

HISTORY OF THE ORIGINS OF THE INSTITUTE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF THE QUEENSHIP OF MARY

Anna Saksri Ngamwong DQM*

1. Introduction

Fr. Carlo Della Torre SDB is the Founder of the Institute of the Daughters of the Queenship of Mary. The History and the development of this Institution are strictly connected with the life of the Founder. He fought and faced various obstacles only to follow what God had established for him. Through the advises of Our Lady and of St. John Bosco, he faithfully followed the will of God, even when he had to suffer for the incomprehension of the people, especially the Superiors and members of the Salesian Congregation who he always loved. Though he strongly felt forced to it, he was ready to overcome his feelings asking to enter among the diocesan clergy of Bangkok, where he found a good welcome from the Bishop and the local clergy.¹

The experience of the Founder exceeds human understanding, but this experience leads to a real understanding of the Mystery of Christ and His Gospel. This experience brings to a specific way of service to the church and society answering to a specific situation in that specific history. This experience is transmitted by the Founder only to those who follow his way of life.² So nobody can study the origin of an institution or even just its charism, if he does not start from studying the life of its Founder. It is from the experience of life of the Founder that the supernatural inspiration springs out. For these reasons, in order to understand the origins of an institute of consecrated life like the Daughters of the

* Sr. Anna Saksri Ngamwong is historian of the Daughters of the Queenship of Mary.

¹ Fr. Carlo mentioned quite a lot of times in his letters that he still considered himself one of Don Bosco's sons. For example: "You know well that it has been many years since I have started the process to be able to return to the Salesian Congregation. But my efforts were met with obstacles from the very beginning of the process... Anyway, deep inside myself, I always felt that I still am one of Don Bosco's sons". This letter was written in Bangkok on 2 April 1981. A similar letter was written on 5 March 1950.

These two letters were addressed to the Father Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation. The manuscripts are kept in the Archives of the Salesian Congregation, No. 15065 Della Torre.

² M. Germinari, *I nuovi termini della vita religiosa*. Roma, Editrice Rogate 1983, p. 45.

Queenship of Mary, we have to know the life experience of Fr. Carlo. He looked for the salvation of his brothers and sisters desiring to “renew and extend the Kingdom of God... among the people of God and the Christian families”³ and especially amidst the poor young people.⁴

2. Fr. Carlo: the source of the Charism

Fr. Carlo was born on 9 July 1900 in Cernusco, Milan, Italy, in a rural family with a simple life style and very devote.⁵ He became the eldest among his brothers after the death of his elder brother, who had lived just a few days. Fr. Carlo went back to the Father’s House on 4 April 1982 at the Camillian Hospital in Bangkok at the age of 82 years. He was a religious among the Salesians for 23 years, a priest for 46 years and a missionary in Thailand for 55 years.

His father’s name was Antonio Della Torre, the youngest of three children. All of them married and had their family. Antonio had seven children and he died of stomach cancer in 1920 when he was only 53 years old.⁶

The mother was Filomena Magni. After the death of her husband, she changed a lot. Automatically she became a very silent person, very reserved, seldom speaking. Whenever she had the opportunity, she would look for her son Carlo and she would talk with him about spiritual matters and eternal life. For her this world was not able anymore to attract her attention. Her heart was already in another world. She died when she was 76 years old, a few years after her beloved son Carlo had been ordained as a missionary priest in that very far country (Thailand) for the mission of evangelization. He had never gone back home following the request of his mother before he left home for the mission.

³ The first constitution written by Fr. Carlo Della Torre, in Italian, 1956, pp. 2-4. This constitution was translated into Thai for the sisters to follow, since 1961.

⁴ MS 494 (MS = Manuscript of the autobiography), written by Fr. Carlo as requested by Fr. Raineri, who was responsible for the Salesian Family at that time. He wanted it to be the spiritual heritage for the Institute of the Daughters of the Queenship of Mary.

⁵ The letter of Antonio Mariani, the son of Rosa, Fr. Carlo’s the youngest sister, written on 11 January 1993.

⁶ Antonio wrote this letter to inform us that Fr. Carlo’s father died when he was 53 years of age and his mother died when she was 76.

“I am happy that I have seen you once again. Now go, go to the land where the Lord is calling you. Remember me, your mother, every day. But I ask you never to leave the work the Lord has given you, not even when I will be sick and die”.⁷

Seven were the brothers and sisters in the family of Fr. Carlo. His elder brother died very soon after his own birth. Followed two elder sisters, Serafina and Emilia, followed by three brothers, Carlo, Natale and Luigi. The last one was the youngest, a girl, Rosa.

3. Carlo's youth

During last century and the 19th century, the world population has doubled. It was the time of the industrial and agricultural revolution. Europe was considered the center of the world. It was the time of a strong and fast urbanization. The cities became very big and crowded. There was a clear division of classes in society. The middle class was the owner of all activities, like for example banks and hospitals, while the working class had a difficult life, low wages and was exploited. All this led to a transformation of the society towards a better living for all, with more comforts, especially in transportation and communications.

The beginning of this century was considered like the beginning of technology. The time of carbon and vapor was finishing. The use of electricity was spreading all over and there was the invention of radio, after telegraph and telephone. Later on, all this will be used for military purposes. It started a new understanding of science and the construction of airplanes with two seats. Colonies were still sought and Africa and Asia were under the political control of European countries.

A difficult situation developed in the Balkans. The majority of the countries sided with Germany and Austria, while Serbia allied with Russia. So the Austrian-Hungarian Empire developed a difficult relationship with Russia. From 1905, a very complicated situation developed all over Europe, which brought about World War I.

At that time, in Cernusco the people lived a very devoted life. Everyone would go to the Church for mass and confession. Sunday was like a feast day for them all. On Sunday afternoon there was time for the teach-

⁷ MS 65.

ing of catechism for the adults (men and women), the youth (boys and girls) and the children (males and females). After catechism, they would gather all together for the Litanies of Our Lady and the Eucharistic Benediction, led by a priest, in order to close their feast day (Sunday).

In Carlo's family, the mother dedicated herself to the formation of her children, teaching them how to pray and to well prepare for eternal life. She liked to repeat often that "without prayer it would be impossible to cross the sea", because she would also say that "between speaking and doing there is the sea".⁸ We can notice that later on, these ideas would become part of the ideal of Carlo's way of life. As a child Carlo was interested in studying catechism regularly. Often he had questions about God and His mystery, questions he would ask every Sunday to the priest teaching catechism, instead of playing with all the other children.

During World War I, the young Carlo was only 16 years old, but he was called to join the army. However, it looked like the atmosphere of the war in the first row of the army prepared Carlo to the service of God and his brothers and sisters at the spiritual level, for the special mission in the Church. This young boy recalled an experience impressed in his memory in an undeletable way:

"I just started my military life since two days and it was the first day we had to wear our uniform. While I was wearing it, a handsome young man with my same size and a smiling face came closer to me and asked me to exchange our hats. I asked him where he was coming from and he answered that he was coming from a seminary studying to become a priest. I asked him further from what town in Italy was he. Staring at me he laughed and put his hat from his head onto mine and my hat on his head. At the same time smiling at me, he said that now I was a seminarian also".

"While he was speaking I had a strong feeling and raised my head to look at him and ask some more questions, but I did not see him anymore and I couldn't see him anymore even later, though we were in the same camp and we were wearing the same uniform. This experience is still very vivid in my memory, I couldn't forget it".⁹

After this experience, he became a silent type, he did not want to speak with anyone and he started feeling bored of listening to the stories of his friends, when they would go out for relaxation during the free time.

⁸ MS 80.

⁹ MS 26-27.

Military life does not support a devoted life, if one does not look for and supports an atmosphere of prayer and Christian life.¹⁰

His friends' life of worldly pleasures during free time, a way incapable of satisfying one's life, worried the young Carlo very much, bringing him to exclaim: "living a short good life is better than a long one stinking of a rotten soul and body".¹¹ This thought helped him decide to enter among those in the front line, ready to die. There he spent only one year and a half, but in this context of the front line he practiced living fraternal life out of christian love and giving witness¹². In this context of war, Carlo started his life of prayer and work for the salvation of his soul. Here in this situation he loved in a special way the prayer of the Rosary. He tells us that:

"In the front line of the war in 1917, everyday and day after day, we had to walk at least 20 km. This walking and running was a law to follow in order to keep our bodies strong. So, we had to accept this difficult practice everyday, in spite at the end there is nothing worth it. Why then, we are not willing to do what is of advantage for our soul, which is even more important than our body? Among the companions in the battlefield we were talking about this, while we could constantly hear the noise of the cannons. We all had to be always ready, always alert to keep ourselves alive. We would close all our conversations in the same way, that is, everyone must try to do what he believes will be good for his soul".¹³

When freed from the duty of the war, Carlo returned to Milan, his home place. Just a short while later, he was called again with the rank of official for the war in Albania, a neighboring country to Italy towards the South. Though he spent only a few months, there the practice of acting according to God's will and practicing fraternal love grew and bloomed in his heart.¹⁴ Very soon he was called back home to visit his father, who was very sick and who finally died of cancer of the stomach. In this sad occasion, he was the one giving courage to his mother and brothers and sisters. After these happenings, Carlo spent his life as teenager helping his mother. He helped teach catechism to the children at the Church and he made as a plan of life to join the celebration of the mass, to have

¹⁰ MS 27-28.

¹¹ MS 38.

¹² MS 40-42.

¹³ MS 484.

¹⁴ MS 64, 75-76.

eucharistic adoration and pray the Rosary every day, in order to find his way in life.¹⁵

He established this plan of life out of two important reasons, that is, in order to thank God and to look for His will concerning his own future. He wrote: "Gratitude to God for having helped me overcome the dangers of the military life and going back home still in good health appeals in my heart all the time".¹⁶

He felt that his way of life was not a family like the others. Thus, he waited for some light from the Providence, living a good christian life as thanksgiving and asking for help in search of the light from God.

While waiting for the light, sometimes he felt it was very clear and some other times very dark, up to the point that he did not know what to do with his future. During this time of confusion, a girl wrote a letter to him, expressing her desire to join her life with him in a good christian marriage. He answered the letter that at the moment he was only 22 years old and he did not feel ready to choose something for life. However, if this letter was a sign of the will of God, he would be happy to welcome her invitation at the proper time for him and for her. While answering this letter a special event happened, which he kept as a secret at the moment.

"The day I answered the letter was a Sunday, about 2:00 PM. I was writing the letter in the bedroom upstairs. The door and the window were closed. When I finished writing, I folded the letter, put it in the envelope and closed it. Immediately after closing it, I felt a strong wind and I saw a hand pulling the letter from my hands and throwing it on the floor. At the same time I heard a voice saying that this one was not the way I should walk on. When the voice stopped, also the wind calmed down and the silence came back as usual".¹⁷

4. Following the internal voice: 1923-1936

The young Carlo came to know about Don Bosco through the conversations he had with his friend, Franco Balcone and also through the Salesian Bulletins, given to him by Fr. Seraphim, his confessor. But above all, the conversation that he had with Fr. Seraphim, on a certain day of November 1923, in which the Father had told him frankly:

¹⁵ MS 91, 93, 486-487.

¹⁶ MS 98.

¹⁷ MS 91-92.

“You have to leave everything, family, work, studies, because you have to study to be ordained as a priest. Later on you will found an institute. If I will be still alive, I will help you. Think carefully about what I told you, because there is no other way for you to walk, except for the one I told you. After some silence for a few moments he continued: I told you what I had to tell you. Now let us pray, because all the important actions must start from prayer and be continued with it”.¹⁸

There have been a lot of signs happening in Carlo's life prior to this. All these signs served as the support and preparations for him, before hand, and in accordance to the advice given to him by his spiritual director. Having prayed and considered what had been happening to him, including his mother's advice, Carlo rejected Franco's invitation to set up a big business in order to become a millionaire. Carlo had chosen to follow the advice of his confessor. He decided to leave home for Ivrea to join the Istituto Salesiano Card. Cagliero, in 1923. It took him three years to complete the training in that institute.

4.1. Life in the mission lands

On 26 October 1926, Carlo said goodbye to his homeland for the last time and headed for Macao, China, to begin his novitiate in the Salesian Congregation. The chapel of the novitiate served as the public place for worship as well. The Gregorian Chants and the Liturgies conducted by the novices drew a lot of people to the novitiate, in such a way that the big parish churches in Macao were almost empty. Every Saturday afternoon, the parish priest invited the singers from the singing school to sing at the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. This drew even bigger crowd in such a way that the priests in Macao were uneasy because their parishioners had deserted their parishes to come to the novitiate. The novitiate life was a happy one. After eight months in Macao, Fr. Gaetano Pasotti led the first group of the Salesian missionaries to a new land.

There was only one Apostolic Vicar in Siam at that time, namely, the Apostolic Vicar of the Apostolic Vicariate of Bangkok who looked after the catholics throughout the country. The majority of the priests who worked in Siam at that time were the French missionaries. And many of them were over 60 years of age. Therefore, the Apostolic Vicar of Bangkok

¹⁸ MS 100-101.

had written to the Congregation of the Propaganda Fide, in Rome, asking for help. He was willing to give a part of his responsibility to the new missionaries. The Salesian Congregation had responded to the Holy Father's call, by appointing Fr. Pietro Ricaldone to be in charge of the missionary activities in the area of Ratchaburi, of the Kingdom of Siam. The father went to Macao to select some of the Salesian missionaries there, to go and work in Siam. Fr. Gaetano Pasotti who was the novice master was appointed to be the leader of the group. The father decided to take the novices and the brothers who were with him in Macao to Siam. They took a boat from Suathao, China, together with 800 Chinese, headed for Siam.

Having traveled by boat for several days, finally, arrived at the Bangkok Port, at the dawn of 26 October 1927. They looked around them and saw everything was beautiful. They saw the lush grounds, full of flowers and water. There were three priests, seven brothers and 11 novices in the group. They were met by a French priest who took them to see the Apostolic Vicar of Bangkok, Msgr. Rene Perros. They were warmly received. Having finished their breakfasts, they were sent to the Ratchaburi area, by boat, prepared by the Apostolic Vicar. They headed for Bangnokkhoek, situated on the banks of the Meklong River. There was a big congregation of the catholics living in this area.

After departing from Bangkok for sometime, the boat had to stop to wait for the high tide. When they arrived at the area of the Maeklong River, it was dark already. The sky was filled by the stars. Both banks of the canal were full of trees, both small and big ones. There were plenty of the fire-flies or *Lampyrus noctiluca*. It was really a beautiful sight. They arrived at Bangnokkhoek about 2.00 a.m. On hand to welcome them, were Fr. Duran, the French missionary and the members of the Salesian Congregation who preceded them. They were housed in a two-story wooden house.

Siam is a tropical country. The weather is hot and humid. One must take a bath at least once a day. It is totally different from Europe. The people bathe themselves in the rivers and in the canals. There were no bathrooms. So our young missionaries had to learn to do likewise.

At first, the Salesian missionaries were warmly welcomed and looked after very well by Fr. Duran, the French missionary of the Foreign Missions of Paris who was the parish priest of Bangnokkhoek at that time. But when they started to settle down, they came across a lot of difficulties. The first difficulty that they had to face was the language. So they

had to learn the language. Then, there was the problem of the food. Their cooks, who were Chinese, could not cook the European food. They were not used to the Asian food, even though they had to spend a lot of money on the food, so many of them were sick and in bad health, could not study properly. Carlo and his friends who came from Macao with him, took their first vows, in the Salesian Congregation, on 8 December 1927. Carlo was appointed by the Rector to look after the seminarians and the novices. The problem of the food still went on. The hygiene was really bad. Furthermore, the cooks embezzled some money for their own usage. And then made a false account. To avoid all these, the Rector put Carlo in charge of the kitchen and the girls working in the kitchen as well.¹⁹

4.2. The reward of life on the difficult path

Carlo, a newly professed religious, had to carry a heavy burden, at the same time, he had to pursue his Philosophy studies and religious training as well. He had to look after the spiritual life of the girls working in the kitchen also. This was the cause for some members of the Salesian Congregation to misunderstand Carlo. So, he handed in his resignation in order to avoid the misunderstandings and to have more time for the studies but the Rector would not listen to him. The refusal of the Rector was interpreted by him as the Divine Providence for him to help many people. He understood all the time that the job was dangerous to his vocation, so he prayed a lot. He mortified and fasted. He put his life under the divine guidance.

At the same time, the Salesian priests who worked in the parishes had the same opinion that the young girls were neglected. There was no one to look after them. So Carlo proposed his own idea. He proposed the establishment of a female religious order in order to look after these young girls more seriously to Msgr. Gaetano Pasotti who was in charge of the Salesian Congregation in Thailand at that time,²⁰ but the Monsignor's councilors did not buy the idea.

Anyway, in 1932, Carlo had prepared a constitution for the new religious order to be established. It was written in line with the Constitution of the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, with

¹⁹ MS 177.

²⁰ MS 203.

some alterations to suit the situation, condition of life, the geographical climate and the thinking of the girls who wished to join it.²¹ He had in mind the 12 girls he was looking after. He wanted to name the order 'Xi-songkhro' or the 'Welfare Sisters'. When it was actually established, it was named: *'The Congregation of the Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary'*. Carlo even built a small chapel for these girls, within the compound of the kitchen where those girls stayed. The building of the chapel was met with the tacit approval from the Superiors and nobody said a thing because it was hidden in the kitchen compound, their private property. The chapel was completed six hours before he started his retreat to prepare himself for the ordination to the priesthood.

After his ordination to the priesthood, on 26 January 1936, Fr. Carlo Della Torre was given another assignment. So, he had to leave behind his 'new religious order', the group that he himself had trained, out of obedience to the Superiors of the Salesian Congregation in Thailand at the time. His bitterness and obstacles were brewing. It seemed as though all his initiatives were ended by that assignment. The future of the native religious order that he was trying to establish was opposed in such a way that he was really bitter by the whole thing.

'That was the reward for the efforts and the difficulties of eight hard working years with humility in the kitchen, as the guardian and the helper of the young girls. Now Fr. Curti and Fr. Casetta have a chance to oppose the training and the establishment of the religious order. They have been opposing it since a long time. If the establishment of a new religious order were God's will, the seeds that were sown would not wither and die but would germinate and give many fruits'.²²

It happened as he had said. In 1937, the councilors of the Salesian Congregation in Thailand had brushed up this idea, once again. This time they all agreed with the establishment of a native religious order with the help of two sisters from the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. At present, this new native religious order was approved by Rome and became a member of the Salesian Family.

²¹ MS 177.

²² MS 204.

5. The missionary priest: 1936-1950

After his ordination to the priesthood, Fr. Carlo was asked to be the parish priest of the Parish of the Nativity of Our Lady, Bangnokkhoek, the rector of the native seminary and the bursar. He declined all these posts, citing his poor health because of his fasting for the last eight years. So, he was sent to Thava to recuperate and look after his health. Disappointed by the failure of his project, he exclaimed:

“without knowing it and intending it, the Superiors sent me to be on the path of the Divine Providence, for me to find the way to carry out the desire that I have had for many years, to its completion”.²³

While Fr. Carlo was at Thava, Msgr. Pasotti kept on telling him that whatever was in his mind, he would never succeed it because the Superiors of the Congregation would never allow him. So, there was one thing left for Fr. Carlo: kneeling in front of the tabernacle asking for guidance. He spent his time of recuperation in prayers and helping out the Parish of Thava. The church attendance of Thava at that time was very low, especially the youth. The Father also noticed that there were no catechism lessons in the Sunday afternoons. There was no benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. So he suggested the idea to the parish priest.

5.1. Looking for the will of God

Being in Thava for six months, Fr. Carlo was reassigned to be the assistant at the Parish of Thamuang, on 29 June 1937. This was the hardest time for the missionaries in Thailand because of the Indochinese Conflict. The Catholic Church in Thailand was persecuted during these years. They became the years of poverty.²⁴

²³ MS 267.

²⁴ Between 1940-1944, Siam was engaged in the war with the French who occupied Indochina at the time. The French missionaries were driven out of Siam. So many parishes in the northeastern region of the Kingdom were left untended.

The rest of the Kingdom was the same. The Siamese government did not want the Kingdom to be under the influence of the Europeans, so it persecuted the Catholic Church, thinking that the Catholics were spies for the French. The persecution was so severe, especially in the Northeast, that there were seven persons murdered because they did not give up their faith. They were beatified on 22 October 1989.

His assignment to Thamuang happened before it should have happened. Even though there was no ill intention in it, but Fr. Carlo could help thinking that his superiors wanted him to meet with the crises of his life, in such a way that he wanted to leave Thailand or followed their wish and did it in the way that they wished.²⁵ At the same time, he also thought that it was providential for him as well. Because of the war and the persecution, Fr. Carlo thought of the inspiration that he received, once again. So he started to prepare for the project that was dear to his heart for many years.

At Thamuang, Fr. Carlo spent most of his time in prayers. He went to pray in the church from 8.00 a.m. - 11.30 a.m. and from 13.00 p.m.-15.00 p.m. He spent his evenings studying Theology, especially the Moral Theology. At the same time, he also helped the parishioners, especially the youth, to grow in their spiritual life. Even after the parish school was closed down in 1939, Fr. Carlo still helped the people with the catechism. The situations in the Parish of Thamuang at that time, were described in the Salesian Newsletters as follows:

“Thamuang had the residence for one priest only. The priest had brought progress to the Parish. He established the primary school that was very important for the Catholic children. The parish was served, as though, a place for the Japanese prisoners of war to congregate, a theatre of love without borders. Fr. Carlo Della Torre was described as the guardian angel of the military cemetery. He visited it quite often, as though he was the relative of those dead soldiers, who sacrificed their lives for peace”.²⁶

The religious persecution and the attacks on catholicity went on until the Japanese Invasion of Siam in 1941. Under those conditions, Fr. Carlo recommended the weapon to protect oneself, namely the rosary. He said:

“This is a powerful weapon that helps you in every matter, especially to combat the devils from hell”.²⁷

²⁵ MS 295.

²⁶ G. ULLIANA, *Nelle nostre Missioni, SIAM, Un trimestre nella Missione di Rajaburi*, in «Bollettino Salesiano» 72 (1948) 168.

²⁷ MS 323.

5.2. Fidelity to the Providence

In 1948, Fr. Carlo was transferred to Bangkok to work at the newly created Salesian Centre, in honour of Don Bosco. Fr. Carlo was given the task of hearing the confessions of the first group of the orphans of the school. In his free time, he allowed to pursue his project of the establishment of a new religious order. So, with the permission from the Provincial, he built a house for his 'postulants'. This made Bishop Pasotti very upset, owing to the fact that Fr. Carlo was not under his jurisdiction and the work was done outside his Vicariate. So, there was nothing much the Bishop could do about it. Anyway, not long after that, the Provincial received the orders from the Father Rector Major of the Congregation to halt Fr. Carlo's project. It was understood that the Rector Major did so under the request of Bishop Pasotti.²⁸ At the same time, there was an attempt to send Fr. Carlo out of the country and send his girls home.²⁹

Fr. Carlo foresaw that the Superiors of the Salesian Congregation would not let him carry on with his project, so he asked Fr. Modesto Bellido, one of the General's councilors, for the permission to bring his case to the Apostolic Vicar of Bangkok, Msgr. Louis Chorin.³⁰ He received the permission from the Provincial to see Msgr. Chorin, on 18 March 1950. And on 19 March 1950, the feast of St. Joseph, the Husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Fr. Carlo asked the permission to leave the Salesian Congregation and be incardinated into the Apostolic Vicariate of Bangkok. Msgr. Chorin received Fr. Carlo as: 'an independent priest to establish a institute consecrated'.³¹ He also gave Fr. Carlo all the necessary faculties he needed in establishing an institute.

6. His last years: always humble, simple and faithful

Even though he left the Salesian Congregation, Fr. Carlo was still faithful to his praying of the rosary. The rosary was always in one of his hands. Praying the rosary, he trusted that Our Lady would provide him with everything that he needed, as he often said:

²⁸ MS 409.

²⁹ MS 407-408, 410.

³⁰ MS 418-419.

³¹ MS 424.

“Their attitude had taught me to trust in the protection from heaven, more than looking for help from human beings. The help from heaven are always trustworthy and long lasting, much more than that of the human. Furthermore, they are always limited”.³²

6.1. *A Salesian from beginning to end*

Fr. Carlo Della Torre entered the Salesian seminary when he was 23 years old. Prior to that he had served in the army. And while he was in the army, he volunteered to go to the front lines. He went through a lot of difficulties during World War I. He had to face matters of life and death throughout the war. That meant that he had gone through all sorts of difficulty and danger. In the end, he decided to dedicate his whole life to God and to the souls. This decision coincided with his ideals and values of life, even though there was nothing in the documents to tell us about this, his own life proved itself. There was one thing that he that mentioned repeatedly in his autobiography: “I try to do God’s will”.

From the age of 23 until the age of 50, the Father had lived a life of a Salesian religious. He was a Salesian for 28 years. Throughout these years, he had accumulated, had learned and loved the life that he had chosen in the first place. Having listened to God’s voice and responded to it with the greatest love. Throughout the years in the Salesian Congregation, the Father still listened to God’s voice and ready to respond to it. That was the state of his soul. In the mean time, he had never abandoned the project that he understood to be God’s will for him, the establishment of a new religious order.

In the establishment of a new religious order, Fr. Carlo followed all the rules and regulations of the Church and of his Congregation. He proposed his project to the Superiors of the Salesian Congregation and of the Apostolic Vicariate. Owing to the time factor and the practice of the time, a member of the Salesian Congregation was not allowed to establish a female religious order. So, he had to leave the Salesian Congregation, the Congregation that he loved and closely associated with. This can be ascertained by his letters to the Superiors of the Congregation, for example, the letter that he wrote to the General Superior of the Congregation:

³² MS 434.

“Having prayed to Don Bosco and the heavenly hosts asking for help, I now humbly beg you...”.

Another factor concerning this matter was that, besides his greatest devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, he was also devoted to Don Bosco. This also can be ascertained by what he wrote in his autobiography. His consultations with Don Bosco concerning the religious order that he was about to establish and of how he should run it. That meant that while leaving the Salesian Congregation in order to establish a new religious order, Fr. Carlo was still in close contact with and devoted to Don Bosco.

Therefore, on 19 March 1975, the 25th Anniversary of his leaving the Salesian Congregation, Fr. Carlo wrote a letter to the Salesian Superiors asking permission to return to the Congregation:

“The many times that I have met Don Bosco, it did not matter before or after my leaving the Salesian Congregation, he still conversed with me amicably, full of love and respect. He always encouraged me, saying to me: ‘do not be afraid because everything will return to me...’”.³³

Fr. Carlo tried hard and really wanted to return to the Salesian Congregation, even though he had to face a lot of obstacles and fears. He had to patiently wait for a long time. It took him seven full years before he was allowed to do so. This was due to the complicated procedures, in the Diocesan and Pontifical levels, laid down by the Canon Law.³⁴

On 5 December 1981, Cardinal Michai Kitbunchu, the Archbishop of Bangkok, informed Fr. Raimundo Garcia, the Salesian Provincial of Thailand, by telephone, that he had no objections to Fr. Carlo’s returning to the Salesian Congregation, as he had been asking for the past seven years. The Provincial hurried to give the good news to Fr. Carlo who was hospitalized at the Camillian Hospital, Bangkok. Fr. Carlo was overjoyed by the news that tears streaming out of his eyes.

On 9 December 1981, noticing that Fr. Carlo’s conditions were deteriorating and he could pass away at any moment, so the Provincial permitted him to make the vows in the Salesian Congregation, once again, as he has been waiting since a long time. It was done in front of the Salesian Provincial, his confreres and surrounded by his beloved daughters, the

³³ Fr. Carlo’s letter, dated 19 March 1975.

³⁴ Fr. Carlo’s letter, dated 2 April 1981.

members of the Institute of the Daughters of the Queenship of Mary.³⁵ A few months after that he gave back his soul to its Creator. He entered his Heavenly Father's House on 4 April 1982. Therefore, Fr. Carlo ended his life in the embrace of Don Bosco, in the Salesian Congregation that he had loved throughout his life. He bade farewell to the Institute that he had firmly established.

Along the way to establish an institute consecrated, Fr. Carlo had always respected and honoured his Superiors in the Salesian Congregation. He never had any ill-feelings against them, even though he was in conflict with them on this matter all the time. This spirit of humility, he had passed on to his beloved daughters in the Institute of the Daughters of the Queenship of Mary. We have witnessed his humble life, faithful to the divine plan and active in the apostolic activities, entrusted to him by God. The Father was a strong-willed person. He dedicated his life to the will of God, whom he searched and contacted with his personal life. The Father's life was tested by God and by his own Superiors. He had passed the tests victorious. This was because his guide was the Blessed Virgin Mary, herself.

7. The way of the charism: The Institute of the Queenship of Mary

The Institute of the consecrated persons, 'The Institute of the Daughters of the Queenship of Mary', originated from the Fr. Carlo Della Torre's spiritual experiences. It humbly followed the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It also cooperated with the project that the loving Divine Providence had entrusted to the Church to bear fruits, both in the form and the unique charism. The Institute grew up gradually, through Fr. Carlo's life. The Father had placed himself under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He trusted in the Holy Spirit without worrying about his own future, in such a way that he could realize the divine charism. He dedicated his life to that charism. He knew full well that he was only an instrument of God and of our Blessed Mother. As he had often exclaimed, after the Institute was established, that:

³⁵ Fr. Grasia's letter that was quoted.

“Had I known from the start that the establishment of an institute was this difficult, I would not have started it at all”. He also said that: “Everything that I have done, it was not I who did it. It was God and the Blessed Mother who did it. I was only a stupid bystander”.³⁶

8. The way leading to the Daughters of the Queenship of Mary: 1937-1952

In 1937, Fr. Carlo was given a new assignment. The situations in the new assignment went from bad to worse, especially during World War II. In the atmosphere of the war, there was a calling deep inside him for him to start anew his project. He should begin it with the girls and the women helping him in the parish, in order to establish a female institute for those who wanted to consecrate their lives to God, for the apostolate. Fr. Carlo thought of the time when the Superiors did not allow him to quit the work in the kitchen, at the seminary. The thought of the establishment of a religious order at the time was for the reward from heaven and also to protect his vocation in the dangerous situations. The thought of the establishment of a religious order at the present, however, was the reflection of the words of his confessor, Rev. Fr. Seraphim:

“...You are to study to become a priest and to establish a institute consecrated”.³⁷

Including the voice that he heard from the tabernacle while he was still a seminarian. The voice told him:

“Wait until you are ordained a priest”.³⁸

Also at Thava, where the Blessed Virgin Mary told him:

“Your desire will be fulfilled after six”.³⁹

³⁶ Sr. Cecilia Sopha Virasilp's letter, dated 16 November 1992. She was the Mistress of Novices immediately after Fr. Carlo, until 1992. She was one of the girls in first group that the Father had gathered. She was close to the Father from the very beginning until his death. She had inherited the religious spirits from the Father. That was why she was entrusted to train the members, by the Father. This letter was to share with later generation, her fond memories of the Founder.

³⁷ MS 100.

³⁸ MS 200.

³⁹ MS 283.

Even though we do not intend to verify these voices but they were the facts that we could not say otherwise. The establishment of the Institute of the Daughters of the Queenship of Mary had happened, after the father had been transferred to six places, out of obedience to his Superiors.

8.1. *Walking with our Lady*

The years of the World War II were the difficult time for the Thai catholics. They were the years that the French missionaries were driven out of Thailand because of the conflict with the French authority in Indochina. Msgr. Pasotti was appointed the Apostolic Delegate, by the Vatican, for the time.⁴⁰ It seemed as though Fr. Carlo's dream of establishing a religious order was dashed by this appointment. This was because the Bishop was not in favour of the project. But things did not happen that way. After the Japanese invasion of Thailand in 1941, Bishop Perros and the French missionaries were allowed back to Thailand once again.⁴¹ It meant that Fr. Carlo's dreams of establishing a religious order were alive once again.

On 5 December 1943, Bishop Pasotti had asked the catholic people to dedicate themselves to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The girls who wished to dedicate themselves in the religious order that Fr. Carlo was about to establish and had been trained by him for some time, took that opportunity to dedicate themselves to God in front of the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Even though this act was a private one, but they were the first seeds of the future Institute of the Daughters of the Queenship of Mary.⁴²

The problem of the establishment of a religious order was still lingering on until 1948, because the authorities of the Vicariate and those of the Salesian Congregation did not think that it was inspired by the Holy Spirit. It was Fr. Carlo's dreams. At the same time, the Thamuang Parish

⁴⁰ During this difficult time, the Salesians in Thailand had to work hard to replace the French missionaries that were driven out of the country. Msgr. Pasotti was appointed the Apostolic Delegate to Thailand and Laos. The catholic schools were closed down. Written by M. Bongioanni, Don Bosco nel Mondo. Vol. II. Direzione generale opere Don Bosco. Torino, Mariogros 1988, p. 396.

⁴¹ MS 325.

⁴² MS 350-351.

School was allowed to function once again. Fr. Carlo, however, thought that the time for him to establish a religious order was approaching and his time at the Thamuang Parish was also approaching. The Father asked the people to carry on with the praying of the rosary and to be devoted to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. They should attend the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass more often, especially on the first Saturday of the month. They should also renew their dedication to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.⁴³

Fr. Carlo said that while he was at the Thamuang Parish, he met with Don Bosco twice in a vision. The first time, Don Bosco said that: "I want this man (Fr. Carlo)" And then, Don Bosco turned and said to Fr. Carlo:

"Look at the dry field, scorched by the sun. Go and work there... Be courageous. Don't be afraid. All this work will be mine in the end".⁴⁴

Another time, Don Bosco said to Fr. Carlo:

"Don Carlo, the Salesian authorities on this earth like to reject all the time. We, in heaven, however, accept it all the time".⁴⁵

Fr. Carlo was reluctant to accept the invitation of Fr. Pietro Carretto, the Salesian Provincial at that time, to go to Bangkok, together with his 10 girls, to work in the kitchen of Don Bosco's Vocational School. Fr. Carlo had to pray hard, in front of the Statue of Our Lady of Sorrows, Thamuang, asking for help and guidance. While he was praying, full of reluctance, he felt deep inside him that the Blessed Mother telling him to go to Bangkok.⁴⁶

8.2. The realization of a dream

The compound of the Don Bosco's Vocational School, in Bangkok, was a large one. It was situated on the outskirts of Bangkok, a promising area of the Capital City. The Salesian Congregation of Thailand had acquired it in 1947.⁴⁷ It was a huge paddy field. There was no electricity,

⁴³ MS 388.

⁴⁴ MS 393.

⁴⁵ MS 395.

⁴⁶ MS 396.

⁴⁷ M. NICITA, *A Bangkok tra I salesiani di via New Petchabury*, in «Bollettino Salesiano» 114 (1990) pp. 15, 34.

no running water and not even a market. In order to purchase food and the daily utensils, one had to travel by boat, up the canal for about two hours. Nobody wanted to live or work in the area such as this. The first group of the ‘aspirants’ of the order to be established had to work in this school, with the hope of making it their centre or headquarter. Even so, it was opposed by Bishop Pasotti. He did not like it from the start and vowed to oppose it to the very end.

So, not very long after that, these girls were ordered home by the Salesian authorities from Turin. By doing so, they were allowed to live together in a house that Fr. Carlo built for them in that same compound. They had to work. They sewed the garments and so on, for their own keeping and for their survival. Even then, they were still opposed by the Salesian authorities. So Fr. Carlo was thinking of sending some of them to study further in order to work in their own schools in the future. So this was really the work of the loving Providence.⁴⁸

What brought them more joy was the fact that they were welcomed into the Apostolic Vicariate of Bangkok, where Fr. Carlo was incardinated at the same time. He was permitted by the Apostolic Vicar of Bangkok to realize his dreams, saying:

“We do not have the money or the land to give to you but we bless you and give you all the necessary permissions you need in the establishment of your religious order”.⁴⁹

The feast day of St. Joseph, the Husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 1950, was the day of the realization of the dreams. It was considered to be the date of the birth of the Institute of the Daughters of the Queenship of Mary. Fr. Carlo and the first group of the aspirants prayed the rosary together to thank God and vow to pursue their goal together with the help from the Heavenly Mother.

⁴⁸ MS 412.

⁴⁹ MS 424.

8.3. The first small house

Before Fr. Carlo and the first group of the aspirants left the Don Bosco's Vocational School to move into the new place, on 19 March 1950, the day that Fr. Carlo received the permission from Msgr. Louis Chorin, the Apostolic Vicar of the Apostolic Vicariate of Bangkok, to establish a new religious order, he admonished them very specially. He also gave them a motto for the way of life of the new order. His motto was "prayer and work". He also admonished them to "always pray and work under the guidance of the Blessed Virgin Mary". They must love her and give her their due respects, as a faithful and infallible Mother.⁵⁰ The Father himself knelt in front of the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary and prayed that in the establishment of a new religious congregation for the salvation of the souls, he would not ask any human being for help. He would asked it from her alone.

That meant that the Institute of the Daughters of the Queenship of Mary started off with Fr. Carlo's empty hand and that of the first group. They had no lands, no money. The only thing that they had, and had it to the full, was their full trust in Mary.⁵¹ Fr. Carlo's confreres noticed all these things and asked him what he wanted to do, seeing that:

"You are alone, have no special incomes. The girls, your collaborators, are of good will but they are uneducated. So how could they take on the big work in the future?"⁵²

Then in 1952, in the midst of the obstacles and difficulties for a long period of time, Fr. Carlo and the first group of his collaborators had a piece of land, about two rais (about an acre), and a school to give the education to the young for the first time, in the Prakhanong area, on the outskirts of Bangkok. That was the first step and the first house of the Daughters of the Queenship of Mary.

In this atmosphere and such an environment, Fr. Carlo saw Don Bosco in a vision, once more and for the last time. On this occasion Fr. Carlo asked him a few questions that were very significant and important to the Congregation. Let us hear what they had to say to one another.

⁵⁰ MS425.

⁵¹ MS 470-471.

⁵² MS 447.

“What will I do about the activities of the Congregation?
Do everything with humility”.

“How do I train the aspirants of the Institute?
Train them in humility, in the family spirits. The Superior should be a good mother. The members should be good daughters and sisters”.

“How should they work?
They should work with full humility. They should work together in love. They are not to seek prominence. Always imitate the Blessed Mother in everything”.⁵³

9. The bases of the Institute and the enlargement of its activities

The school and that piece of land seemed to be too small for the development in the future. Fr. Carlo who envisaged the future plus having full trust in the Blessed Mother, had asked the first group of the members of the Institute to pray for the expansion. In the end, the father was able to buy the second piece of land for another school. It was in the place where the father thought it could serve as the headquarters for the Institute in the future. And it did actually become the headquarters of the Institute at the present. Having established the second school, the Father, now, turned his attention to the official establishment of the Institute.

The Father had proved himself to be a person who truly had a charism. His vision was that of a prophet. He envisaged the fruitfulness of the new congregation in the future. He had said clearly about the life of the Institute.

“I have to give suitable regulations to the life of the people in this country, with their foundations in the gospel. It is a prayer life, a holy life, a life of dedication and apostolate, at the same time. All the activities concerning training, counseling must have its objectives in the conversion of the youth who have been educated in the schools of the Institute”.⁵⁴

⁵³ MS 468-469.

⁵⁴ MS 469 The catholic schools are very important to the activities of the Church. They are the special places that the Church can bear witness to Christ and points Him out to the Buddhists. Many people would like their children to be educated in these schools. From the very beginning, the Catholic Church had given the best education to this country. This can be ascertained by the speech that the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, gave to the Thai Bishops when they visited him, ‘ad Limina Apostolorum’ 1991. The Holy Father said that: “The catholic schools in Thailand serve as life builders, guarantors of the youth in the matters of religious education and create responsible lay men in living the life according to the spirits of the gospel”. *L’Osservatore Romano*, Saturday 25 May 1991, p. 5.

9.1. The charism giving life

As time went by, the Father had accumulated big debts. The members of the Institute had to work hard but they were still faithful to their promise, not asking any human being for help. They would ask it from Our Lady alone. The Father knew full well that a small piece of land at Prakhonong would not be sufficient for the activities of the Institute. He was looking for another location. But he was reluctant because of the financial situations. While he was reluctant about this thing, one of his Aspirants said to him: "Father, you should buy that piece of land". The Father replied: "I do not have enough cash on hand". She said to him: "If you wait until the time you have cash on hand, Our Lady won't send you any". Having heard from a youngster who was full of faith, the Father thought it might have been the will of Our Lady. The girl kept on saying: "You should buy that piece of land. We are praying to Our Lady asking her to pay for it, for you". In the end, the Father listened to the advice of the aspirant.⁵⁵

The last day of the annual retreat at the Assumption Cathedral, while the Father was kneeling and praying his rosary, he looked at the statue of Our Lady of the Assumption that was above the altar. While looking at the statue, the Father was surprised because the statue disappeared. Instead, he saw her sitting on the big throne. Looking at that image, the Father was thinking of asking the Blessed Mother for help. But before he could open his mouth, the Blessed Mother said to him: "Please go and see St. Joseph immediately".⁵⁶ Saying so, the image disappeared and he saw the statue of Our Lady of the Assumption as before. Having heard that, the Father turned to the statue of St. Joseph and asked him for help.

Having completed his retreat, while he was returning to the Srichan, a catholic who was an official working in the Interior Ministry informed the Father that the Cabinet had approved the purchase of lands to build a super highway to the Don Muang International Airport. And it was prepared to give a just price to the owners of the lands. Fortunately, part of the Father's land was in the pathway. So the Father sent two of his aspirants to negotiate with the Interior Ministry and the Father was compensated for the 26 rais (about 10 acres) of his land. The Father used this sum of money to pay his debts and to purchase the necessary items for the

⁵⁵ MS 463-4, 470.

⁵⁶ MS 472.

congregation. This made the Father more confident in Our Lady and asked the Aspirants to pray even more.

Not long after, in 1954, the Father purchased a piece of land, of 15 rais, at the Trokchan from Luang Sithi, for the sum of two hundred and twenty thousand bahts. He built a one-story school building, no walls, only partitions of 1.50 meter high. There were 300 pupils. The members of the Institute who were qualified to teach in a school were asked to run the school. They had to work very hard, full of sacrifices. Not long after that, another building was added to it. It was 100 meter in length, built of old woods. The number of the pupils had increased. This place had been developed in such a way that nothing of old was left. It started off in a stable to become the heart and the headquarter of the Institute.

While developing the Institute and training the members of the Institute, the Father had sent the petition to Rome. This was to ask to be recognized as a Secular Institute (cf. *lex peculiaris*), together with the regulations and the constitution, in accordance with the Canon Law, on the behalf of the local Ordinary. The Institute of the Daughters of Queenship of Mary was officially approved by the Church together with its constitution, through the documents sent to the Ordinary of the Apostolic Vicariate of Bangkok, on 3 December 1954. And on 9 December 1955, the first group of seven members of the Institute took their first vows in the chapel of Msgr. Louis Chorin, the Apostolic Vicar of Bangkok, (which is the Vatican Embassy at the present). It was presided over by the Apostolic Vicar himself.

9.2. *The way to the Salesian Family*

In 1973, Fr. Carlo showed his desires to have his congregation become a member of the Salesian Family. Having considered that the Salesian Provincial and the Salesians working in Thailand had accepted the Institute of the Queenship of Mary, Fr. Carlo had applied for a membership of the Salesian Family for his Institute. The Salesians in Thailand had expressed their feelings as follows:

“The Salesians in Thailand extend their welcome to the newly established congregation and are willing to provide it with the pastoral cares and Don Bosco’s spirit...”⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Fr. Carlo’s letter, dated 15 March 1973.

Two years later, Fr. Giovanni Raineri, who was in charge of the Salesian Family throughout the world, had expressed his approval to Fr. Carlo, saying the if Fr. Carlo returned to the Salesian Congregation, the chance of joining the Salesian Family was even greater.⁵⁸

On 1 January 1977, Fr. Carlo sent in his application for the Institute of the Queenship of Mary to be a member of the Salesian Family. He began his letter saying:

“While I was still a member of the Salesian Congregation, the Blessed Mother and Don Bosco had asked me to establish a religious order for the salvation of the christian and the non-christian youth”.

He, then, explained the history of the Institute and how the Salesians in Thailand had helped him out in the matters of the pastoral cares and the Salesian spirit. Because of these, the Father thought that his Institute had already become a member of the Salesian Family in actuality, lacking in paper work only. That was why he sent in his application.

Fr. Carlo concluded his application saying:

“Because I was a member of the Salesian Congregation and had been trained in the Salesian spirit, I, therefore, want the members of my Institute be trained in the Salesian spirit as well. I, who still am a member of the Salesian Congregation, request that the Institute that I have established be admitted into the Salesian Family, in accordance to the objectives of the establishment of this Congregation. That they had to carry on and preserve the Salesian spirit that I have instilled in them, to the full”.⁵⁹

Fr. Carlo’s relationship with the Salesian Congregation had been growing by the day, both in his way of thinking and in his way of doing. He had transmitted Don Bosco’s spirit that he had received to the members of the Congregation that he had established. He tried his best to help the members of the Institute of the Queenship of Mary to preserve their vocation that they have received from God. The members of the Congregation saw and understood the Father’s good intentions, by practicing them in their own lives.

In 1986, the Institute of the Daughters of the Queenship of Mary held its first General Chapter and the assembly had approved unanimously the adoption of Fr. Carlo’s desires in bringing the Institute into the Salesian

⁵⁸ Fr. G. Raineri’s letter to Fr. Carlo, dated 16 January 1975.

⁵⁹ Fr. Carlo’s letter to Fr. G. Raineri, dated 1 January 1977.

Family. The members understood that their relationship with the other groups in the Salesian Family would help them to preserve their identity and helped them to know more about the spirit of the Salesian Family. It would also strengthen the spirit of each group and advanced in their apostolic work, in accordance to the objectives of the founder.

Being a member of the Salesian Family did not mean that each congregation must come under the administration and a part of the Salesian Congregation. It meant to be a sharing in the vocation and the charism of Don Bosco. It meant the sharing in the spiritual life and the apostolic activities that each group of the family shared in the Salesian identity. Because of the spirit and the activities in training the youth, “the Institute (of the Daughter of the Queenship of Mary) wishes to be a part of the Salesian Family. It wishes to receive the Salesian spirit as well, in order to preserve the spirit of its Founder”.⁶⁰

After the First General Chapter, the Institute of the Daughter of the Queenship of Mary had carried on the application to be a member of the Salesian Family. Owing to the difficulties in the matters of the paper works and the language problems, the matter was dragged on until the Second General Chapter in 1992, in which the matter of the membership of the Salesian Family was brought up again. Having studied the matter carefully, once more, the Institute still had a unanimous decision to join the Salesian Family. Mother Maria Chanthavarodom and her councilors, therefore, carried on this matter.

In 1994, when all the documents concerning this matter were ready, Mother Maria Chanthavarodom, the Mother General at the time, had sent them to Fr. Viganò, the Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation who had fallen sick after he had received the documents. So the matter had to wait once more. Anyway, after the Salesian Congregation had its new Rector Major, this matter was carried on immediately. Fr. Juan Vecchi, the new Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation, had approved the membership of the Institute of the Daughter of the Queenship of Mary in the Salesian Family, on 12 July 1996.⁶¹

⁶⁰ The 1986 Constitution n. 6.

⁶¹ Fr. Juan Vecchi's letter, No. 96/1025, dated 18 July 1996.