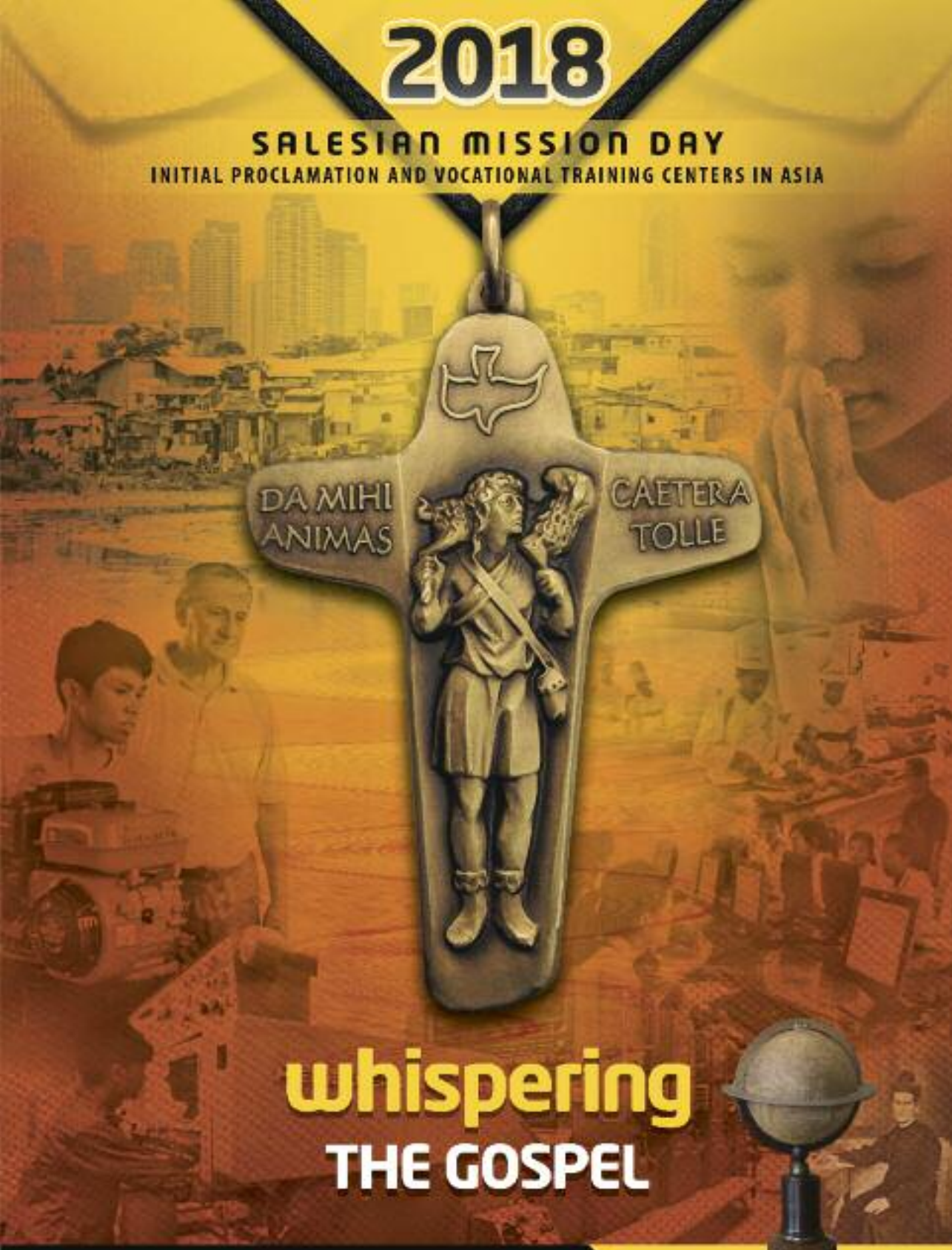
2018

SALESIAN MISSION DAY

INITIAL PROCLAMATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTERS IN ASIA



whispering THE GOSPEL

SALESIAN MISSIONS SECTOR

WWW.SDB.ORG

EXPLANATION OF THE POSTER FOR SALESIAN MISSION DAY 2018: WHISPERING THE GOSPEL

We present you the poster designed by our artist, the young confrere, Peter Le Duoc, SDB.

The **new Salesian missionary Cross** reminds us that, as Salesians of Don Bosco and the Salesian Family, we are called upon to be missionaries of the young. Our hearts are shaped on the model of the heart of the Good Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ, the source of our joy, our faith, our hope and our love.

The **radiant golden light in the background**, descending from above and **flowing as a gentle stream of water** symbolizes the presence of the Holy Spirit, who constantly guides and illumines the Salesian missionary throughout his life of service. That stream of water gently murmurs life, an hinting to us the way of Initial Proclamation, characterized by a patience that is serene, discreet and respectful as it communicates the Good News.

The photomontage of the **young people in our Salesian vocational training centres** represents our field of work in the countries of Asia. In this continent we see a marked contrast between wealth and poverty; we meet young people of various cultural, religious and economic backgrounds. With patience, kindness and gentleness we accompany them and instruct them through vocational training. We introduce them to the world of work so that they grow up as honest citizens and good Christians, or followers of a different faith. We help them to contribute to society, and in doing so, to experience true joy in this life and in the future.

The poster's visual journey leads us to a picture of **Don Bosco** sitting by a globe, a reminder of our father's missionary dreams. He invites his children to travel the world, bringing the Good News to the young. Through our fraternal presence, education and ministry we, Salesians, create family-like environments. We foster and promote a dignified inclusion of young people in society. In our homes, they hear our "word in the ear", **whispers** of joy, faith, hope and love – indeed, the whispered words of the Gospel.

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LETTER OF THE RECTOR MAJOR

11 November 2017

"Whispering the Gospel in Asia" is so eloquent and, at the same time, so Salesian. The very title speaks of what we are and what we already do among the young people of this exciting continent of Asia. The theme clearly indicates the path to embark upon.

The Salesian element of this evangelical whisper is, above all, our educational presence. Even without saying a word, our kind, gentle and trusting presence among the poorest of youth is already such an extremely incisive proclamation. Our presence as brothers, parents and friends is not neutral; it brings, even with the discretion that Asia demands, a message of educational friendship.

Through this discreet educational presence, we have succeeded in lighting up even more brightly the many beautiful values that the Asian people hold dear, preserve and transmit. And among these values, I'd like to emphasize the values of peace and work. We live and work as Salesians among many peoples in Asia who are, typically, peaceful and hardworking. The Preventive System of Don Bosco upholds these values and gives them even more depth and beauty.

This Salesian educational presence "whispers the Gospel" also by providing spaces that are enriched by the coming together of cultures in a spirit of reciprocity and solidarity. With Don Bosco, many young Asians discover and forge human relationships that become ever richer and more enduring. Our young people in Salesian houses eat together, study together, play together and work together. Despite cultural and religious diversity, they create profound and lasting bonds of true friendship. They feel at home. Each of our educational fields of action is called to whisper the family spirit that our father, Don Bosco, left us. In these places of humanizing encounter, women are respected, valued, promoted.

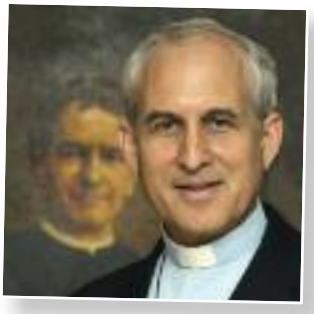
Finally, this whisper is educational and evangelical. It does not inhibit young people, nor does it prematurely age them through indifference. On the contrary, it awakens them, leads them forward and sets them marching. Accepting this call, the young man gradually takes his life in his own hands. With conviction, he faces all challenges and discovers that his life is a vocation.

Dear brothers and friends, let us focus this year's missionary attention on the Gospel and its discreet and fruitful reach into the depths of the young people living in Asia. May the Salesian family of the whole world rediscover its apostolic passion in each of the different contexts in which it lives and works.

Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, SDB
Rector Major

LETTER FROM THE COUNCILLOR FOR SALESIAN MISSIONS

As always, the Salesian Mission Day is an opportunity not to be missed. Sometimes, some confreres, in some Provinces, even towards the end of the year, still do not know what the theme of the Salesian Mission Day is. This is a serious challenge to each of the Provincial Delegates for Missionary Animation: that the good news of this Mission Day reaches everyone, every Salesian house, every confrere, every lay person and every young person.



It is, therefore, a matter of "making noise" via the Salesian Mission Day, so that our missionary ardour is not extinguished and no one robs us of our apostolic passion!

As in the previous Salesian Mission Days of this sessennium, the leitmotif continues to be "Initial Proclamation". This time we focus on the Asian continent, more specifically, on our presence in the technical and vocational training of young people. Here we see the interesting contrast between the loud "noise" that is inevitable in any vocational training centre and the gentle, near-silent entry of the Gospel into the hearts of different cultures. These centres, often found in the very midst of large, noisy cities, are likewise converted into oases where evangelical values are the daily bread.

For this Salesian Mission Day 2018, I ask each Delegate for Missionary Animation and his team, in the light of this eloquent and provocative theme:

- to study, starting from the guidelines given by the SDB Missionary Formation, how to open up ways to cultivate and train every Salesian, especially those in initial formation, to become *experts* in whispering the Gospel among the young;
- to seize this opportunity to make Asia better known as a vast missionary land, still waiting for the missionary availability *ad gentes* of many;
- to show and share good examples of Salesian family members, not necessarily those for whom a cause of canonization has been started, but who lived with evangelical dedication the mandate to proclaim the Good News, especially to the poorest youth, with creativity, salesianity and courage.

Mary, the Immaculate and the Help of Christians, welcomed in faith the Good News that the archangel Gabriel whispered to her at Nazareth. She herself whispered an urgent need to her son's ears: *"They have no more wine."* She embraced the precious inheritance whispered to her in the final hour: *"Here is your son."* She, assumed into heaven, has not ceased to whisper from the bosom of the God of Love, one by one, the needs of the *exiled children of Eve*. May she intercede for us and make of every son and daughter of Don Bosco and every Salesian house an evangelical whisper in every corner of the world, so that young people may have life – and life in abundance!

Fr Guillermo Basañes, SDB
Councillor for the Missions

Salesian Mission Day
A Tradition that continues

What does it mean?

Since 1926, the universal Church has celebrated World Mission Sunday. Since 1988, a specific missionary theme was proposed each year for the entire Salesian Congregation. All Salesian communities thus have the opportunity to learn about a particular mission. It is, indeed, a powerful practice of Missionary Animation in the Provincial or local Salesian communities, in Youth Groups and in the Salesian Family. It is an opportunity to involve the SDB communities and the educative-pastoral communities (EPC) in the dynamics of the universal Church and in strengthening missionary culture.

Why?

To give an impulse to Missionary Animation through a programme that becomes an annual concrete project. To help the whole Salesian Family to learn about the Congregation's missionary commitment, to open our eyes to new missionary realities, to overcome every temptation to close oneself within one's own territory or context and to remember the universal scope of the Salesian charism. "The activities of missionary animation must always be directed to their specific ends: to inform and to train the people of God to the universal mission of the Church, to give rise to missionary vocations *ad gentes*, to foster cooperation in evangelization" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 83).

When?

Globally, there is no fixed date for SMD. Each Province chooses a date or period most suited to its own rhythm and calendar. Some traditional dates that could be considered in the provinces might be, for example, in January, near the Feast of Don Bosco or his birthday in August, a day in Lent, the feast of the Missionary Martyr Saints, Louis Versiglia and Callisto Caravario – 25 February; a day in the month of May; in the missionary month of October or 11 November.

It is important to go through a period of preparation, offer an educational and pastoral journey that lasts a few weeks. The Salesian Mission Day becomes the culminating moment of this process. The SMD is to be the expression of the missionary spirit of the entire educative-pastoral community, kept alive throughout the year through a number of initiatives.

How is it animated?

Start the process at a meeting of Rectors, where the Delegate for Missionary Animation explains the objectives and distributes the tools available for the SMD in the Province, such as the provincial web page or an SMD link at www.sdb.org. Thus, all SDB communities become agents in the dynamics of the SMD. We focus every year on a concrete aspect of missionary culture. We pray for the missionaries presented in the SMD. We offer real and concrete support for the mission.

Who celebrates?

The first protagonist is the Salesian community. It can be organized in a variety of ways, depending on the circumstances of each institution (schools, vocational training centres, parishes, youth groups, missionary volunteer groups) and the Salesian Family (Salesian Co-operators, Past Pupils, ADMA Groups, etc.). It has to be open to the entire Salesian movement and to the friends of Don Bosco.

With what material?

Each Salesian house has access to: the official poster, printed material, video or film on the subject. This material – prayers, pamphlet, film – can all be found at www.sdb.org/missions.

Importance of Prayer for the Missions

All members of the EPC contribute to the missionary activity of the Congregation and of the Church. They pray and offer sacrifices for Salesian missionaries and for missionary vocations. Every 11th of the month is an occasion to pray according to the Salesian Missionary Intention. Every year a specific prayer is proposed, composed around the theme of the SMD. Missionary action flows from and is sustained by regular encounter with God.

SMD Project

Every year a project is proposed to be supported by the entire Congregation. This is an important and concrete part of the dynamics of the SMD. The purpose of the SMD project is not just to raise funds. Rather, it needs to be made into an educational experience for young people, a taste of solidarity through concrete action. The PDMA promotes solidarity through various initiatives, particularly during the important liturgical seasons of Advent and Lent and during the month of October, or as part of the celebrations of the SMD. The whole provincial community is also invited to make a monetary contribution to this particular project as an expression of world-wide missionary solidarity.

Evaluation

An evaluation of the SMD is as important as its preparation and celebration. An examination is made of the extent to which the SMD fostered the missionary culture within the local or provincial community via the theme proposed for that year. Decisions are taken on improvements for the future.

SMD: A tradition that continues (1988 - 2018)

Year	Location - Theme
1988	Guinea-Conakry: The Dream Continues
1989	Zambia: Lufubu Project
1990	Timor Leste - Venilale: Young Evangelizers
1991	Paraguay: Street Kids
1992	Peru - Valle Sagrado Incas: Christ Lives on the Roads of the Incas
1993	Togo - Kara: Don Bosco and Africa – A Dream come True
1994	Cambodia - Phnom Penh: Peace-building Missionaries
1995	India – Gujarat: Dialogue to share the Faith
1996	Russia – Yakutsk: Lights of Hope in Siberia
1997	Madagascar: Boy, I tell you, Get up
1998	Brazil: Yanomami: New Life in Christ
1999	Japan: The difficult Proclamation of Christ in Japan
2000	Angola: Gospel, Seed of Reconciliation
2001	Papua New Guinea: Walking with the Young
2002	Missionaries among Young Refugees
2003	Commitment to Human Promotion in the Mission
2004	India - Arunachal Pradesh: Awakening of a People
2005	Mongolia: A New Missionary Frontier
2006	Sudan: The Salesian Mission in Sudan
2007	Sudan: The Salesian mission in Sudan
2008	HIV/AIDS: Salesian Answer – Education for Life
2009	Missionary Animation – Keep your Missionary Flame Alive
2010	Europe: The Salesians of Don Bosco Walk with the Roma-Sinti
2011	America: Volunteers to Proclaim the Gospel
2012	Asia: Narrating Jesus (Telling the Story of Jesus)
2013	Africa: Walk of Faith
2014	Europe: The Others are Us – Salesian Attention to Migrants
2015	Lord, Send Me! – Salesian Missionary Vocations
2016	Come, Help Us! Initial Proclamation and New Frontiers in Oceania
2017	... And they Stayed with Us: Initial Proclamation and the Indigenous Peoples of America
2018	Whispering the Gospel. Initial Proclamation and Vocational Training in Asia

Leitmotif of this Six-year Term: Initial Proclamation

Path of the Congregation

From 2015 until 2020, the leitmotif of the Salesian Mission Day is "Initial Proclamation" (IP) in different cultural contexts. This year it is dedicated to Initial Proclamation in Asia and, in particular, through the integral educational service of Vocational Training.

The SDB and FMA have reflected on this theme of Initial Proclamation in all the Regions of the world: Europe (Prague 2010), South Asia (Kolkata 2011), East Asia (Sam Phran 2011), Oceania (Port Moresby 2011), Africa (Addis Ababa 2012), America (Los Teques 2013), the Muslim context (Rome 2012) and the urban context (Rome 2015). Each Regional Seminar began with a summary of the previous seminars. The participants identified possibilities in the various sectors, fields and environments of the mission (parishes, ethnic minorities, schools, oratories, vocational training centres, etc). In 2017, the meetings were in Brazil (Belo Horizonte) and Thailand (Sam Phran); in 2018, in Portugal (Fatima) and Africa (Johannesburg).

We reflected on the concept of Initial Proclamation in relation to the **testimony** of every Christian and of the whole Christian community. Every activity, or set of activities, can foster an overwhelming and exhilarating experience **of Jesus**. Under the action of the **Holy Spirit**, He sparks a **search** for God and an interest in His Person. Activities and programmes respect the **freedom** of conscience and, ultimately, lead to an **initial adhesion** to Him, or to the revitalization of **faith** in Him.

All this is promoted with a step-by-step pedagogy, attentive to the social, historical

and cultural context of the interlocutor. The intention is to lead one to live one's life as a Christian in a permanent state of being on a mission. Every person and every community is to become a de facto centre that radiates Christian life. Initial Proclamation is aimed at a variety of recipients:

1) those who **do not know Jesus Christ** (non-Christians);
2) **Christians who have received the Gospel's Initial Proclamation insufficiently,** and therefore:
   a) those who, after knowing Jesus Christ, have abandoned Him;
   b) those who live their faith as something cultural, without Christian practice with and within the community, or without receiving the sacraments, or are not involved in the life and activity of the parish;
   c) those who believe they know enough about Jesus but, live their faith as a routine or a cultural feature, or even, in a way contrary to their faith;
   d) those whose Christian identity is weak and vulnerable;
   e) those who no longer practise their faith.
3) those who are **looking for Someone** or something that gives meaning to their life, but fail to do so, or cannot give it a name.
4) those who live their daily life without any sense or meaning.

Concrete proposals made by the SDB in Asia

The Salesians of **South Asia** who participated in the study days at Kolkata in 2011, proposed some concrete steps to give priority to Initial Proclamation:

– Reflect on the primacy of IP in the Pastoral Educational Project (PEPS) of each community.

– Start and accompany missionary groups in our various environments.

– Form a network with other members of the Salesian Family and other missionary religious communities in our region to help us share successful experiences and methods of the Initial Proclamation.

– Improve collaboration and coordination among the Youth Ministry Commission, Social Communication, Formation and Missions.

– The Provincial Delegates for Missionary Animation (PDMA) need to create groups in the Provinces, groups of people sharing the same vision of Initial Proclamation.

– Promote the study of missiology and short courses on the Initial Proclamation among Rectors, Salesians in initial formation and catechists.

In **East Asia** (Sam Phran, 2011) these proposals were made:

– Make conscious efforts to kindle the desire to know the person of Jesus.

– Develop skills (languages, information technology, good knowledge of cultures, religions and socio-political aspects, etc.) and prepare ourselves through cultural immersion.

– Promote understanding of the life and nature of the Mission – missiological formation.

– Reinforce the role of the missionary animator in the provinces. Missionary animation in the provinces is done in two dimensions, *ad gentes* and *inter gentes*.

– Promote awareness in individuals, as

well as in communities, that living the life of a Christian is the only way to proclaim Christ to others.

– Strengthen the lay members of the Salesian Family to become agents of Initial Proclamation.

– Make appropriate use of our traditional environments (schools, vocational training centres, oratories, youth centres, etc.) as places for Initial Proclamation.

The Heart speaks to the Heart

The Chinese character for "**listening**" consists of five parts:

– (**ears**) – the first organ for listening
– (**you**) – personal commitment to listen to the other
– (**eyes**) – the visual contact with the dialogue interlocutor and careful observation of non-verbal communication.
– (**one**) – pay attention to this "one on one" activity
– (**heart**) – the most important organ for effective listening: "The Heart speaks to the Heart."

Close, attentive listening allows us to recognize the incarnation and manifestation of the presence and action of God and his Spirit in the cultures and religions of the great continent, as well as in its poor.

Our ability to listen carefully will make us intuitively sensitive to that unforeseen moment when our lives, activities, presence, or witness as believers and as Church trigger an interest in knowing the Person of Jesus Christ and believing in Him.

St. Francis de Sales often repeated a beautiful phrase: ***"Cor ad Cor loquitur"***, or "The Heart speaks to the Heart." We want the Heart of the Gospel to speak to the heart of Asian culture, to every culture and to every person. We want it to give each of us, missionaries, this capacity for empathy. We want each missionary to have respectful trust and intimacy. Then, and only then, can we tune in to the hearts of those with whom we speak. Then, and only then, can we communicate the one we love most: Jesus Christ. ■

"Cor ad Cor loquitur"

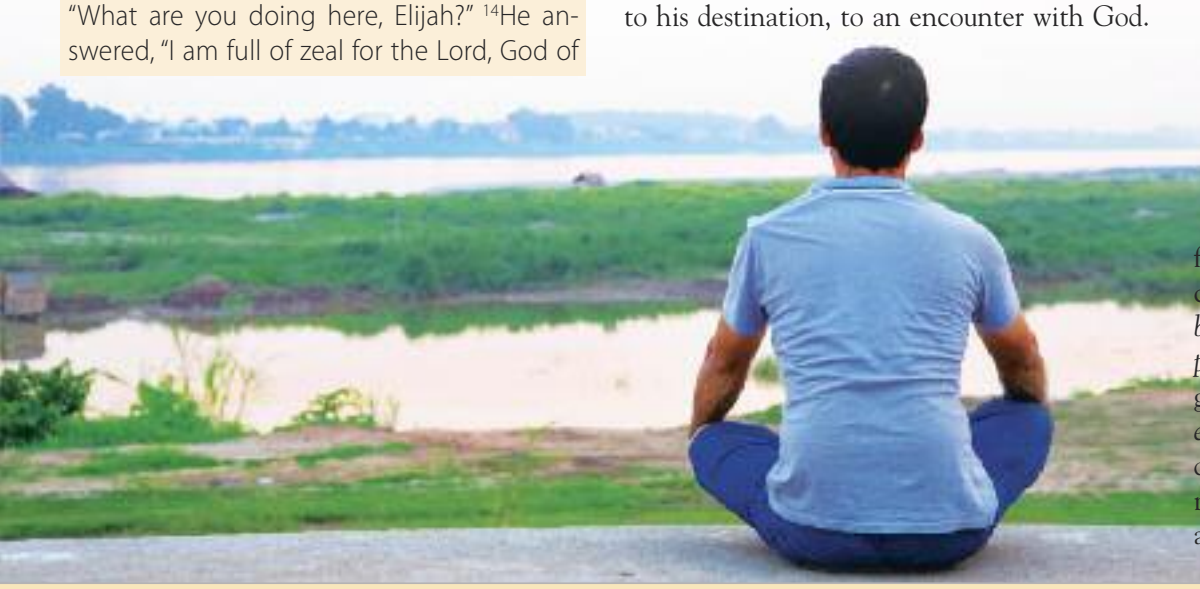
"The Heart speaks to the Heart"

And God was in the whisper of the gentle breeze (1Kings 19.12)

The "whisper of the Good News" reminds us of the text of prophet **Elijah**, when he is with JHWH on Mount Horeb (Sinai). This story is very suggestive of his spiritual adventure. We focus on his meeting with God in the whisper of the gentle breeze.

[10]He went into a cave to spend the night there; the word of the Lord was then addressed to him in these terms: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" [11]He said to him, "Come out and go up onto the mountain, into the presence of the Lord. And there the Lord will come by." There was a violent and stormy wind that shook the mountains and broke the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind, an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. [12]After the earthquake, a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. After the fire, **the whisper of a gentle breeze**. [13]As he heard it, Elijah covered his face with his mantle, went out and stood at the entrance to the cave. And behold, a voice came to him saying to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" [14]He answered, "I am full of zeal for the Lord, God of armies, for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, have demolished your altars, and have killed your prophets by the sword. I'm left alone and they try to take my life."
[15]The Lord said to him, "Come on, retrace your steps to the desert of Damascus; once there, anoint Cazaèl as king over Aram. 16Then anoint Jehu, son of Nimsi, as king over Israel, and anoint Elisha, son of Safat, of Abel-Mecola, as a prophet in your place." **(1Kings 19.10-16)**

Prophet Elijah, captured and sentenced to death by Queen Jezebel, had to flee. Finding himself in the desert, he fell to the ground at one point, tired and exhausted, depressed and disconsolate. He said: *"That's enough now, Lord! Take my life, because I am not better than my fathers."* He fell asleep in total despair; but, an angel woke him up and said to him: *"Eat this bread and drink this water that I have brought you, and continue your journey."* Elijah ate and drank, and with the strength of that food he walked for forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God, the Horeb, to his destination, to an encounter with God.



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After spending the night in the cave, God invites him to go out and meet with Him.

קוֹל דְּמָמָה דַקָּה

"The Lord passed" before the prophet. Four manifestations of the passage of JHWH are described, the last contrasting sharply with the first three (hurricane, earthquake, fire and breeze). The "whisper of the gentle breeze", is one possible translation of *qôl demamáh daqqáh*. It can also be translated as: "murmur of a light wind", a "calm, permeated by a light voice" or, a "subtle silence". What is evoked is the simultaneous presence of sound and silence.

This narration offers a variety of interpretations.

a. There is a polemical interpretation to negate the **pagan religion** that the prophet fought against. Baal is the god of the storm and the earthquake. The light breeze, in contrast, reiterates that JHWH is the true God; it is not Baal, who can only destroy and kill.

b. It also reminds us of the breeze in the garden of Eden (Gen 3: 8) when God walks in to meet with Adam and asks him where he is. One could also see a reference to the ***ruah*** that hovered over the waters in Gen 1.2. This refers to the creative presence of God in the midst of chaos, the God who saves man from sin. He is a God who continues to create and save throughout the history of His people.

c. A second interpretation links our episode to the **experience of Moses** on Sinai, which the prophet relives: hence, the 40 days, the cave where he hides, the only man of faith, while the people are unfaithful. Sinai's theophany of fire caused fear in the people of Israel (Exodus 20:18); now in contrast, we have a "*light breeze*".

d. Finally we have an interpretation in the light of Elijah's own personal interpretations of God. He seems to have been a "fiery" prophet (Sir 48: 1): he is impetuous, intolerant and chastising. He would, therefore, have been expecting a theophany suited to his understanding of God. The Lord disappoints his expectations by approaching him in a new and unexpected way, i.e., **in peace and gentleness and not in the devouring fire**. JHWH wants to show him His way – the way of mercy and peace. It is through these that He wants to visit and save his people. Not for nothing do some fathers see in this choice of God a subtle reproach to the prophet; for example, pseudo Ephrem commented: *"By this very symbol, God disapproves of the excessive zeal of Elijah, as if to say: Oh Elijah, look at me, I do not delight in the vehemence of the wind, nor the might of the earthquake, nor in fiery ardour. I have spoken only sweet words to you; why do you not imitate the gentleness of your Lord? Why do you not calm your burning eagerness to punish the sons*

of your people? Why not become more of an intercessor for them, and not be their accuser?" Even Sirach, commenting on this episode, gives the same interpretation: "You, Elijah, you got reproofed at Sinai" (Sir 48,7-8).

Without excluding the other interpretations, this last one is very interesting and stimulating for shaping Salesian missionary life. We could end up in discouragement and a loss of spirit in the missions of Asia because the Catholic population is small in most countries. Like the prophet, we are called to go out of ourselves, to resume the spiritual journey of the exodus, and – after the encounter with the God who whispers – we are sent on a mission to face and deal with the various challenges of society.

The whisper of the Good News is a **productive word**, a word that creates, generates, (Gn 1,2), a voice that is listened to in an atmosphere of intimacy, one that provokes **encounter** (Gn 3: 8). It is the tenuous voice of God, which does not blast the eardrums, but which reaches the ears and the heart in great discretion. It is the "word in the ear" that, with delicacy and respect, just like the gentle breeze, wins confidence and offers a message of life. It is communication marked by loving kindness, as per the Salesian Preventive System.

It is a word of harmony and peace: "The Lord was not in the hurricane, in the earthquake, or in the fire, but there was that whisper of a gentle breeze: peace or, as the original says, using a beautiful expression: The Lord treads in resounding silence." (Pope Francis 13/06/14).

It is a whisper that leads to interiority, a silent voice, much appreciated in the Asian continent, that educates and listens in silence to the voice of God, that deeply understands the interiority of all matters, such as work, education and relationships; of the world and of God Himself.

It is a subtle message that drives the mission forward, despite all its social, political, economic and religious challenges. As Elijah went on to anoint kings and prophets, we, too, are likewise called, after our encounter with God, to go into the world with its problems, to implement God's plan within it.

The entire Salesian educational-pastoral proposal is full of frenetic noise. Our centres resound to the cacophony of laboratories, workshops, machinery or hammers. At the same time, there is a respectful whisper to the young Asians regarding the values of solidarity, responsibility, human dignity and work. All these are fully enshrined in the Word, making us all participants in this task. Our educational system demands a personalized, affectionate, respectful relationship. This relationship is accompanied by the witness of our coherent life and by our charity. The totality of this process opens the hearts of the young to this "breeze of the soft whisper of the Gospel."

Whispering the Gospel to the Soul of Asia

Mons. Thomas Menamparambil, SDB

It was in the Asian Synod that I used for the first time the phrase "Whispering the Gospel to the Soul of Asia". Several Asian bishops came to me during the coffee break to thank me for the expression. Later, others too joined in. I used the phrase on another occasion to conclude an article of mine on the evangelization of Asia. I received words of appreciation precisely for that phrase from persons I had never known: from Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and even from a retired missionary in France, who had worked in Asia earlier. People saw in the phrase something deeper than I was able to imagine when I used it for the first time. It was not a well thought out phrase carefully crafted after much reflection. It had come to me spontaneously when I was formulating a written intervention for the Asian Synod. Ever since, it has caught the imagination of many, including also a Consolata missionary working in Mongolia, who did a doctorate at the Urbaniana University applying the phrase to the Mongolian context.

Generally, what comes to one's mind when one hears of **'quiet communication'** in today's Asian context is a thought of fear and anxiety, in the context of the much-reported violence against Christians these days. That was the least important reason I would have had in mind when I used the expression for the first time. It was not in my mind at all. 'Whispering', as I used the word in my intervention, was not intended to be an expression of fear, timidity, caution, or prudence. It was a **sign of closeness, intimacy, trust, relationship, profundity**. It also evoked a sense of the sacred. In India *mantras* are pronounced gently; they are sacred words. *Sutras* are only whispered to initiates; they are sacred teachings. People listen to these utterings with reverence. The seriousness and solemnity of the context would make you hold your breath. You are enthralled by their sacred meaning and cosmic significance.

But to tell you the truth, all these deeper meanings and connotations were less in my mind, when I drafted that intervention for the Asian Synod, than the thought of a missionary's closeness to his people. All those who dealt successfully with large numbers of people, sought to be close to them: individuals and communities. That gave them great persuasive power. Mahatma Gandhi was close to his people, to individuals and groups. His relationships were always warm and intimate. Mother Teresa had the singular ability of making everyone she met feel that she belonged to him/her. That is why even a whisper from her mattered. President Clinton said that no one in modern times had stung the conscience of the world as she had done. Princess Diana would bend deep like a little girl to listen to Mother's 'whispers.'

It is said that Alexander, Napoleon, and Mao were close to their fighting men in their early years. Their closeness to the average soldiers and the trust they showed in them generated the courage their men needed to risk their lives on the frontlines. Don Bosco's 'Word in the Ear' (a word of friendly correction, encouragement, or affirmation) changed hearts, shaped lives, transformed history. Founders of many congregations would withdraw with their close associates to discuss the future of their society in deep faith, confidence and intimacy. They were sacred moments for those concerned. All that happened in later years through the heroic work of their successors had some mystic relationship with what happened in those early gatherings of the pioneers with their founder.

Jesus frequently withdrew from the crowds to instruct his disciples or deepen their understanding of what he had taught to the crowds at an earlier moment. I could compare the conversations of Jesus with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, and his discussions over meals, to the "Whispering of the Gospel" I was referring to. In such **intimate sharings** serious things can be said, deeper things can be explained, and what really counts can be accepted freely, happily and with lasting consequence. Even the words of Jesus to the Good Thief, the questioning of Peter about his love, and his post-resurrection conversations with his disciples, could be classified under the same category. But, most of all, it is the conversation of Jesus with his disciples in the Upper Chamber that we could call "Whispering of the Gospel to the soul" of the Young Church. Everything speaks of closeness, seriousness, intimacy. There is warmth, there is loving kindness. Here we find Jesus pouring out his heart. Every word is precious, profoundly felt, with diverse levels of meaning, words

that sum up what he stands for and the vision he has for his dear ones.

First of all, we may ask ourselves whether we as missionaries are capable of that closeness, intimacy and profundity in any of our conversations, at least a portion of it. Yes, we are. It was in the playgrounds that Don Bosco used to whisper a word in the ear of a naughty boy. I was feeling guilty at one stage that just when Pope John Paul II was speaking of announcing the Gospel from the housetops I was speaking of whispering the Gospel. I had not even thought of it until someone pointed it out. At one stage I was feeling diffident. This difference could be misunderstood. However, one approach was never intended to be a denial of the other; in fact, one is intimately related to the other. Jesus' intimate sharing with his disciples had a close relationship with his preaching to the crowds.

There are times and contexts too in our own case when we announce the message loud and clear without fear, and there are occasions when we deepen the reflections in intimate circles. Often, we probe our way forward in deeper level conversations. A final choice is made for accepting the Christian Proposal as an individual, a family or a small group, in a context of intimacy and personal nearness. May be that is also what happens between two young persons who decide to live together as partners for a life time.

There is another dimension that has meant much to me during my entire missionary life. It is the challenge of **culture**. Whatever be your personal talent or qualification, unless you come on the wavelength of the culture of a community, your missionary performance will always be limping. Dealing with culture is not merely analysing people's habits, traditions, and studying their feasts and handicraft. It is seeking admission into the inner world of communities, understanding their collective attitudes and orientations, respecting their values, feeling a measure of pride in their history, cultural heritage and collective achievements. It is vibrating with the community. This will call for a sympathetic understanding even of their weaknesses, correction for which ultimately comes from the community itself.

This will mean dialoguing with the '*collective psyche of communities*' in the way great missionaries of the past have done. Such people alone are close to the "Soul" of a community. Whispering is possible and worthwhile only if you are close to the Soul of a community. Missionaries who are able to interpret the genius of a people, the deeper dimensions of their culture, understand

their collective genius, and are intimate to the communities... they alone are in a position to 'whisper the Gospel' with any measure of success. Many missionaries address the logical mind, not the intimate soul.

It is said that St. Patrick understood the Celtic mind and dealt with the Irish people with amazing success. Something similar was said about St. Boniface in Germany, and he transformed the lives of entire peoples and societies. In India, St. Francis Xavier seems to have had a similar gift. Closer to us, we could say something similar about Fr. Constant Lievens of Chhotanagpur (Jharkhand) whose success is unexplainable except for his genius in dealing with communities. Nearer to us still, we could possibly refer to Fr. Vendrame who showed amazing ways of dealing with the Khasi people. The pedagogy of 'whispering' comes alive when people with such abilities pass on an idea to the communities with whom they are dealing. And entire communities are touched.

Asian society is far more **communitarian** than societies in most other parts of the world, except possibly for those in Africa. Here a missionary will have to deal, not only with individuals and families, but also with the larger units of society, such as a tribe, an individual ethnic group, a village, a small neighbourhood, etc. If he has learnt to identify himself with a specific community, of which possibly he has emerged a hero, he will work wonders.

Speaking of Asia again, there will be great differences between various communities: tribal people, people who have been de-tribalized of late, communities that have accepted one of the world religions, those who remain uncommitted, and those that have abandoned their religion. There will be differences between the rural and urban population, smaller isolated ethnic groups and larger societies. However, the need for penetrating the inner world of a society, and understanding its working and the patterns of its emotional rhythms, is extremely important when it comes to sharing one's faith. The more casually you share it, the more superficial it remains. Unfortunately, much of our missionary education, teaching and catechesis has remained at the superficial level. When it becomes intimate and deep, you notice the difference.

The aspect of **'depth'** is as important as the quality of intimacy. Asians esteem depth no matter what persuasion you belong to. While depth has reference to the content of the discussion, it also has reference to the personality of the communicator, the quality of the relationship, the unction of the style of communicating. It points to the intimacy a communicator has with his/her own real 'self' as well. In Indian spirituality, pursuit of the 'self' is one of the highest goals. If the communicator is close to his own 'superficial self' the content and style of his communication will also reflect that. But if he is often with his **'deeper self'**, the profounder dimension of his/her person, when he communicates a message, he wins attention.

I am tempted to believe that the very phrase "Whispering the Gospel to the Soul of Asia" was the utterance of the collective psyche of Asia. It was not an artificially constructed strategy of anyone after much study and elaborate discussion. It sprang up spontaneously as the Asian Church was gathered in Rome for the most important event in its recent history. It holds the formula for the future of evangelical work in Asia. ■

Salesians in Asia
(India and China)

Francesco Motto, SDB

In the late 1830s, reading the Annals of the Propagation of the Faith offered Don Bosco good information on the missions in India and China. In the same years, so did the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, who ran the Consolata sanctuary in Turin, with their departure for the missions in Burma (Myanmar). Another notable influence on Don Bosco was Giuseppe Ortalda, director of the diocesan Council of the *Propaganda Fide* Association for 30 years (1851-1880), promoter of a minor seminary for missionary vocations and the publisher of a missionary review.

Don Bosco's missionary interest for Asia grew even more with the 1862 canonization in Rome of the 26 Japanese protomartyrs and the beatification in 1867 of over 200 Japanese martyrs that was solemnly celebrated at Valdocco, too. Many missionary bishops also passed through Turin including, in November 1859, Msgr. Luigi Celestino Spelta, Apostolic Vicar of Hupei (China), and in the following years Msgr. Daniele Comboni, with whom Don Bosco had an exchange of ideas for the missions in Africa. He also met with Bettazzi, a missionary from Brescia, to discuss the management of a school of arts and crafts or a seminary in Georgia, USA, which also involved the local bishop. Until 1870, though theoretically sensitive to missionary demands, Don Bosco kept his focus on national projects.

Msgr. Luigi Celestino Spelta

Msgr. Daniele Comboni

Msgr. Luigi Moccagatta

The Missionary Turning Point of Vatican Council I (1868-1870)

The presence in Rome of 180 bishops at the First Vatican Council, bishops from mission lands, gave Don Bosco the opportunity to meet with many of them.

In November 1869 a delegation of Chilean bishops visited Valdocco. In July 1870, the archbishop of San Francisco (USA) asked for and obtained the promise to take up the direction of a hospice with a vocational training school - then never built it. In the same year, it was the turn of Piedmontese Mons. Domenico Barbero, Apostolic Vicar in Hyderabad (India), who asked for nuns for India. Valdocco also received Mgr. Luigi Moccagatta, Vicar Apostolic of Shantung (China) and Msgr. Eligio Cosi (1819-1885), his successor.

In 1873, again in Valdocco, Mons. Timoleone Raimondi invited Don Bosco to take charge of the Catholic schools in the Apostolic Prefecture of Hong Kong. The negotiations lasted more than a year and then ran aground for a variety of reasons. The same happened for a number of missionary foundations in other parts of India and Australia for which Don Bosco negotiated with individual bishops. Some of these were submitted to the Holy See as finalized while, in truth, they were only projects *in fieri*. The offer of the rector of the Irish College of Rome, Msgr. Toby Kirby, to provide English-language students did not materialize. Instead, the Argentine-Patagonian project which, by combining attention to the many Italian emigrants and the evangelization of the Indios, was quickly welcomed and launched by Don Bosco (1874-1875). The similarity

of language, culture and traditions had facilitated the project.

Salesians in China

Despite his dreams and wishes regarding the Asian missions, Don Bosco could not personally materialize any expedition of Salesian missionaries in what were densely populated regions. The first "Asian" landing was, in fact, in the Middle East, at the end of the century, by his successor, Fr. Michele Rua, for an educational centre in Palestine that had already been initiated by one of the Brothers of the Holy Family, Fr. Antonio Bellone. Later came the works in Palestine, Turkey and Egypt.

In the same five-year period of the late nineteenth century the Salesians maintained relations with the Jesuits who suggested the small town of Macao, a Portuguese colony, as the first venue for Salesian work in China. On the eve of the new century, the Portuguese bishop of Macao, through the apostolic nuncio of Portugal, began direct negotiations with Fr. Rua for the management of an orphanage for boys, with arts and crafts workshops and other missionary activities in his diocese. The bishop's death interrupted the negotiations, but they were resumed by his successor, with whom Fr. Rua signed an agreement at the end of December 1905.

Sailing from Genoa in mid-January 1906, a team of three priests and two coadjutor brothers, led by Fr. Luigi Versiglia (1873-1930), reached Macao a month later, and were joyfully welcomed by the bishop, the authorities and the local population. Salesian work developed rapidly, but after only four years it had to be abandoned following the Portuguese revolution that expelled the religious from the colonies, too.

The Salesians then settled in the Chinese territory of Heung-Shuan, between Macao and Canton, and built small Christian communities in Seak-Kei, Mong-Ciau and Ngan-Hang, especially created to form catechists. In 1917, they were offered the mission of Shiu-Chow, to the north of Canton, which, erected in 1920 as an apostolic vicariate, was entrusted to Msgr. Versiglia. Missionary residences, churches, chapels, seminaries and schools for boys and girls were built, but on February 25, 1930, Msgr. Versiglia was murdered together with the young priest Fr. Callisto Caravario (1903-1930); both were canonized in 2000 by John Paul II.

Msgr. Eligio Cosi

Msgr. Timoleone Raimondi

Msgr. Luigi Versiglia

In India

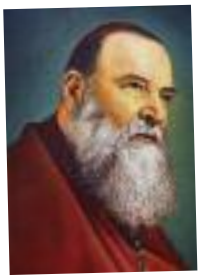
Even in India, there were no Salesians during Don Bosco's lifetime. The first to request their presence was the Portuguese bishop of Myliapore, located on the east coast, in a suburb of Madras. The Episcopal request of 1896, reaffirmed by his successor in 1902, was finally formalized by the two parties in December 1904. In December 1905, three priests, a cleric, a coadjutor brother and an aspirant departed from Genoa for India. The Superior at the time was Fr. Giorgio Tomatis (1865-1925). They arrived in the city of Myliapore a week later, via Bombay-Mumbay. After a twelve-hour train trip, they

reached Tanjore, a city of 60,000 inhabitants, with only 8,000 Catholics. Another 26,000, however, lived in the surrounding areas. The Salesians were destined to run a small orphanage with arts and crafts workshops and a small parish school, both of them with some support from the British government.

The arrival in 1907 of Fr. Eugenio Mederlet (1867-1934) – future archbishop of Madras – reinforced the community. In 1909, a workshop-orphanage opened in Myliapore for Anglo-Indians, and in 1915 the central parish of Tanjore was donated to the Salesians.

Seven years later, they would begin missionary work in the Apostolic Prefecture of Assam at the request of *Propaganda Fide* following the removal, during the First World War, of the German "Salvatorian" missionaries who had founded it. The first Rector of Shillong, Fr. Louis Mathias (1887-1965), would become the Apostolic Prefect in 1923, bishop in 1934, and then Mederlet's successor in the Archdiocese of Madras. In 1928, *Propaganda Fide* also entrusted the Salesians with the diocese of Krishnagar.

Fr. Giorgio Tomatis



Msgr. Louis Mathias

Fr. Vincenzo Cimatti

To complete the Asian picture, in 1926 the first Salesians, led by Fr. Vincenzo Cimatti (1879-1965), established their parish, oratory and scholastic mission in Japan on the island of Kiou-Siou, in Miyasaki, Nakatsu and Oitia. Two years later, institutions built by the Holy See in these areas, in what were mission territories, were entrusted to the Salesians; they remained in operation even when the new mission became an Apostolic Prefecture in 1935.

As for Thailand, the Salesians arrived in 1927. Three years later, they were entrusted a mission already belonging to the Missionaries of the foreign missions of Paris, with its main centres in Ratburi and Bang-Nok-Khuek. The first director, Fr. Vincenzo Pasotti (1890-1950), promoted oratories and schools, especially vocational training centres, which attracted Christians and Buddhists alike. In 1934, the Apostolic Prefecture was established and was entrusted to the same Mons. Pasotti.

They followed the indications of the apostolic letter *Maximum illud* of Pope Benedict XIV (1919) and the encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae* of Pius XI (1926) which, after the First World War, had re-launched the Church's missionary activity with the need to provide specific and solid training to the missionaries, form indigenous clergy, prepare them to assume the leadership of the missions, and to avoid compromising evangelization with political, nationalist and colonial interests; also, the expectation of erecting autonomous local churches.

In the missions, the method of Salesian evangelization was obviously inspired by Don Bosco: the Salesians focussed on the youth, with orphanages, schools of various kinds, oratories, parishes and catechetical activities according to the preventive system. Their efforts at inculturation and adaptation to local situations was admirable, despite there being strong limits to their theological and anthropological-cultural knowledge. ■

The de Nobilian Missionary Method An Early Example of a Paradigm Shift in Missionary Approach

Thomas Anchukandam, SDB

Introduction

Roberto de Nobili, an Italian Jesuit, reached India in 1605 with the idea of converting as many Indians as possible to Christ in imitation of his great Jesuit predecessor, St. Francis Xavier. But, being a man of remarkable insights, after a short experience of life in Madurai, he came to the conclusion that Christianity would have little success in India if it were presented as a Western religion. This was evident from the geographical concentration of the Christians in India. They lived along the coast where they could find protection and support from colonial powers. The vast interior regions were quite untouched by the missionaries and the people there were quite hostile to the Christian religion. Hindus identified Christianity with the religion of the colonisers.

This realization of de Nobili and the thought of changing the situation were shared by Fr. Albert Laerzio, the Provincial of the Malabar Province of the Jesuits. Fr. Laerzio, in fact, was of the opinion that 'too long had conversions been made in the islands and along the beaches, under the protection of Portuguese guns'. The time, according to him, had come 'for the Cross to outstrip the flag' and attempts made to bring the gospel to those living in the interior regions of Southern India.

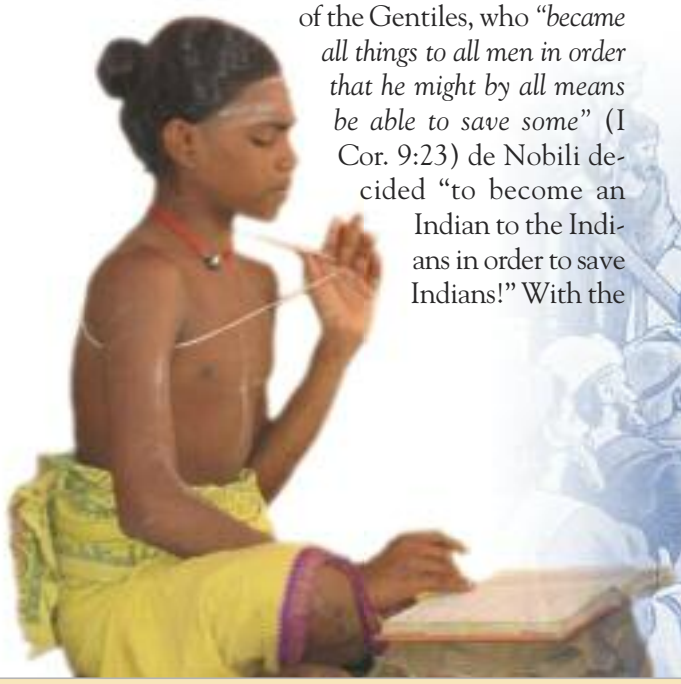
A paradigm shift

Laerzio asked de Nobili, to learn Tamil, the local language, as well as the social customs. Blessed as he was with a prodigious memory, he proved himself to be a fast learner and mastered not only Tamil, but also Sanskrit, the language in which the Hindu Sacred Texts were written and commented upon by Brahmin scholars; and Telugu, the language of the Vijayanagar rulers who were masters of Madurai. He also undertook a serious study of Hinduism and, with the assistance of some learned Brahmins, got a clearer understanding of the manner of life of the Brahmins as well as the very profound Hindu philosophical and religious thought. His study, discussions and reflections led him to believe that, in the way of life of the Hindus, there was a clear distinction between cultural norms, which are harmless and hence acceptable, and religious practices, which often contained superstitious elements.

His life and interaction with the people and his better understanding of the culture led him soon to the conclusion that the caste Hindus and more especially the higher castes like the Brahmins would never accept Christ if Christianity were to be identified with European culture and the Portuguese colonizers, who were disparagingly referred to as *paranghis*. The *paranghis* were considered a vile and polluting race as they moved freely among the out-

castes, ate meat, drank liquor, did not take regular baths despite the heat and humidity, and were generally considered to be people without morals. Christianity, the religion of the *paranghis* was referred to as *Paranghi Markkam* or the way of life of the *paranghis*. Hence no self-respecting caste Hindu would ever think of being baptized into such a religion as he would be considered someone ignoble and vile. All those who associated themselves with the *paranghis* and their way of life were in fact considered defiled and hence untouchable.

The above realization made de Nobili to dissociate himself from the *paranghis* and to declare that he was not a *paranghi* but that he was indeed a *sannyasi* (Hindu ascetic) born in Rome. In this his decision he was guided by what was established by the Apostles themselves at the Council of Jerusalem in 50 AD, viz. just as the gentiles were not expected to become Jews and follow Jewish norms (Acts 15), Indians should not be expected to become Europeans (Acts 15) if they were to decide to become believers in Christ. What was clearly implied was that diverse social practices were compatible with their belief in Christ. Further, imitating St. Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, who *"became all things to all men in order that he might by all means be able to save some"* (I Cor. 9:23) de Nobili decided "to become an Indian to the Indians in order to save Indians!" With the permission of Fr. Alberto Laerzio, the Provincial, de Nobili decided to initiate a new method of evangelization in Madurai.

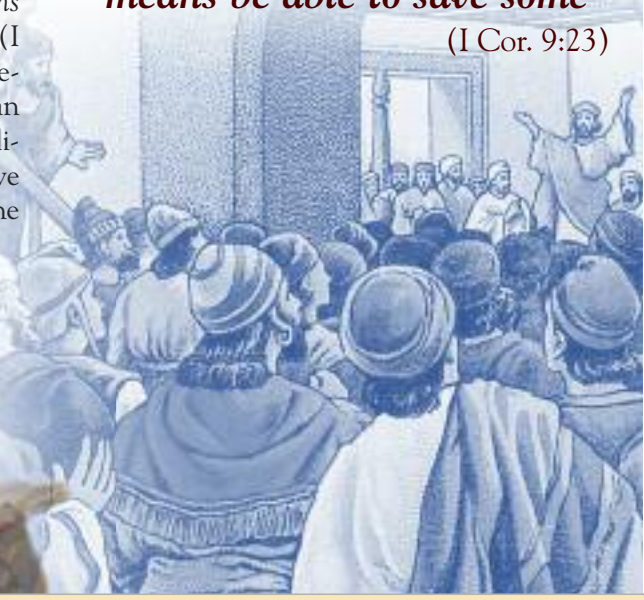


The Method

De Nobili did not want to have anything, either in his appearance or in his life-style which would associate him with the *paranghis*. Hence, he set aside the black cassock and dressed like a *sannyasi-guru* or Hindu ascetic-teacher. He stopped eating meat, fish or eggs and drinking wine. He ate only one frugal meal a day, which consisted of rice, milk, fruit and vegetables. He did not any more travel on horse-back or use leather shoes. Instead, in keeping with the local practice, walked with a pair of sandals made of wood and with the aid of a staff. He cut off all contact with the Portuguese and even with his Jesuit confreres who were known to be *paranghis*. He also refrained from any contact with outcastes or the polluting categories of people.

He also intensified his study of the Hindu Sacred Texts especially the Four Vedas or the spiritual laws of the Hindus. Becoming aware

"Became all things to all men in order that he might by all means be able to save some"
(I Cor. 9:23)



that the Hindus believed that there was indeed a Fifth Veda, which had actually been lost, he decided to present the Christian doctrine as the Fifth Veda or the *Sathya Veda* (the True Veda). He extracted from the approved commentaries of the Vedas a collection of texts and allusions best suited to serve as a basis for demonstrating the truth of Christianity. This brought him into theological discussions with the Brahmins during which his own preparation in scholastic philosophy and theology stood him in good stead. In due course, he would publish 15 works of varying lengths in order to propagate the Christian doctrine as well as to defend his method.

Pope Gregory XV

The method proved effective as several from among the caste Hindus, including some Brahmins, converted to Christianity. Due to his teachings on the Christian doctrine and his writings the Tamils reverently referred to him as *Thathuva Bodhakar* (Teacher of Doctrine).

De Nobili allowed the newly-converted to keep the insignias of their caste like the *kudumi* or the tuft of hair, the Sacred Thread or the triple strand of white cotton hanging from the left shoulder across the chest and back and tied near the right thigh. He permitted them also the use of the sandal paste on their forehead, chest and upper arms as well as to take regular baths, especially before participating in formal religious or civil functions. This he did by making a subtle distinction between what he considered purely social practices indicative of one's social status or rank and those other practices with evident superstitious or religious connotations.

Controversies

This "paradigm shift" in missionary approach, which he had embarked upon, soon led to controversies both among his own Jesuit confreres and especially among the Portuguese missionaries. They accused him of being an agnostic and of himself having become a Hindu. However, if it was his Provincial who in the beginning had prompted him to embark upon this new missionary approach, he now found support from another influential and knowledgeable Jesuit, Msgr. Francis Roz, Archbishop of Angamali-Cranganore. Being the Archbishop of the Syrian Catholics of Kerala, Msgr. Roz knew from first-hand experience that one needed to make concessions to the Indians at the social level without compromising on doctrines if one were to prove a successful missionary in India. De Nobili's own personal example of asceticism and accompanying suffering on behalf of the Gospel, his apologetic writings on the subject as well as the forceful interventions on his behalf by Msgr. Roz saved the day for the method. On 31st January 1623 Pope Gregory XV, through the Apostolic Constitution *Romanae Sedis Antistes*, approved it. The Jesuits then went on to adopt it as their official method of evangelisation in the Indian missions.

Conclusion

However, by the end of the 17th century there arose what has come down in mission history as the *Malabar Rites Controversy* centred round the de Nobilian method. Two groups of apostolic workers, the Capuchins and the Jesuits, were ranged against each other. The controversy was referred to as the *Malabar Rites Controversy* as it centred round the missionary method of the Jesuits in the Malabar Province of India. After a prolonged series of accusations and counter-accusations by both parties and after several representations to Rome, the Holy See sent Card. De Tournon to visit India and to make a report. De Tournon, who was not keeping well due to his

long and difficult journeys, lodged with the Capuchins in Pondicherry. Without ever visiting the Jesuit missions and verifying facts for himself, he returned to Rome and submitted his report. Basing himself primarily on this report submitted to him by de Tournon, Pope Benedict XIV promulgated the Bull, *Omnium Sollicitudinum*, dated 13th September 1744, condemning the de Nobilian method as making allowances to superstitious practices. He further required all missionaries to India to take an oath stating that they would not follow the method.

Pope Benedict XIV

Cardinal De Tournon

This requirement of the oath remained in force until 1940. The Second World War and the Post-colonial period, when the western domination of the world became part of history, the Catholic Church was forced to rethink her missionary approach. This led to the urgent call for inculturation and with it the emphasis on the need to adapt the Gospel to world cultures.

As for de Nobili himself, he is, to this day, considered a pioneer missionary. About three hundred and fifty years before Vatican II, he indicated a new way of being a missionary – without using political or financial influence but trusting in his own intellectual preparation and his formation as a Jesuit. These had made him an independent thinker and open to new world realities. Above all, he was committed to the primary missionary task of announcing the Good News as the *Thathuva Bodhagar* or the Teacher of Doctrine.

(The de Nobilian experience and initiative of trying not to identify the Christian religion with the colonial West finds a relevant echo even today. The persecution of Christians as, for instance, in the Middle East by their own Muslim brethren is owed to the fact of their religion being unjustifiably identified with the "exploitative Western 'Christian' countries"!) ■

Vocational Training
and Salesians in Asia

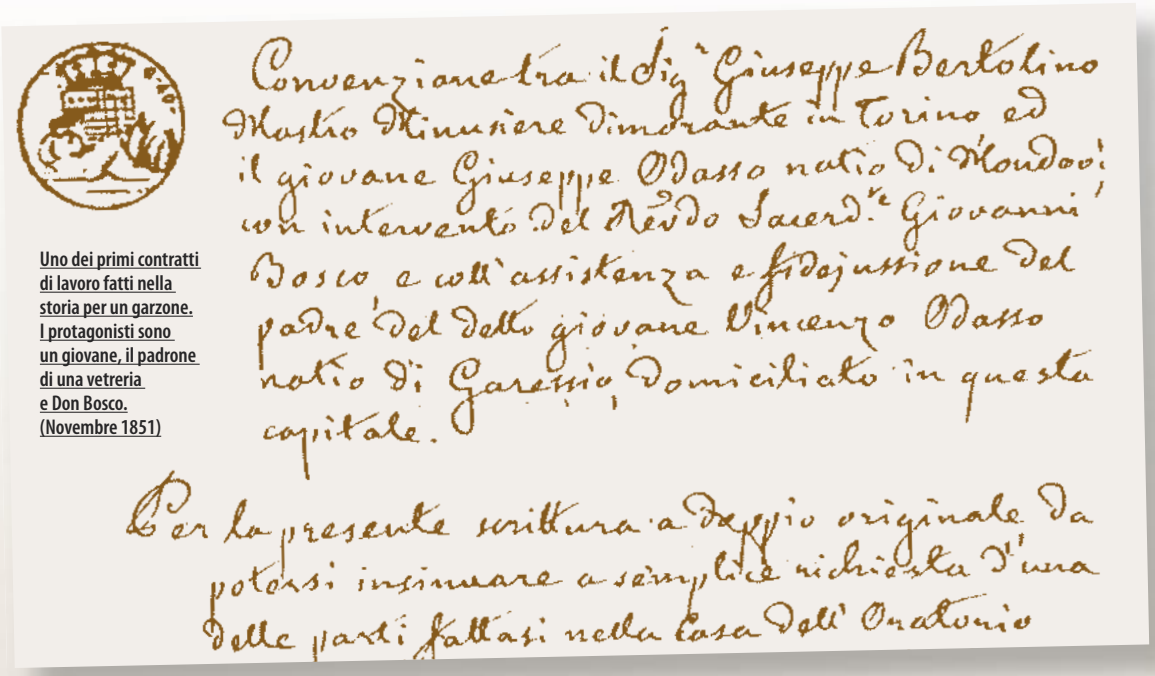
Don Bosco

St. John Bosco (1815-1888) was the founder of the Salesians of Don Bosco, having devoted his whole life to the education of the most vulnerable among young people. He carried out his educational work at the time of the industrial revolution, the era of the exploitation of young farmers who moved to the great city of Turin in search of a job. Among these there were children as young as eight who worked fourteen hours a day, seven days a week.

Don Bosco began to protect young apprentices with labour contracts that allowed them to enter the labour market. In a period of general exploitation, Don Bosco insisted on their right to periods of well-deserved rest.

In 1853, at Valdocco on the outskirts of Turin, the great didactic innovation of arts and crafts began (which in the future would be called professional, or vocational training schools). Don Bosco started with workshops for carpenters, typographers and shoemakers. Later, his work spread across the globe in the form of technical high schools, professional schools and agricultural schools.

The importance of vocational education and training (VT) is repeatedly mentioned, today, as a global educational and economic priority. UNESCO and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) insist on it. The great contribution of Vocational Training is its ability to offer adequate solutions to society for its development in all areas.



Convenzione tra il Sig.r Giuseppe Bertolino Mastro Minuziere dimorante in Torino ed il giovane Giuseppe Odasso natio di Mondovì con intervento del Revdo Sacerd.te Giovanni Bosco e coll'assistenza e fidejussione del padre del detto giovane Vincenzo Odasso natio di Garessio, domiciliato in questa capitale.

Per la presente scrittura a doppio originale da potersi insinuare a semplice richiesta d'una delle parti fattasi nella casa dell'Oratorio

Uno dei primi contratti di lavoro fatti nella storia per un garzone. I protagonisti sono un giovane, il padrone di una vetreria e Don Bosco. (Novembre 1851)

The Framework of Youth Ministry

The Originality of the Salesian Vocational Training Centre

Vocational training and the Salesian school were first established in Valdocco to respond to the concrete needs of young people. They are part of a global project of education and evangelization of the young, especially the neediest among them. Animated by the desire to guarantee dignity and a future for his young people, Don Bosco gave life to the arts and crafts laboratories and workshops. He helped young people to find work and procured contracts for them to prevent their exploitation. This preparation and service were enriched by the vocation and presence of the Salesian coadjutor brother.

This is the matrix of the current vocational training centres, working for the promotion of the human, Christian and professional formation of young people. This proposal responds to the aptitudes, skills and aspirations of many of them who, at the end of basic training, need to enter the world of work. Vocational training is an effective tool for integral human maturation and the prevention of youth-related problems, as well as for the Christian animation of social realities and entrepreneurial development.

Always attentive to the needs of young people, Don Bosco expanded his commitment by establishing Salesian schools. He understood that a school is an indispensable tool for education, a meeting place of culture and faith. We consider the school as a privileged cultural mediation of education and instruction; a determining institution in the formation of the personality because it conveys a concept of the world, of man and of history (see *La Scuola Cattolica*, No. 8). In the Congregation, the school environment has evolved a lot in response to the actual needs of young people themselves, of society and of the Church. It has become a movement of highly qualified educators.

There are also pre-vocational training centres with a specific formulation and implementation of diversified proposals: orientation, formation, ongoing education, requalification, social and work-related reintegration, promotion of social enterprise. They contribute to the personal success of each individual and address a wide range of needs: basic education and school-leaving exams; young people and adults looking for jobs; young people in situations of hardship, or out of school; migrants or apprentices. These programmes provide highly individualized paths for re-entering the school and vocational training system or to be initiated into the labour market. In fact, pre-vocational training includes a series of programmes to raise awareness of the current labour market and prepare them for a number of professions.

"Don Bosco Tech", India
Towards two million skilled young workers

What we see in the rapidly growing Indian economy is a true paradox. While India's population is growing and fresh avenues of employment are rapidly increasing, there are not enough young people with the skills required to take these jobs. Unemployment continues to grow inexorably. The result is the perpetuation of poverty in the midst of so many opportunities!

Don Bosco Tech, also known as DB Tech, addresses this endemic problem with a market-based approach that is sensitive to the socio-economic needs of marginalized young people aged between 18 and 35. Don Bosco Tech has created a network of vocational training centres throughout India that attempts to fill the needs of those without access to opportunities and are increasingly marginalized by the demands of the new economy.

Don Bosco Tech is an example of social action that synchronizes various stakeholders and aims to integrate and guarantee economic security to young people who are, or could become, victims of poverty. Don Bosco Tech gives young people the skills needed to enter the competitive labour market. It does so in an atmosphere that responds also to the emotional needs for the development of the individual.

Don Bosco Tech
Skilling India

Don Bosco Tech is a network of more than 420 vocational training centres, some Salesian and many non-Salesian. This system of networking began in 2006 as an immediate response to the needs of the young worker. The network's motto is, "Skilling India", that is, to prepare young Indians to become professionals. Besides providing valuable and employment-related training to fresh candidates, DB Tech also updates the skills of those already employed. It aims to provide jobs for 2 million youngsters by 2022.

Short-term professional courses led by the market are offered to young people, who are economically and socially deprived. Over a decade, Don Bosco Tech has trained 264,986 young people, of whom circa 70% have found work with recognized organizations throughout India.

Many are school-age students and economically weak youths from villages and cities.

Unlike conventional, non-flexible training courses that do not respect the ever-changing labour market, Don Bosco Tech goes beyond the rigid learning based on the curriculum. It adopts, instead, flexible and market-oriented learning modules, managed by qualified instructors. Teachers encourage their students to develop their intrinsic skills, identify and articulate their strengths and weaknesses, and develop solutions to solve those weaknesses in a self-managed fashion. Through a personalized and personal dialogue with students, teachers guide them to learn from their life experiences and to take responsibility for their own progress as well as for the welfare of their families and communities.

Current Formal and Informal Salesian Centres of Vocational Training in India and Sri Lanka

Province	Formal Institutions		Non-Formal Institutions		Total Number of Students
	Polytechnics	Secondary Schools	Vocational Training Centres	Others	
INB	1	2	7		1900
INC		4	5	2	1500
IND			7	6	1300
ING	1		7	3	2200
INH		2	8		1200
INK		6	12		2800
INM	3	6	10		3400
INN		3	9		1750
INP	1	1	2		1400
INS		1	8	2	1500
INT	2	3	7		2150
LKC	1		5		1100
Total	9	28	87	13	22.200*

* The rest of the centres where Don Bosco Tech runs its courses are inistitutions run by other religious, dioceses and NGO's.

Variety of Vocational Training Centres in East Asia

Fr. Václav Klement, SDB
General Councillor for East Asia-Oceania Region

Below is a list of the **Salesian VT** institutions in East Asia and Oceania:

Oceania

- Samoa – 2 (Don Bosco Technical Schools: Apia, Saleleloga)
- Salomon Islands – 2 (Honiara DB Technical School, Tetere DB Rural Training Centre)
- Papua New Guinea – 5 (Port Moresby – Gabutu, Port Moresby – DBTI College, Kumgi – DB Technical College, Vunabosco, Araimiri)

Asia East

- Macao – 1 (*Vocational Training Centre - VTC*)
- Hong Kong – 1 (Aberdeen *Technical School*)
- Taiwan – 1 (Tainan Salesian *Technical School*)
- Korea – 1 (Seoul – DBYC: *VTC*)
- Japan – 1 (*Salesio Polytechnic* – Tokyo, Machida)
- Vietnam – 4 (Phuoc Loc, Tanh Ha, Ky Anh, My Thuan) *VTC*
- Thailand – 3 (Bangkok *Don Bosco Technological College*, Bangkok – Pakkred: *VTC* for the Blind, Banpong *Don Bosco Technical School*)
- Myanmar – 3 (Myitkyina, Mandalay, Hlang Thar Yar) *VTC*
- Laos – 1 (Vientiane) *VTC*
- Cambodia – 5 (Phnom Penh, Sihanoukville, Poipet, Kep, Battambang) *VTC*
- Philippines – 18 (Manila – Tondo, Manila – Makati, Manila – Mandaluyong, Canlubang, Calauan, San José Nueva Ecija, Legazpi, Naga, Pampanga, Mindanao – Mati, Buda; Victorias, Dumangas, Cebu – DBTS, Cebu – Boys Home, Cebu – Pasil, Cebu – CICL: *prison VTC*, Borongan)
- East Timor – 4 (Fatumaca, Maliana, Fuiloro, Dili-Comoro) *Technical school*, *VTC*
- Indonesia – 2 (*Blitar Technical school*, Jakarta - Tigaraksa VTC)
- Malaysia – Kuching (*St. Joseph Technical College* * *VTC*: started 2017)

We must also mention other educational institutions managed by the groups of the Salesian Family:

- Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA): Thailand – VTC for the Blind; Cambodia – VTC for girls, Myanmar – VTC for girls; Philippines – VTC for girls and women; Laos – VTC for girls.
- Sisters for Charity of Jesus: *Secondary Technical School* – Port Moresby, Kimbe – recently opened.

"Don Bosco", both as a religious congregation with its educational institutions, and as a person, is known, recognized and appreciated in all 23 countries of our East Asia-Oceania region, especially for its technical education at the secondary school level and at the level of tertiary education - Colleges, or through Vocational Training Centres (VTC) of various levels and disciplines.

Salesian Vocational Training can become an instrument – **a vehicle for Initial Proclamation of Jesus Christ** – in the environments of East Asia-Oceania:

- Being a meeting place in everyday life, where education easily becomes testimony of Jesus and reaches the hearts of young people.
- Especially in multi-religious and multicultural environments, professional training becomes a bridge between simple people and the Catholic Church. In fact, in our VTC we find the young poor of all religions (or without any specific affiliation) who are looking to improve their lives.
- It is an ideal platform to reach or be present among young people of other faiths or religions.
- Don Bosco is called by many to offer this preparation for life to young migrants, the poor or the marginalized. Vocational training is obviously accompanied by human formation and many possibilities for formation in the faith.

From the time of Don Bosco and his first missionaries, technical education has been a privileged space for the **Salesian coadjutor brother** who is closest to the poor youth in the workshop and in the classroom, much as an elder brother or a father who starts young people off not only in their professional lives, but also in the life of a family, a supportive society. The humble, meaningful and effective presence of a Salesian brother among young people is an eloquent sign of the presence of Jesus Christ in the workplace or in preparation for work.

As a matter of fact, in almost all technical schools or vocational training centres we see that the majority of teachers, technicians, instructors and educators are our own former students; specially those who lived in our schools or attended VTCs that offer room and board. The education we offer is enriched by simple daily prayers, the "good morning" and "good night" talks, the songs, devotions or prayer groups, retreats for non-Christians. This type of become a seed that bears its fruit not immediately, perhaps, but after many years. The experience of our VTCs invites us to devote more time to the formation of our past pupils from the very first day of their arrival at our centres. These former pupils are, indeed, the most devoted to Don Bosco, because they owe everything in their life to him.

Laos, a Recent Presence

Don Bosco Missions

FROM THE VIDEO: Whispering the Gospel in the Vocational Training Centres of Laos

In a country of Buddhist tradition, politically Communist, vocational training has opened a door for the presence of Don Bosco in favour of young people. In 2008, the *"Don Bosco Youth Vocational Training Centre"* opened in the People's Democratic Republic of Laos, in the city of Vientiane.

Laos is a country seeing great economic growth. Tourism and industry are currently fast developing. The country has a population of about 7 million, of whom 700,000 live in its capital. Vientiane is prosperous, while poverty prevails in the agricultural provinces. NGO's contribute to the country's development.

The Don Bosco Centre is a technical school, with facilities for food and board, to prepare young people to start work. No school fees are requested, but students residing with us are asked to contribute with about 150 kg of rice per year. We offer 4 courses: electricity and auto-mechanics are 1-year

courses; motorbike repair and welding are 6-month courses.

The Laos government authorities thank Don Bosco Centre for the training already given to more than one thousand students, with 75% of its graduates finding work, resulting in a greatly improved quality of life.

This institution falls within the Salesian province of Thailand. The work began in a very humble form in 2004, thanks to several former students from Laos who had studied in the Salesian vocational training centre at Bangkok (Thailand). They became the first teachers in our institute.

The Youth Development Department, part of the *Laos Revolutionary Youth Union*, has shown interest in the work of the Salesians in support of poor young people. In 2010, a first official contract was signed (MOU), followed by a second contract within the same year, to meet the great need for vocational training centres.

In the Don Bosco Centre, students not only learn a trade. They also learn, on a daily basis, how to behave, how to be good, how to overcome vice and undesirable habits.

Laos is a predominantly Buddhist country. There still are many restrictions on the practice and public teaching of the Christian religion; but, the presence of the Salesian centre is accepted by the Government because they acknowledge that the educational method of Don Bosco is effective and, therefore, convincing.

Naturally, Salesians remain missionaries as always and everywhere; but, they cannot carry out strictly religious activities outside the centre. In addition to their personal witness of their daily life, Salesians bring to the students human and moral values. No one objects to values like diligent work, serious study, discipline, sacrifice, excellence and quality in the workshops, honesty in social life, and more. This is the gateway provided by Don Bosco's Educational System; it is true pre-evangelization or Initial Proclamation.

The hope is that Salesian vocational training can be extended, over the years, to other parts of the country. The door is open, and the hope is to create more favourable conditions for an Initial Proclamation, which will touch the hearts of the youth of Laos more deeply, when the Lord allows it. ■

Three Salesians Missionaries in Shirt Sleeves in Vocational Training

The Salesian Brother was one of the many great strokes of genius that the Holy Spirit inspired Don Bosco with. Salesian Brothers contribute the value of their religious laicity, making them specifically witnesses to the Kingdom of God in the world, close to the young and to the reality of work (cf. *Constitutions* 45). They are the consecrated to whom Don Bosco referred as those "in shirt sleeves". They are professionally qualified and they carry out with competence the vocational formation of youth in many different contexts. Here are three examples, the testimony of three Salesian missionary brothers in Asia.

Interview with Bro. **Roberto Panetto:** The wonderful story of the *Don Bosco Hotel School*

Adapted from the Bollettino Salesiano - January 2016, Italy

From the interview with **O. Pori Meconi**

***Don Bosco Hotel School*: isn't it a strange name for a Salesian centre?**

Well, it starts with "Don Bosco" and ends with "School"! It wants to reflect the many ways Don Bosco himself would have used in our day to attract young people, make them feel welcomed as into a family, educate them by enriching them with the precious gift of love, prepare them to enter society with a good job that will allow them to help their families to rise from poverty, become "honest" Cambodians and lead the country towards a more promising horizon. I would think Don Bosco would have called it "Salesian Hotel School."

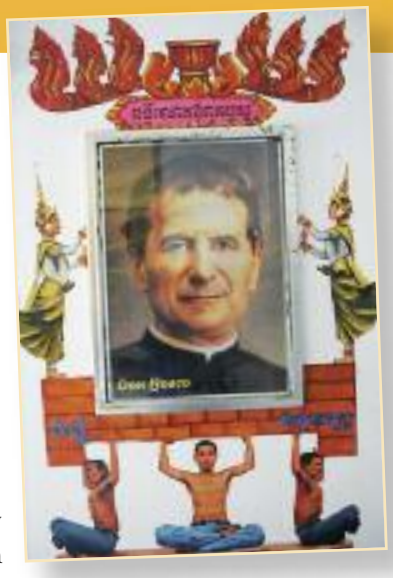
How is it structured?

The Don Bosco Hotel School is like an extension of the Don Bosco Technical School in Sihanoukville. The hotel school can accommodate 200 young people – at the moment we have 196 – in the departments of Reception, Room service, Dining Room Service and Kitchen. The students, boys and girls, come from villages scattered throughout the country, mostly from the provinces of southern Cambodia.

Some boys (32) live in the hostel inside our structure, while the girls (54) are in three youth houses: two are located opposite the main entrance of the school and one is in the city centre, near the Don Bosco guesthouse.

The neighbours often linger on their balconies to watch the movement of the students. They are intrigued. Some ask to visit the school premises, as well as to participate in the morning "Assembly" that marks the beginning

of the day. We recite a universal prayer followed by the "Good morning" talk – a good educational thought-for-the-day offered in turn by Salesians or school staff, sometimes even by guests eager to communicate their life experiences to our young people.



A part of the structure is the Ristorante Gelato Italiano, an ice cream parlour-restaurant located in a square in the city centre, 3 km from the Don Bosco Hotel School. The restaurant, in partnership with the San Pè di Poirino Agri-Gelateria, offers high-quality ice cream as well as pizza, pasta, espresso coffee, cappuccino, and other Italian and Asian dishes.

Many customers come to know Don Bosco simply by eating a good ice cream followed by many questions about the origin and activity of Don Bosco in Cambodia. The ice cream is appreciated and requested by other hotels and restaurants in Sihanoukville and much applauded by the many children and young people who receive it for free during some school festivals. At the celebration of the bicentenary of Don Bosco we distributed over seven thousand ice creams.

How did you get the idea?

A Dutch benefactor declared he wanted to make a big donation for the hotel school. We tried in vain to convince him to help another sector, already existing, but he exclaimed: "If it does not exist, why don't you feel up to starting it?"

Why not?

It was an excellent opportunity to help many young people with a good job and they could avoid migrating. And, Don Bosco too worked as a waiter to meet his own needs as a student! And so, the idea became a magnificent reality.

Since when have you been in Cambodia?

On May 24, 1991, Fr. Valter Brigolin and I arrived in Cambodia. 2016 marked our 25th year.

What were your previous experiences?

After the novitiate in Monte Oliveto, Pinerolo, I studied in Turin, at the Opera Salesiana Rebaudengo from 1969 to 1972. Here my missionary vocation matured as a result of a "good night" talk when a missionary wrote that what he needed was a Salesian mechanic, more than other material help. When I asked the superior to let me leave for the mission in Thailand, the answer was: "Calm down... we'll talk about it in three years".

I then went to S. Benigno Canavese as a technical teacher at the professional institute and a trainer in gymnastics for the middle school, until November 1975. Since I had not 'calmed down' even by then, I was allowed to leave for Thailand where I spent 14 beautiful years in the Don Bosco technical school in Bangkok.

In 1989 the Jesuits asked the Salesians to implement short practical courses for young Cambodians in the refugee camps. The aim was to equip the largest possible number of Cambodians with a trade, so they could return to Cambodia capable of rebuilding their society destroyed by the long years of the Pol Pot genocide, 1975-79, and the war that was still going on among the Vietnamese, Khmer Rouge and government forces. The Provincial of Thailand accepted the invitation when, at a visit to the refugee camps, he was impressed by the sea of children and young people: over 60% of the 350,000 refugees were young people under the age of 20, huddled in bamboo huts fenced in by barbed wire under military surveillance, but exposed to various dangers and abuses.

The Salesians built six technical schools for

over 1,200 students. Over 3,000 young people were prepared to work as mechanics, welders, electricians, auto-mechanics, auto body repair workers and printers. Don Bosco conquered the hearts of the young people in the refugee camps!

They said: "Why does Don Bosco not come with us to Cambodia. We are without parents and Don Bosco is now a Father for us! He must come with us!" A touching request; Don Bosco would not have said, 'No'. A visit to the authorities in Phnom Penh ended with an agreement to build a professional school in the capital. So, the Salesians obeyed the order of the young Cambodians who asked that their Father be next to them, finally, in Cambodia.

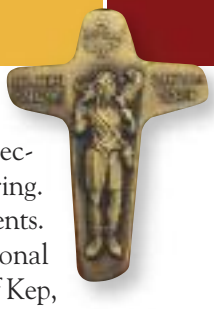
What is the Salesian presence in Cambodia?

The Salesians, known as the Don Bosco Foundation in Cambodia, mainly work in vocational schools and in preparation for work. The first school was started in a government orphanage. The first Salesian school was the Don Bosco technical school in Phnom Penh. On its 12-hectare site, various buildings were put up to welcome over 600 young people, boys and girls, in the fields of Mechanical Engineering, Welding, Auto Mechanics, Electro-mechanics, Electronics, Graphic Arts and Information Technology.

The school also produces technical books in Cambodian, much appreciated and requested by other governmental technical schools and other organizations.

The second school in Sihanoukville has 566 young people studying Mechanics, Welding, Auto Mechanics, Electro-mechanics, Company Secretarial Service and Social Communication. And there is the *Don Bosco Hotel School*. A third presence is in the city of Battambang where there are two schools for children from the brick factories and from the poor families in the villages. There are over 800 children. An agricultural school is taking shape and will open soon.

The children who work along the Thai-Cambodia border also have a Don Bosco's home, which welcomes them to Poipet. Besides elementary and middle school, they have the opportunity to learn a trade like electro-mechanics, welding and car repairing. There are about 350 children and students.



The mot recently started professional school is located in the seaside town of Kep, 150 km south of Phnom Penh. There, 300 young people take courses in Social Communication, Company Secretarial service, Hotel Management, and Information Technology.

What do people think of the Salesians?

The Salesians, being sons of Don Bosco, have a heritage. Don Bosco has conquered the hearts of the Cambodians, because he loves, unconditionally and without any discrimination, the poor youth of any religion. He respects the authorities, does not enter politics, educates the young people and accompanies them up to their integration into society with a dignified job. All this makes the Salesians welcome by the population as well as by the authorities.

How do you see the future of the Congregation in Cambodia?

The Salesian presence in Cambodia finds itself operating in a situation very similar in some respects to what Don Bosco found on the streets of Turin and in prisons – child labourers who were exploited and abused. The traffic of children across the border; children exposed to sex tourism and paedophiles on the beaches of Sihanoukville or on the Phnom Penh river; the little ones sold by simple and unaware families to people who promise them a dream future ...

All these realities challenge us Salesians to intervene quickly to prevent and put an end to such horrors. Many families live in extreme poverty. Statistics show that the population in rural areas feeds on less than one dollar a day. Education, especially in preparation for a job, is the best weapon to defeat ignorance and poverty. In Cambodia, we are currently 16 Salesians, two of whom are Cambodians. We can be bold because at least we ourselves will not be unemployed here for years to come! ■

Andrew Tran: Starting out a Buddhist, I became a Christian, a Salesian and a Missionary!

From Cagliero 11 - August 2012

Bro. Andrea Tran Le Phuong is a Vietnamese missionary in Mongolia working in the Ulaanbaatar vocational training centre.

Our family was Buddhist, but some of my sister's friends were Catholics; so, she participated in some church activities with them. One day, my sister expressed a desire to become a Catholic. My father then told the whole family that, before his death, his grandfather had told him that our ancestors were said to have been Catholics and had asked my father to look for our Catholic relatives. My father gave permission to my sister and, surprisingly, added: "I want all our family to become Catholic according to the wish of my grandfather."

The church nearest our house was run by Salesians and my sister met Fr. Fabian Hao. She shared our story with him and my father's wish. He offered to help. A couple of months later, Fr. Hao told my father that he had gone to his grandfather's birthplace and had found our Catholic relatives. One had even become a priest. With this news, my father decided that our whole family was to convert to Catholicism. Our entire family supported his decision, except for me. Everyone began to study catechism, but without me. I resisted but, under the influence of Fr. Hao, in the end, I also decided to study catechism with my family. On December 22, 1992, Fr. Hao baptized our entire family.

A month later, it was discovered that my father had cancer. A few months later he passed away. His death was a hard blow to me; but, I was very impressed by Fr. Hao's support to my father during his illness, and to our family after his death. Finally, I asked my sister to accompany me to Fr. Hao. I told him that I did not know what consecrated life was, but that I just wanted to be like him. So, I became an aspirant while continuing to work to support my family. After reading the biographies of Don Bosco, blessed Artemide Zatti and Simon Srugi, I was more than ever convinced that I ought to become a Salesian coadjutor.

One day, while I was cleaning out an old bookshelf in the pre-novitiate, I saw a book about the missionaries in Vietnam. It narrated their suffering and eventual martyrdom for the love of Christ. This became the seed of my missionary vocation. I shared my desire to be a missionary *ad gentes* with my novice master and the Rector in the post novitiate. In 2000, I made my request officially and I was sent to Papua New Guinea to study at the Don Bosco Technological Institute in preparation for my mission in Mongolia.

When the confreres ask me why I wanted to be a missionary abroad, while we had a lot of people in Vietnam who did not know Christ yet, I simply answer: "We have received so much from missionaries even at the cost of their lives. I feel we have the duty to share our faith in Christ anywhere in the world." I am sure that God will bless us abundantly for our generosity, and He will send more people to take my place in the Province.

Since 2004, I have been working happily in Mongolia as a Salesian coadjutor missionary. I thank the witness of life of the Salesians that made the obstinacy of my Buddhist heart malleable and brought me to Christ and to discover my Salesian vocation. Above all, I thank God for the wonderful things he has done for me! ■

Luigi Parolin: Two Calloused Hands to Change the World

Dal Bollettino Salesiano - Dicembre 2016

The marvelous and laborious adventure of a Salesian coadjutor and of the *Don Bosco Agro-Mechanical Technology Centre* of Legazpi City, in the Philippines.

I am a Salesian coadjutor. My name is Luigi Parolin and I was born in the province of Vicenza (Italy) in 1940. I come from a family of farmers. As a boy I went to the Salesian Agricutural School in Cumiana (Turin) and, later, to the "Rebaudengo" Salesian Professional School in Turin. There I had the opportunity to meet many Salesian missionaries who were returning to Turin. Listening to their experiences, I understood the great poverty of people, especially the young. I was struck by all this and at the age of seventeen I chose to become a Salesian. After three years of training, in 1960, I left for the Philippines. I was twenty and till today I am happy with my decision.

All of my life I have worked only in Salesian professional schools.

I attended a course in California, the United States, for a higher specialization. In 1968, I returned to the Philippines to organize and direct the vocational training section in two different centres of Manila, which served the young people from poor families. At the end of the 1990s, my superiors, at the request of the Bishop of Legazpi, commissioned me to establish a professional centre in the hills of that city located about 500 km southeast of Manila.

To understand this choice, we must keep in mind that the Philippines has a population of about 100 million with an increase of about one and a half million a year. Most

people are employed in agriculture. A good part of the land is hilly and are coconut plantations. The income of farmers is from the sale of the coconuts. Farmers do not over-exploit the land and the proceeds from the sale of nuts are not enough for everyone. The number of plants is decreasing due to the diseases that affect them and typhoons that hit the island. The population keeps growing with the result that economic conditions are worsening. Only a few farmers plant a little corn, tapioca and sweet potatoes. Animal rearing is for family use only. Agricultural work in the hills has real difficulties.

Other agricultural products are rice, abaca (fibre for the production of fabrics and various objects), pili nuts and pineapples. Fishing is also widespread. Legazpi is located in the Bicol region (Luzon island) with a population of about 5.7 million. 60% of the land is mountainous and hilly land. Bicol is one of the poorest regions of the Philippines. The climate is hot and humid, and rain is abundant. The local bishop offered us the use of about 13 hectares of land in the hills, planted with coconuts, but only half of it is currently usable.

Analysing the socio-economic conditions of the local people, we identified some of the problems to be confronted: the lack of agricultural planning for the hilly terrain (what and how to plant); the lack of basic equipment, which was presently rudimentary and archaic; the lack of initial capital; the lack of managerial and marketing capacity.

After the initial analysis of the problems and an assessment of the environmental and cultural situation, it was decided that this was the ideal place for Don Bosco to be. And on September 11, 2000, the foundation stone was laid. With the economic assistance of the Episcopal Conferences of Italy and Germany, we put up buildings and procured equipment. On 28 June 2001 the "Don Bosco Agri-Mechanical Technology Centre of Legazpi City" was officially inaugurated.

Activities of the vocational training centre

Following the example of Don Bosco, who made education his weapon against poverty, we organized an agri-professional centre to teach a trade to the children of farmers and non-farmers, and then to lay the foundations for their social redemption while not neglecting their human and Christian formation.

1,579 young people completed their studies by October 2014 and over 85% of them had found employment within a few months.

The training on offer consists of three professional courses: agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry; agricultural mechanics, mechanical carpentry along with electric welding, petrol and diesel engines with one cylinder and motorcycles, study of equipment and agricultural machinery; electrical systems and maintenance of air conditioners.

Courses at the Centre last one year followed by five months of apprenticeships and internships in various companies. The re-

sults produced by the Centre are more than satisfactory and make a positive impact. At the personal level, the youngsters found gainful employment; at the family level, there was an improvement of their economic conditions; and at the community level there was the active involvement of educated, self-confident young people.

Developing agriculture

The second goal we set ourselves was to assist farmers in improving and enhancing land use in spite of its hilly characteristics. We needed to work in this direction.

Among the different agricultural products we grow today are corn, cassava, vegetables and fruits.

For some years now we have also cultivated soya as an important element in the production of animal feed. Instead of importing this widely used product, we want to grow it locally and lower its cost. At the same time, it will create more jobs and opportunities for farmers. All this requires still more research, equipment, technology and capital, but it will benefit many farmers.

The focus on production has never been at the sacrifice of attention to the land. The use of the earth must not end in disrespect of the environment. For years we have been practicing organic farming. In addition to being cheaper, it improves soil conditions and betters the quality of the products themselves. All our fertilizers are natural, mainly produced in our own centre. We do not use pesticides and herbicides.

We raise a thousand hens and more than a hundred pigs. To reduce the cost of animal feed, the Centre uses a mill for grinding corn.

In addition to training in agricultural technology, we feel the duty and urgency to introduce simple mechanical equipment for tilling the earth: we build some of these tools ourselves; we buy some others and adapt them to the features of the land or the work to be performed. There is very little mechanized equipment in the Philippines, so we have to use our creativity.

The processing of products

Don Bosco started to grow soya beans experimentally in 2008. We had good results. However, production had to be limited because soya needs processing. We were not able to do it due to our lack of suitable equipment. The Minister of Agriculture, who believed in our project, provided the capital to buy a soya processing machine. We now assist farmers in the cultivation of this product that is in great demand in the local market.

Don Bosco has shown that soya grows well in this region and that it can be produced in other regions, too. With this initiative, we have provided a new opportunity for farmers.

The cooperative

Don Bosco organized the "Don Bosco Agricultural Multi-purpose Cooperative" of Legazpi with the aim of uniting the farmers and assisting them in cultivating the land. It helps them with initial capital loans and instructs them on the application of appropriate techniques, marketing, etc. Processed soya is a much appreciated product for the farms and for the companies that produce animal feed. It is up to the cooperative to place this, and other products, on the market.

Everyone at Don Bosco, and we Salesians in particular, are happy to accompany the farmers and young people in their formation in the wholistic sense: the improvement of their social and economic status through technical education, side by side with their human and Christian growth. ■

Ecclesia in Asia

We present here a small part of this rich document on evangelization in Asia.

No. 23. Christian Life as Proclamation

The more the Christian community is founded on the experience of God that emanates from a faith that is lived and experienced, the more it will be able to proclaim to others in a credible way the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ. This flows from a faithful listening to the Word of God, from prayer and contemplation, from the celebration of the mystery of Jesus in the sacraments, first of all in the Eucharist, and from the example of true communion of life and integrity of love. The focus of the Church must be placed on the contemplation of Jesus Christ, God made man: the Church must constantly strive for a more intimate union with Him, of which the mission is a continuation. The mission is contemplative action and active contemplation. Therefore, a missionary who does not have a profound experience of God in prayer and contemplation will have little spiritual influence or success in the ministry [...]

A truly religious person is very easily respected and followed in Asia. Prayer, fasting and various forms of asceticism are held in high regard. Renunciation, detachment, humility, simplicity and silence are considered of great worth by followers of every religion. So that prayer is not separated from human promotion, the Synod Fathers have emphasized that "the work of justice, and spirituality itself, will be the source of every work of evangelization." Fully convinced of the importance of authentic witnessing in the evangelization of Asia, the Synod Fathers said, "The Good News of Jesus Christ can be announced only by those who are captivated and inspired by the love of the Father for his children, made manifest in the person of Jesus Christ. This proclamation is a mission that needs holy men and women who will make the Saviour known and loved through their own lives. A fire cannot

be ignited except by something that is itself inflamed. Thus, a successful proclamation of the Good News of Salvation in Asia can only be achieved if Bishops, priests, religious and laity are themselves burning with love for Christ and burning with zeal to make it known more widely, to make it loved more intensely and be followed more closely." Christians who speak of Christ must embody the message they proclaim in their own lives.

In this regard, however, a particular circumstance in the Asian context requires attention. The Church knows that the silent witness of life remains the only way to proclaim the Kingdom of God in many places in Asia, where explicit proclamation is forbidden and religious freedom is denied or systematically restricted or reduced. The Church experiences this kind of witnessing in a conscious way, considering it "a taking up of one's own cross" (Lk 9:23), even if it does not tire of calling on governments and encouraging them to recognize religious freedom as a fundamental human right. [...]

Clearly, therefore, the proclamation of Jesus Christ in Asia presents many complex aspects of both content and method. The Synod Fathers were acutely aware of a legitimate variety of approaches to the proclamation of Jesus, provided, however, that the faith is respected in its integrity in the process of assimilation and sharing of the same. The Synod stressed that "evangelization is today a rich and dynamic reality, with various aspects, such as witnessing, dialogue, proclamation, catechesis, conversion, baptism, insertion into the ecclesial community, the implantation of the Church, inculturation and integral development of man. Some of these elements proceed simultaneously, while others are stages or successive phases of the whole process of evangelization."

In all the evangelizing work, however, the complete truth of Jesus Christ needs to be proclaimed. To underline some aspects of the inexhaustible mystery of Jesus is legitimate and necessary in gradually proposing Christ to a person, but no compromise can be allowed in the integrity of the faith.

Ultimately, a person's acceptance of the faith must be based on a certain understanding of the person of Jesus Christ, the Lord of all, who "is the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb 13: 8), as has been taught by the Church in every time and place. ■

Saints who pioneered Vocational Training

Saint Kuriakose Elias Chavara

Kuriakose (Cyriac) Elias Chavara was born on 10 February 1805 into the family of Iko (Kuriakose) Chavara and Mariam Thoppil, at Kainakary, in the State of Kerala in India. *Kuriakose* is derived from the Syriac Aramaic name *Quriaqos* because the family belonged to the Syro-Malabar rite of the Catholic Church. This Church claims its descent from the seven communities founded by the apostle Thomas, whose tomb is to be found at Chennai on the East coast of India.

Kuriakose was born ten years before Johny Bosco; but, interestingly, and in contrast to Johny Bosco, he had no difficulties starting his education at a tender age at the primary school in his village. At the age of 13 he entered the seminary and was ordained a priest on 29 November 1829, before his 25th birthday.

Two years later, in 1831, his Rector at the seminary, Fr. Palackal Thoma Malpan, Fr. Porukara Thoma Kathanar and Fr. Kuriakose himself, started living together in a monastic community. These two died a decade later, one in 1941 and the other in 1846. That did not make Kuriakose drop their original plans to start a Congregation. On 8 December 1855, Kuriakose and ten others made their vows in the Carmelite tradition.

They were two continents apart; but, there are many similarities between Don Bosco and Kuriakose Chavara. Chavara understood the transforming value of education, and he used his position as the Vicar General of his diocese to order every parish to start a school. He did not have to deal with illiterate youngsters migrating from villages to cities in search of employment. However, he saw that only the children of the powerful had access to education. The low castes were even expressly forbidden to learn Sanskrit. Kuriakose insisted that everyone be given admission to the parish schools. He attracted the children of the poor and the low castes to school by providing a free midday meal to all students. It would be only a century and a half later that the government of India would do the same.

Both Don Bosco and Kuriakose were prolific writers. Both realized the power of the printed word. Both owned a printing press – Kuriakose going on to start the oldest existing Malayalam newspaper, the *Nasrani Deepika*.

Kuriakose and Don Bosco chose the education of the young as the primary service offered by their congregations. Both of them realized that not everyone could excel in the academic field. Hence both of them started vocational schools, though the emphasis placed on this by Kuriakose was not as strong as that given to it by Don Bosco. This was, perhaps, because Kerala was not going through an industrial revolution as Piedmont was.

Interestingly, Kuriakose went against the social more of his time and place, offering education to girls and vocational training to young women. He collaborated with Fr. Leopold Beccaro to found a congregation of women, just as Don Bosco collaborated with Don Pescarino and Mary Mazarello to found the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

We arrive at the highway that leads to the hearts of people through the footpath of the education we give their children, including vocational education. ■

Project 2018

A Whisper of Hope amidst Explosions and Gunfire

Giovani in meditazione

Corso di falegnameria

Ragazze del primo anno

Joseph Lian Khat Kim is now 20 years old and earns US $ 200 a month working as a carpenter – a very good income for Myanmar. He was "orphaned" at the age of 3, as his parents got divorced and abandoned him. It is Don Bosco that educated him, gave him a skill and thus empowered him to find employment.

Sut Rein Aung is 21. Abandoned by his father at the age of 2 and abused by his step-father in his teens, he escaped from his home that was no more a home for him. He went to Myitkyina, the capital city of Kachin State in Myanmar. His seniors on the streets introduced him to drugs. He got involved in petty thieving to maintain his habit and to quench his hunger. It took five months of unconditional Salesian love to get him to withdraw from drugs. He learned welding at Don Bosco school. Today he earns US 150 a month, but will continue to stay with us for a while longer to avoid the pull of his former addict friends on the streets.

Don Bosco is making a difference. The Gospel of Mercy, proclaimed by Christ, is whispered to the hearts of these young Kachins while they qualify themselves to earn a decent living. It is transforming their lives. It is bringing them hope.

There are presently 130 other "Lian Khats" and "Rut Aungs" – 90 boys, 40 girls – majority from the Kachin community, others from several other tribes, in Don Bosco, Myitkyina. They are transforming their lives through the love and vocational education they receive.

Kachin State has been reverberating to the sound of gunfire since decades. The civil unrest and massive violence have, as always, brought nothing but despair to the common people, especially the youth. Youngsters have dropped out of school and fled the villages to Myitkyina. They are not much safer in the city. They run the danger of recruitment by armed factions, drug abuse, human trafficking, black-marketing...

Since 2001, Don Bosco has been a rare beacon of hope for these youngsters – boys and girls – through the human, religious and vocational formation we offer them. The courses are tailored to their circumstances, capacities and needs. They learn simple trades that improve their possibilities for employment within their own city. There are courses in carpentry, welding, electricity, motor-mechanics, cell-phone repair for the boys; tailoring, embroidery, sweater making, and stitching for girls; organic farming and rearing of pigs and cows for both girls and boys.

Don Bosco invites every Salesian and every institution to launch a campaign for this mission this year to make this whisper of hope a little stronger. The centre is in great need of financial assistance from abroad for enlarged and updated infrastructure and equipment. Send your cash contributions to the Generalate, specifying that it is for the youngsters of Myitkyina, Myanmar.

Corso antincendio

Corso di meccanica

Corso di cucito

Prayer

Almighty God,
Maker of heaven and earth,
who revealed Yourself to Elijah
neither in the violent wind,
nor in the earthquake,
nor in the fire,
but in the whisper of a gentle breeze,
make us docile to the whispering of the Spirit
to announce the heart of the Gospel
to the heart of the Asian continent.
May the harmonious and joyful sound
of an education that leads to employment
dignify the lives of our young people
and lead them to an encounter with Jesus,
the "Carpenter of Nazareth".
Amen.

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