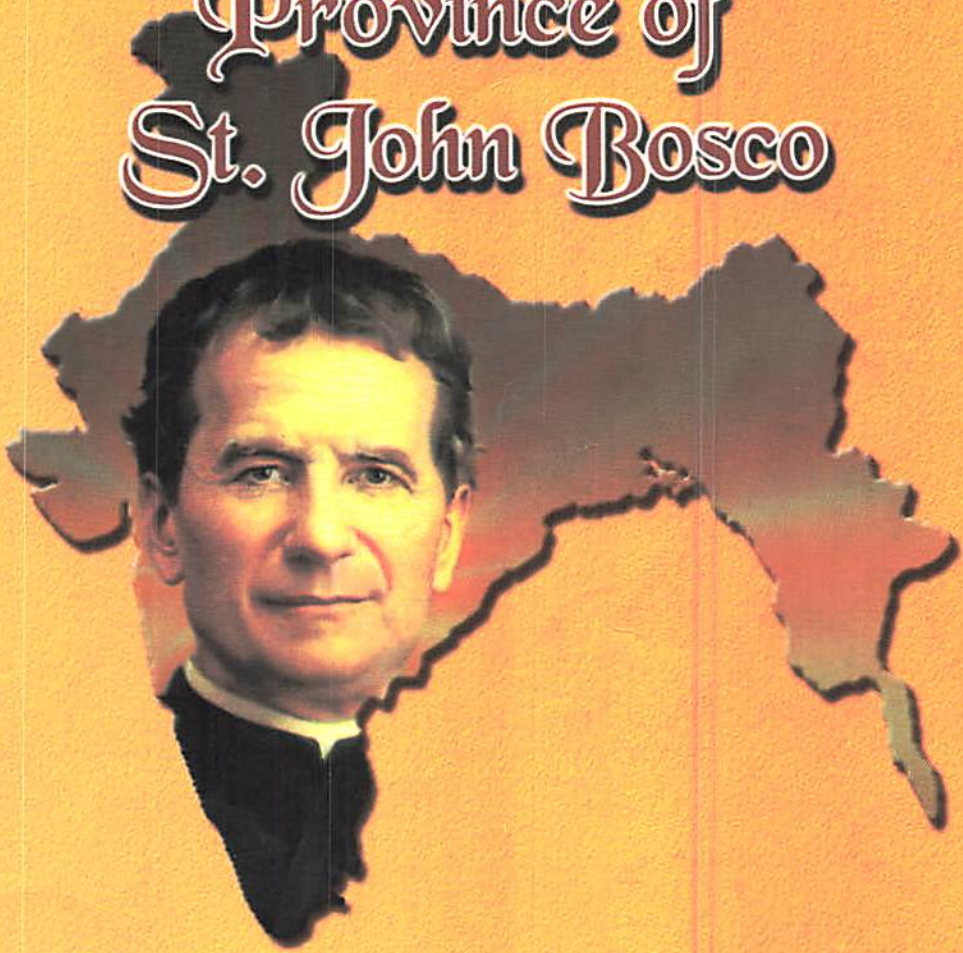
History of The Kolkata Province of St. John Bosco



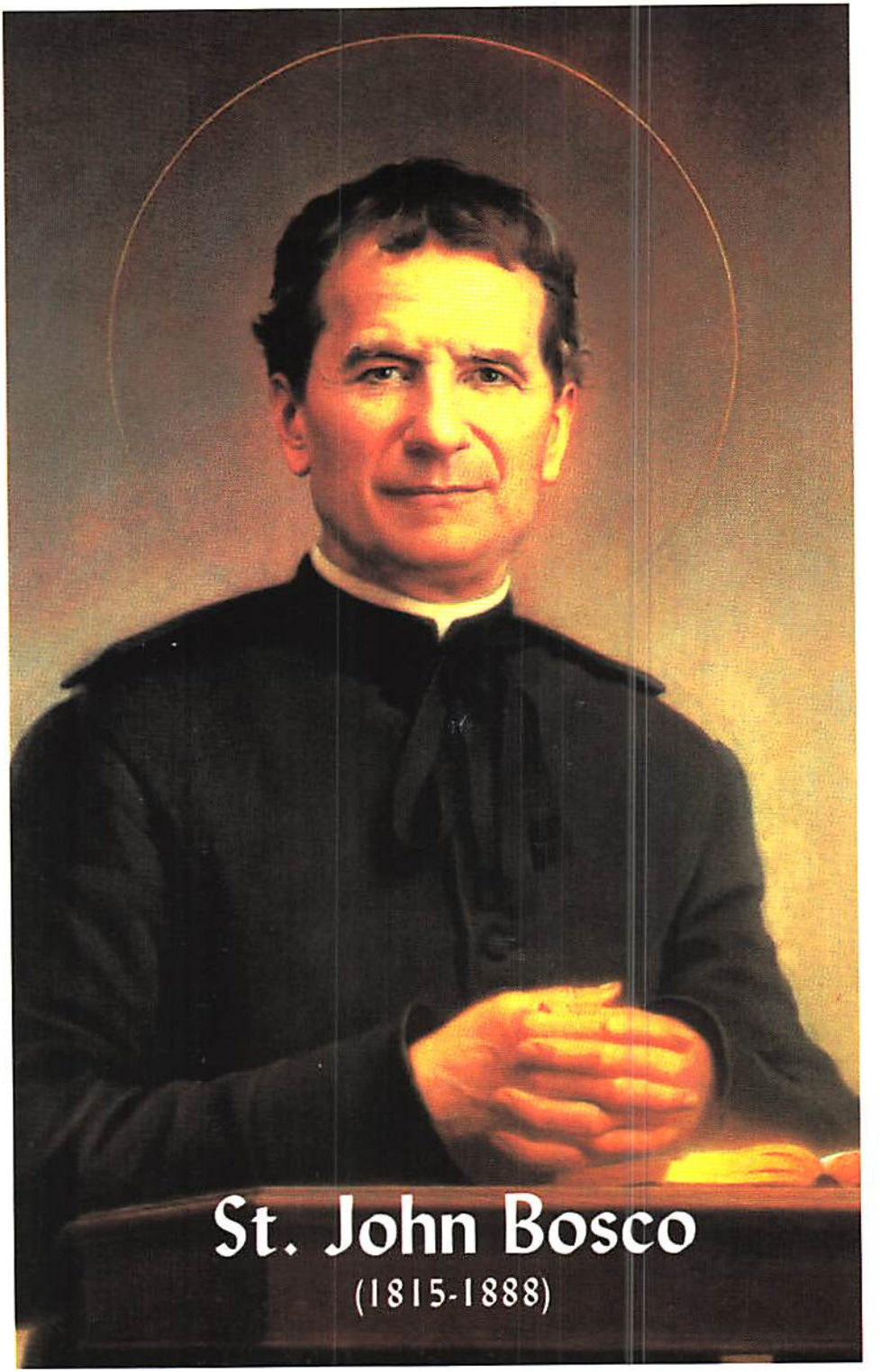
Fr. Nicholas Lo Groi SDB

"The rays emanating in all directions from Don Bosco on the map of India refer to the recommendation of Msgr. Lepicier, the Extraordinary Visitor to India, to Msgr. Mathias in April 1925: "Monsignor, Monsignor, fill India with Don Bosco" (Ch.III, 78). Its partial realization is shown in the last Map, 'Salesian provinces in India in 2001' on page 597."

History
of the
Kolkata Province
of
St. John Bosco

Fr. Nicholas Lo Groi SDB

To V Rev. Fr. Francis Alencherry,
With gratitude & love
Fr. Nicholas Lo Groi, SDB


St. John Bosco
(1815-1888)

Dedicated

To my Confreres

That they may not forget their Roots

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FOREWORD

When I promised Fr. Nicholas Lo Groi that I would write the foreword to the History of the Salesian Province of Kolkata, which I had commissioned him to write, I was quite certain that it would be completed at least within my term as provincial, if not in 2001 when the platinum jubilee of the Province would be celebrated. Not even in my wildest imagination did I then think that I would be writing it as the General Councillor in charge of the Salesian missions. History, however, has taken its own course through a combination of different circumstances, and I now have the pleasant task of presenting this great work not only to the Province of Kolkata, but to the whole Salesian world.

Writing the history of the Province of Calcutta (now Kolkata), the first canonically erected Province in Salesian India, was a Platinum Jubilee project. On 28th May 2001, the Province completed 75 years of its existence as a juridical entity. The occasion was celebrated appropriately with a series of events and programmes. Writing of history can be tedious and arduous and things do not always work out according to planned schedules. Hence, the history of the Province was not ready for publication on the occasion of the jubilee. It took one more year to complete the work and I am delighted to launch it now with these few words.

Although not a professional historian, Fr. Lo Groi was a natural choice for this difficult task. His intellectual and scholarly acumen, meticulous artistry, vast experience and exemplary dedication to an assigned task, more than qualified him for it. And indeed, he has produced a work of very great value.

I would say that this book is a history with a soul, for its author is himself part and parcel of the story that he writes. Since he has spent 63 years of his life in India as a member of the Province of Kolkata, he is not only a historian but also a protagonist, one who lived and witnessed the many events that unfold in this volume and interacted closely with the persons who are the subjects of this history. Much of what is written in this volume could be considered an account of what was seen and heard and experienced. Fr. Lo Groi's own keen memory has been of great help in the critical use of the documents used in writing this volume. Every

page of it is vibrant with his love for the congregation and wonder at the marvellous growth of Salesian work in India and in the Province of Kolkata in particular.

Describing this book as a history with a soul does not in any way detract from its true characteristic as history. More than an evaluative or critical account of events and persons, it is a chronicler's history, which is authentic because the narrative is based on the documents available in the archives of the Province and in the different Salesian institutions. At the same time it is a dynamic history because the events that characterised the growth and expansion of the Province from its inception up to the present day and the persons responsible for them come alive in these pages and invite the reader to relive the heroic days of the past, while critically evaluating the present in which he is immersed.

History is a great teacher. It can instruct us in the way human beings wittingly or unwittingly become agents of God's plan of creation and renewal of human society. Reliving the past and reflecting on it helps to better the present and lay surer foundations for the future. This is precisely the reason why it was considered important to have the history of the Province written on the occasion of its platinum jubilee. I daresay that the painstaking work of Fr. Lo Groi will pay great dividends by instructing generations of Salesians of the present and the future in the ways of the Lord in establishing his Kingdom on earth. Even when more competent historians will have written their version of the history of Salesian India, the present work will continue to retain its charm and influence.

Being a platinum jubilee project, this history is also an act of thanksgiving to the Lord of history for the great things He has done for the Province since the beginning of its existence. All through these long years the Province has been a dynamic reality that has given birth to several other Provinces. When in 1959 the Province of Guwahati was separated from the Province of Kolkata, the mother Province was left with only a few houses and hardly any missions. In the years that followed the division, however, the Province once again grew in strength and in apostolic outreach and was ready for another division in December 1996. That dynamism characterises the Province even today. The reading of these pages will further stimulate and enliven this innate dynamism of the Salesian charism in the day-to-day life of the Province. Through successive divisions the

charism is only further strengthened and its effect felt in many more places through the life and activity of new generations of Salesians. As persons dedicated to the Lord and his Kingdom, we cannot but rejoice at this marvellous march of our history.

Though it is the first Salesian Province in India and has already a history of 75 years, the Province of Kolkata in no way exhausts all the possibilities of the Salesian charism. Much more still remains to be done so that this wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit can blossom in all its splendour within the present boundaries of the Province. The reading and study of this history could help to recapture the spirit of daring, sacrifice and broad vision that characterised the early Salesians. This will foster the spirit of initiative and creativity that is essential for the further realization of Don Bosco's charism in its fullness in the Province of Kolkata.

It is my wish that this book will become a frame of reference for all those who wish to take the Province of Kolkata on the path to further progress and apostolic effectiveness.

Fr. Francis Alencherry SDB
Rome, 31st January 2003

PREFACE

The origin of this *History of the Kolkata Province of St. John Bosco* is not due to a personal choice of mine, for which I did not feel prepared, but due to the request of the then Provincial, Fr. Francis Alencherry, in August 1998. He was thinking at that time of the Platinum Jubilee of the Province in 2001, and a compilation of the history of the Province would have been an important item of the Jubilee. I accepted it saying that I would do my best, but due to many reasons I could not start working on it till my return from Italy in September 1999.

What inspired me all through these four years of labour has been the desire to tell my confreres: **know your roots.** The Latin dictum: *Historia, Magistra Vitae* - "History is the teacher of life," has been echoing in my ears during this long and, at times, tedious work. I was particularly struck by one remark of Fr. Luc Van Looy, the Vicar General, in his inspiring obituary letter of the late Rector Major, Fr. John Vecchi. "Fr. Vecchi, as Rector Major, had a particular attention to the progress of the "Historical Institute" at the Generalate in Rome, because, in his opinion, **"he who neglects history forgets his own roots."**

The following pages will try to present the work of our pioneers, especially the **spirit** that animated them, their zeal, their love for souls, and their total dedication to the mission entrusted to them, which can **inspire** and instill enthusiasm in the younger generation. *Si isti et illi, cur non ego?* - "If these and those, why not I?" (St. Augustine). The *'Dare and Hope'* of Msgr. Louis Mathias, the *'Apostolus Christi'* of Msgr. Stephen Ferrando, the missionary zeal of Fr. Piasecki, Fr. Vendrame, Fr. Farina, Fr. Scuderi, Fr. Pianazzi, Fr. Alessi, Fr. Ravalico, Msgr. Orestes Marengo, Fr. Francis Convertini, Bro. Cid, Bro. Ferraris, Bro. Casagrande, Bro. Mantarro, and many others who have followed in their footsteps, even to the point of giving their life, such as Fr. Felix Matta, can no doubt fire the imagination of our youth today.

1. The Plan

This work consists of an Introduction, twelve Chapters in three Parts, and an Epilogue

The **Introduction** gives the Christian and Salesian setting in which the missionary work starts in Shillong in January 1922.

The **First Part** consists of five chapters and goes from the entrustment by the Holy See of the Assam Mission to the Salesians in July 1921, to the consecration of the first two Salesian bishops, Msgr. L. Mathias and Msgr. S. Ferrando, and the first division of the Province in 1934.

The **Second Part** consists of four chapters dealing with the life and activities in the various centres, the War years, and ends with the second division of the Province at the end of September 1959.

The **Third Part** consists of three chapters dealing with the progress and setbacks, the expansion of our works, and ends with the third division of the Province in December 1996.

In the **Epilogue** I take a look back at the spectacular growth of the Salesian presence in India in the last 80 years, offer a glimpse into the main events of the past six years after the third division of the Province, and give a look ahead to see the way along which we have to proceed for the further growth of the Province and of the Salesian Presence in India.

2. Some Characteristics of the Work

2.1 It is a chronicled account of the growth of the first Indian Province

The chronological approach is more intense in the first two parts and less so in the third part, where each chapter presents the history of 12 years. Within the chapters themselves of the third part the strict chronological approach is not possible.

2.2 The use of the Historical Present

I am using the historical present through out, instead of the traditional historical past. Someone may question this 'novelty' as 'artificial'. I have followed the advice of a dear confrere of mine who suggested it to me and has made me read a big volume of Indian History written in the historical present. The advantage seems to be to render the account more vivid and to make the reader feel involved in the flowing of events.

2.3 Names of some big Cities

Four of our big cities of India have had their names changed in the past years, such as Madras into Chennai, Bombay into Mumbai, Gauhati into Guwahati, Calcutta into Kolkata. So also Burma became Myanmar, and Rangoon, Yangon. I have used the old names in the Introduction, in the whole of Part I and II, and in the first two chapters of Part III. I use the new names in the last chapter of Part III, and in the Epilogue.

3. Sources

My sources are primary sources, such as, letters, the chronicles of the Province and, when needed, the chronicle of some particular house, the minutes of the Provincial Council meetings; and secondary sources, such as books, biographies, brochures on the occasion of silver, golden, and diamond Jubilees, and the 'Salesian News Calcutta' (SNC), started in 1974. I have not made a 'critical' study of the secondary sources, as a professional historian would do. However, I have not followed them blindly. When I saw the need, basing myself on other more reliable sources, I have detached myself from them, such as, for instance, in the account of the Salesians taking possession of the Shrine of *Our Lady of happy Voyage* at Bandel in 1928. To justify the abundant use of Salesian News Calcutta, I refer the reader to the first footnote of chapter XI, in which I present the origin of this News Letter, and the reasons that have induced me to make such a copious use of it. In July 1999 I had the fortune of working for over a month in the General Archives at the Generalate (Pisana, Rome), and of going through all that I could get pertaining to the Kolkata Province from its very beginning. There I could see and take abundant notes and photocopy material that I would have not been able to find in India. The Director of the Archives was indeed very kind and helpful, and I am very grateful to him.

Similarly, I also feel that a 'critical' evaluation of the missionary methods used by our first missionaries, is beyond the pale of my work. I believe that more competent persons, expert in Missiological problems, are already doing or will be doing such work. As I wrote above, my aim is to present as faithfully as I can the gradual, steady, and not always in-dolorous growth of the Province from July 1921 - when the Holy See officially entrusted to and practically imposed the Assam Mission on the Salesians- to December 1996, when the Kolkata Province is divided for the third time, giving rise to the New Delhi Province of *Jesus the Good Shepherd.*

4. A Word of Thanks

My gratitude goes first and foremost to our Blessed Lord, to our Blessed Mother and to Don Bosco, for having given me sufficient health to do the work. I'm grateful to all those who have helped me with their prayers.

I am grateful to Fr. Francis Alencherry, for having entrusted me with this task, onerous, but at the same time very rewarding. Through it I have, so to say, come into personal contact with so many excellent Salesian missionaries who have given their all for the glory of God and the good of the people they were working for, especially the young, the poor, and the sick. I want also to thank Fr. Francis Alencherry for his beautiful Foreword.

I am grateful to the Provincials and the rectors who, faithful to the advice of Don Bosco, have taken special care of the chronicles and of the minutes of Provincial and House Council meetings. I am also grateful to those who have helped me in several ways, with their encouragement and help, especially the two Provincial Secretaries, Fr. Samuel Mondol and Fr. Antony Earathara. The latter has contributed very much with his skill in computer work and by designing the cover page. Fr. Mathew George Kariapuram deserves a special mension for having accepted to edit the whole work and making it more presentable and more readable. He has gone through every line of each page, polished the language, standardized the notes, and has given valuable suggestions towards improving the text itself. Indeed a very generous and self-sacrificing contribution! I thank also several confreres who have read some part or other of my work and have been generous with their encouragement and precious suggestions. I want to thank very sincerely Rev. Sr. Teresa Curran, IBVM, for accepting to read carefully the whole text before it was given to the press and for offering her valuable suggestions to improve the language. Finally a much felt word of thanks goes to Rev. Fr. Kuzhikottayil John, Manager of the Don Bosco Press (Okhla) and his efficient team of helpers for the fine edition of the History of the Kolkata Province.

I will feel rewarded, if the reading of this history of the Province will inspire many young hearts to imitate the zeal and the total dedication of our pioneers, to work tirelessly for the glory of God, for the good of souls, in the footsteps of Don Bosco under the maternal protection of Mary Help of Christians.

Fr. Nicholas Lo Groi SDB
24th May 2003

INTRODUCTION

1. The Catholic Church in Northeast India 2. Don Bosco, the Salesians and India before 1922: 2.1 Don Bosco and India 2.2 Arrival of the Salesians in India in 1906: 2.2.1 Tanjore (1906) 2.2.2 Mylapore (1909)

The Province of Calcutta is officially erected on 28th May 1926, but the Salesians are already in India in 1906, and in Assam in January 1922. In this *Introduction* the reader is offered a brief glimpse into the background picture of the Catholic Church in Northeast India and of the Salesians in India, when Fr. Louis Mathias and his 10 companions reach Shillong on 13th January 1922.

1. The Catholic Church in Northeast India[1]

On 2nd August 1626 three Jesuits, Fr. Cacella and Fr. Cabral from Portugal and Fr. Fontabona from Italy, set out from Hooghly in West Bengal for Tibet. On 26th September only Fr. Cacella and Fr. Cabral reach Hajo near Gauhati, the seat of the Mughal Governor. At Pandu they meet the Raja of Busna. He introduces them to the Raja of Cooch Behar at Hajo itself, who in turn advises them to meet his son at Cooch Behar, in case they need help on the way. They reach Cooch Behar on 21st October 1627 and leave for Paro in Bhutan. There they meet the Raja who welcomes them. They obtain permission to build a Chapel and to preach the Gospel. But as their apostolate bears no fruit, they hit the road again. Eventually they reach Lhasa and return to Bandel via Kathmandu and Patna.[2]

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[1] This brief historical survey is mainly based on: G. Kottuppallil, "A Historical Survey of the Catholic Church in Northeast India from 1627 to 1959," in *The Catholic Church in Northeast 1890-1990,* ed. Sebastian Karotemprel (Shillong: Vendrame Institute, Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Limited, 1993), 31–75; L. Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India, I* (Torino: LDC, Torino, 1965), 17–31; O. Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands* (Shillong: Don Bosco Press, 1987), 1–6, 7–17; A. Pianazzi, *Ardisci e Spera* (Roma: LAS, 1976), 40–44.

[2] C. Wessels gives part of the account of Cacella himself on the journey of Cabral and Cacella to Assam, Tibet and Nepal from Hooghly. "On 2nd August, 1626, we left Golim (Hooghly) and arrived at Dhaka on the 12th. We set out again on September 5th and on the 26th of the same month we reached Azo (Hajo) and Pando (Pandu), where we stayed for a few days with Rajah Satargil. From Azo we moved on 8th October to Biar (Cooch Behar), which we entered on the 21st. Here we had to wait for four months before we could cross the mountain ranges, so it was not till 2nd February 1627, that we took the road to Runate (Rangamati), the furthest of the dominions of Cocho (the Koch Kingdom), and on the 21st we entered the kingdom of Potente (Bhutan)". Cfr. C. Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1992).

The chronicles of the Augustinian monastery at Bandel in 1682 state that the Augustinan Friars have a flourishing community of 7000 Christians at Rangamati, in the then Bodo Kingdom of Assam. Bandel is under the jurisdiction of Mylapore diocese. In 1714 the saintly bishop, Francis Lainez S.J. spends 25 days with the Rangamati Catholics. But by 1800 the Catholic community there disappears without a trace. Does social upheaval, or wars, or the death of the missionaries force them to migrate?

In 1790 some 5000 Christians in the service of the Mughal Emperor come from Meerut in Uttar Pradesh to Bengal in order to help the Nawab in his war against the British. Once the war is over, they settle down in Bondashil near Badarpur in Cachar. In the beginning, they are only occasionally visited by the missionaries from Calcutta. Later, when Dhaka becomes a mission, they are served more frequently. In 1844 Fr. Freycenon pays them a visit from Dhaka. He does so again in 1847, and at that time he reaches out also to the Naga tribes and finds them responsive to Catholicism.[3]

From 1834 to 1850 Assam belongs to the vast Vicariate of Bengal, which in 1845 is divided into the Vicariates of West Bengal and East Bengal. Assam then becomes part of the East Bengal Vicariate.

Meanwhile the Vicariate of Tibet-Hindustan is divided and Tibet is separated from Agra and given to the pastoral care of the Foreign Missionaries of Paris (MEP)[4]. Unable to enter Tibet from China due to the persistent opposition from the Chinese authorities, the MEP request and obtain from the Vicar Apostolic of Dhaka the permission to have Assam as part of the Vicariate of Lhasa, from where they can enter Tibet. Some of these missionaries visit the Brahmaputra valley and find a few scattered Catholics. Their heroic effort of evangelizing Tibet comes to a tragic end when two of them, Fr. N. M. Crick and Fr. Bourry, are treacherously killed in 1854 by a Mishmi chieftain called Kaisha on the Tibetan border in the present day Arunachal Pradesh. Fr. Crick and his companion are on their way back after having successfully entered Tibet in 1853. After this tragedy the MEP leave Assam, which reverts back to the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Dhaka, and go to Sikkim with a view of entering Tibet via Pedong near Kalimpong.[5]

In 1870 the Mission of Central Bengal is elevated to a Prefecture with Msgr. Antonio Marietti (PIME)[6] as Prefect Apostolic with North

[3] Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands*, 2.
[4] *La Societé des Missions Étrangerès de Paris* (MEP).
[5] Kottuppallil, "A Historical Survey," 32–33; Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India*, 18–22.
[6] Pontificio Istituto Missioni Estere (PIME)

Bengal and Assam as part of the new ecclesiastical territory. Only then Assam gets a permanent missionary in the person of Fr. Iacopo Broy[7], a Venetian who reaches Gauhati in 1872. As his superiors do not support him with finance or personnel, the 18 years of Broy's apostolate in Assam is limited solely to the Catholic families and individuals scattered all over the Brahmaputra valley. One reason for the lack of support from Marietti is Broy's unwillingness to initiate any new apostolate among the native tribes of Assam.[8] He tours extensively at great cost and personal suffering, by steamer, bullock cart, on an elephant and often on foot, from Dhubri to Nowgong, Sibsagar, Dibrugarh, Doom-Dooma, Margherita, etc., wherever Catholics are present in offices, tea gardens, mines, railways, etc. In 1875 he has some 300 Catholics. Fr. Broy continues his mission all alone in Assam till 1890. In his youth he wanted to become a Jesuit but he could not. Now that desire comes back to him forcefully. With the arrival of the Salvatorians in 1890, he decides to pursue that goal and at the age of 54 becomes a Jesuit novice. He dies at Barrackpore, near Calcutta, while preaching a homily during Mass, to a group of soldiers. Thus ends the life of a great pioneer missionary who has never returned to his native land, Italy, after reaching India.

Bishop Thomas Menamparampil writes about him thus, "Fr. Iacopo Broy is the most outstanding figure in the early history of the church in Assam...The work of catering to the needs of existing communities in itself is so great that he is unable to launch into the work of expansion...He feels terribly alone. But he does not move from his post until he has handed over the charge to reliable hands. Assam owes a great debt of gratitude to Fr. Jacopo Broy."[9]

In 1889 the Episcopal Synod of the Catholic bishops of North India held at Allahabad discusses at length the question of Assam. The bishop of Krishnagar, Bishop Pozzi, and the Holy Cross Bishop of Dhaka, Bishop

[7] There is reason to doubt the spelling of the name and surname of this PIME missionary. He is a Venetian. Now, the Italian alphabet does not have the letters "J" and "Y". Hence, the Italian spelling of both should be "Giacomo Broi" and not "Jacopo Broy" as found in C. Becker's work, and in G. Kottuppallil, *History of the Catholic Missions in Central Bengal1855–1886* (Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publication, 1988). Fr. Joseph Dal Broi in his unpublished manuscript, "Reminiscences", I, p. 9a, suggests that probably the missionary changed the spelling of his name and surname, as he was working among the British in the tea-plantations in Assam. This, however, explains the change of "Broi" into "Broy", but what about the change of "Giacomo" into "Jacopo"?

[8] Kottuppallil, "A Historical Survey," 34; Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 22–24.

[9] As quoted in Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands* 5–6.

Dufal, plead their inability to spare either personnel or finance for Assam. Hence, the bishops appeal to Rome to separate the whole region from Central and East Bengal and to create it into a new Prefecture Apostolic. Rome accedes to their request and by a decree of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide issued on 15th December 1889, establishes the Mission of Assam entrusting it to the care of the Society of the Divine Saviour (SDS) only recently founded by Fr. John Baptist Jordan.[10]

Four Salvatorians, two priests and two lay brothers, reach Gauhati[11] on 18th February 1890, where they receive a very hearty welcome from Fr. Broy. Though Fr. Broy suggests Fr. Otto Hopfenmueller, the Superior, to stay on in Gauhati he heads for Shillong, the recently made capital of Assam. He makes Shillong the headquarters of the Mission and leaves the other priest and one of the brothers in Gauhati. In Shillong, the Delanaugerede, a catholic family that is residing at Gauhati, puts their small Shillong villa – *Buona Speranza* – Good Hope – at his disposal. On 21st August of the same year, Fr. Otto dies of a sunstroke and consequent meningitis. Ten days later, the lay brother who is with him is stricken down by dysentery and dies. To cap it all, the earthquake of 12th June 1897, destroys all what the Salvatorians have been able to put up.

More personnel are sent to Assam who toil with indefatigable zeal. But the Mission gets a real boost in 1906, when Fr. Christopher Becker arrives on 17th March. He is the first one to receive the title of Prefect Apostolic of Assam.



Msgr. CHRISTOPHER BECKER, SDS
First Prefect Apostolic of Assam
(1906-1915)

Fr. Becker, still in his youth and endowed with great intelligence and zeal, gives a tremendous thrust to the Mission. He creates an imposing complex in Shillong: a spacious and beautiful church, a worthy residence for the Prefect Apostolic, an orphanage and a trade school, a convent and a school for girls under the care of the Salvatorian Sisters. Besides, for the education of the

[10] Bernandz, "Salvatorians and Northeast India," in *The Catholic Church*, ed. Karotemprel, 77.
[11] Today the name for Gauhati is Guwahati. We shall use the name Gauhati for most of this work.

children of Europeans and Anglo-Indians he approaches the Congregation of the Irish Christian Brothers for a boys' school and the Loreto Nuns for a girls' school. In 1908 the Loreto Sisters arrive in Shillong and in 1914 the Irish Christian Brothers too reach the place. In 1912 Msgr. Becker builds the second residence in Gauhati and invites the Catechist-missionary Sisters of Mary Immaculate from Paris to take charge of it.

The flourishing missionary activity of the Salvatorians receives a serious jolt with the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. On 9th July 1915, the Salvatorian fathers are interned and taken to the Ahmednagar Concentration Camp near Bombay. In 1916 they are released and sent back to Europe, whereas the lay Brothers stay on in India until the end of the war. The Salvatorian Sisters are also repatriated on 15th November 1915, while the Catechist Sisters leave Gauhati for South India on 20th October 1916.

At the time of the departure of the Salvatorian fathers, the Assam Mission, besides the works mentioned above, has 7 centres with 12 priests, 4 lay Brothers, 9 Salvatorian Sisters, horticulture and a sericulture school, a dispensary, 37 village schools, 4471 Catholics and 1387 catechumens.

After the departure of the German missionaries the Prefecture of Assam is temporarily entrusted to the archdiocese of Calcutta. At the request of Msgr. Becker, Archbishop Meuleman S.J. of Calcutta sends his own secretary, Fr. Lefebvre, on 24th June 1915, to take charge of the Assam Mission. Within a short time four other veteran Jesuits join Fr. Lefebvre. The five Jesuits occupy only the residential mission centres of Shillong, Raliang, Gauhati, and Bondashil. Naturally, it is not possible to keep open all the established works. The trade school of Shillong, the horticulture and sericulture farm at Umlynka (Upper Shillong) are abandoned. The farm being a government property, Fr. Lefebvre hands it back to the government. Two Jesuit Brothers and a Holy Cross Brother from Dhaka help the missionaries[12]. On 10th October 1915, Fr. Lefebvre appeals to the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions in Dhaka for help and they generously send five sisters to replace the departing German sisters. They start St. Mary's Middle English School for over a hundred day-scholars, an orphanage with 42 girls, a dispensary and a work-room offering jobs to some 120 young women. In February 1916, the Irish Christian Brothers start St. Edmund's School. Like the Loreto Nuns who started a school in

[12] P.C.Matthew, "The Jesuits in Assam during the I World War," in *The Catholic Church,* ed. Karotemprel, 129-30; John C. Descary and Aurele Zamawla, "The Holy Cross in Northeast," in *The Catholic Church,* ed. Karotemprel, 131–134.

May 1909, they too follow the Cambridge school programme, as most of the students are Europeans or Anglo-Indians.[13] The Jesuits work in Assam Mission with great zeal and dedication, despite the shortage of personnel and the limitations imposed on them by the War and the difficulties of post-war years. They are convinced that they will be in Assam permanently. Their Superior General, however, insists with the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome to relieve his confreres from that responsibility.

When the Salesians arrive, the statistics of the Assam Mission are as follows: 5844 Catholics, seven missionary centres,[14] six priests, two orphanages, a house for the aged, and a dispensary. The missionary activity is limited to the Khasi Hills, except two missionary centres in the plains: one at Gauhati for the care of the workers in the tea plantations of the Brahmaputra valley, and the other at Bondashil (Badarpur) for the descendants of the Portuguese soldiers, the workers in the tea plantations in the Surma valley, and chaplaincy for the Catholic railway employees, as Badarpur is a railway junction.

2. Don Bosco, The Salesians, and India Before 1922

The history of the Province of Calcutta starts with the arrival of the first batch of Salesians in Assam in 1922. However, prior to that, neither Don Bosco nor the Salesians are strangers to India or to Calcutta.

2.1 Don Bosco and India

As a young priest Don Bosco yearns to be a missionary. In those days reports from the missionaries published by the magazine, *Le Missioni Cattoliche,* "The Catholic Missions", are avidly read in Piedmont, as it is a popular magazine among the clergy. Those reports, for the greater part, are from missionaries working in China and India and, hence, it is natural that the readers' thoughts instinctively hover around these countries in the Far East. Being a regular reader of this magazine, Don Bosco's thoughts too are not different, to be a missionary in the Far East. In the discernment he makes about his missionary vocation, he realizes that God's plans are different for him.

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[13] C. Curran, "A Century of Catholic Educational endeavour in Northeast" in *The Catholic Church,* ed. Karotemprel, 346

[14] The missionary centres besides Shillong were: Cherrapunjee or Sohra, Laitkynsew on the Khasi Hills, Raliang on the Synteng Hills, Gauhati in the Brahmaputra Valley, Badarpur in the Surma Valley, Haflong on the Cachar Hills, Cfr. Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India*, 71.

However, when he sends out his first batch of missionaries, the choice is not the Far East, but countries at the opposite side of the globe, as directed by God. In his ever-recurring missionary dreams, he sees the Far East as a place where his sons would reap an abundant harvest. Time and again even the highest Ecclesiastical Authority is making appeals to Don Bosco, to send missionaries to India.

On 27th April 1876 Don Bosco writes from Rome to Fr. Cagliero, then in Argentina, telling him how gracious the Holy Father had been during a private audience. Among other things, the Holy Father had offered to the Salesians three apostolic vicariates in India, one in China, and one in Australia. Don bosco writes that he has accepted one of them in India, and for this he foresees the need of using the services of Fr. Cagliero. Hence the need of his return to Europe to establish one house in Rome, and then go to India.[15]

On the evening of 4th June 1876, the feast of Pentecost, at ten o'clock, Don Bosco gives a conference to 170 Salesians, novices, and postulants in the Church of St. Francis de Sales. He tells them of his journey to Rome, of all the things he had achieved during his stay there and, in particular, of the private audience with the Holy Father in which he offered the Salesians 12 apostolic vicariates in India. Since the Pope was insisting that Don Bosco accept one such vicariate, Don Bosco considered it for a while and then said: "If such is your will, Holy Father, I accept it, but only after 20 months from the day we will receive all the pertinent documents", to which the Holy Father agrees. Then addressing the audience: "Those of you who wish to go to India have 20 months to get ready."[16]

On 31st October 1876, in another letter to Fr. Cagliero, Don bosco writes: "I really feel that you must return to Europe in 1877 and take a trip to Ceylon in India, to open another very important mission. That place needs a Castelnuovo boy."[17]

On 14th January 1877, writing again to Fr. Cagliero, Don Bosco mentions the various projects in America and tells him how to dispose the personnel for these projects. Then he asks: "And what about Fr. Cagliero?

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[15] Cfr. Peter Braido, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo dela libertà*, LAS, Roma, 2002, Vol. II, 150–151.
[16] Cfr. E. Ceria, *Biographical Memoirs*, Vol. XII (1976), 161.
[17] Ibid. 223.

He is meant for India. At the beginning of 1878 we will go to take charge of the apostolic vicariate of Mangalor in India. Fr. Cagliero will be the Vicar Apostolic, Fr. Bologna will be his Vicar General."[18]

However, Don Bosco himself soon realizes that he has too many irons in the fire and in his letter of 12th May 1877 to Fr. Cagliero he gives a counter information: "In view of the multiplication of the houses and the thinning down of personnel, the project of Ceylon, Mangalor, Australia, etc., is suspended."[19]

It takes another 30 years for the sons of Don Bosco to reach India. And finally when they come in 1906, it is not to Ceylon or to Mangalore, but to Tanjore in Tamil Nadu.

Thoughts about India, and Calcutta in particular, linger on in the mind of Don Bosco. "The Chronicle notes that in May (1875) a missionary comes (to the Oratory), although his name is not recorded. However, it does report that he inspires many to go to the missions. ... The Archbishop of Calcutta visits the Oratory in October 1875. After talking at some length with Don Bosco, he officiates at the solemn Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament."[20]

Letters of Don Bosco and of Don Rua to the Archbishops of Calcutta, in answer to their request to send missionaries to that archdiocese, are jealously preserved in the Archives of the Calcutta archdiocese.[21]

On 23rd February 1884 Don Bosco replies to the invitation of Archbishop Goethals, S.J. of Calcutta, conveying his inability to comply with his request due to lack of personnel, and other pressing commitments elsewhere. "I very much regret not to be able to send my missionaries due to lack of available personnel. His Holiness Leo XIII has entrusted to us

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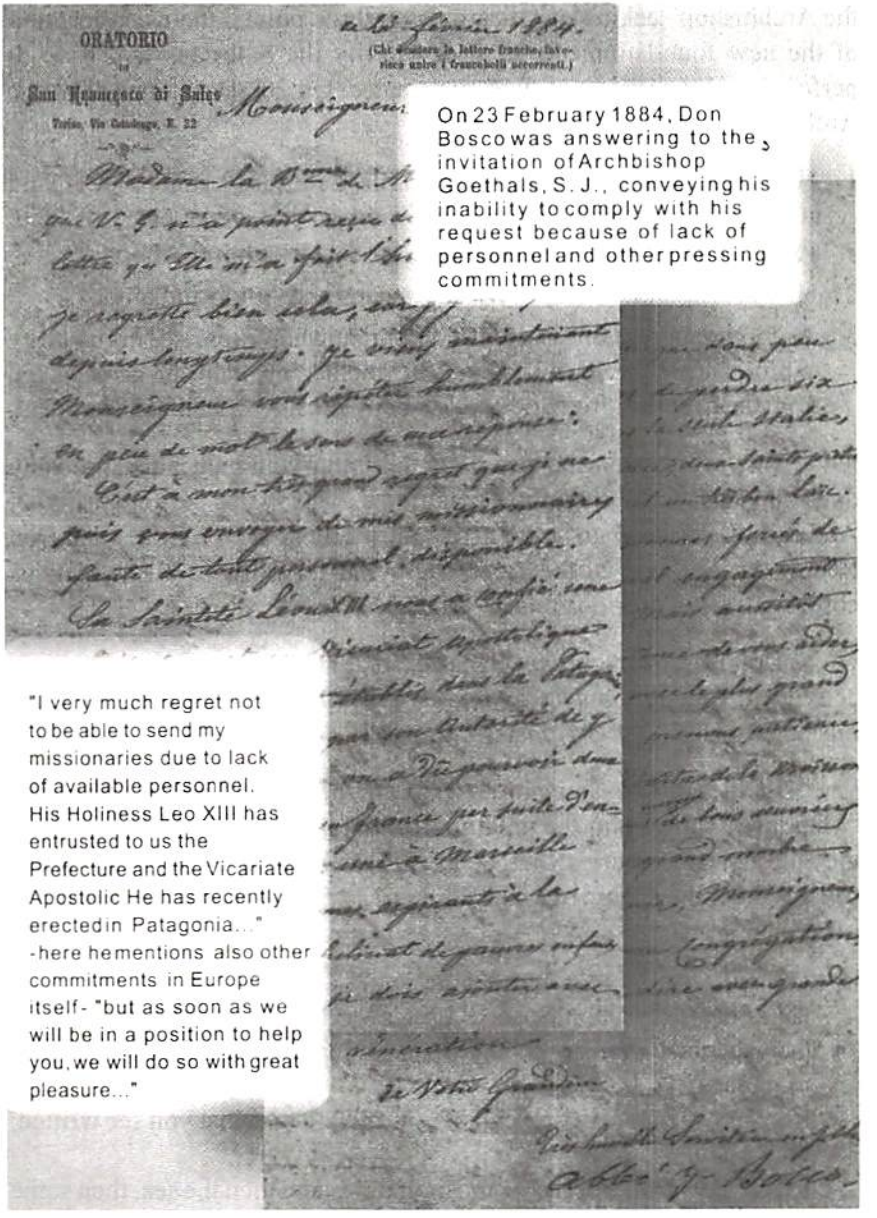
[18] Cf. Peter Braido, *Don Bosco prete dei giovani nel secolo della libertà*, Vol. II. 157.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Cfr. E. Ceria, *Biographical Memoirs*, XI, (1964), 295.

[21] The original letters of Don Bosco and Rua in French are found in the Archives of Calcutta archdiocese. In the *Provincial Archives* of the Province of Calcutta there are two Photostat copies that were sent by Msgr. Perier, S.J, Archbishop of Calcutta, to Msgr. L.Mathias in June 1926. *Provincial Archives* of the Province of Calcutta, File A.1. Cfr. also. *Archivio Generale* F. 175, Pisana, 1111, Roma.

the Prefecture and the Vicariate Apostolic He has recently erected in Patagonia…but as soon as we will be in a position to help you, we will do so with great pleasure."



Towards the end of the year i n l904, Fr. Rua meets Msgr. Meuleman, S.J., the Archbishop of Calcutta, and discusses the possibility of starting a Salesian presence in the archdiocese. On 25th November l904, after having informed the other members of the Superior Council, Don Rua writes to the Archbishop seeking clarifications on three points: the exact location of the new foundation; the kind of activity the Salesians will have to perform; and the means of their sustenance. On 20th December l904, the Archbishop sends his own proposals:

1. He promises to put at the disposal of the Salesians a small plot of land at Kharakpur initially. Later, he would give a larger piece of land, about 20 miles West of Kharakpur, for an agricultural school.
2. He asks for a trade school for Europeans and Anglo-Indian boys.
3. As for the sources of sustenance, the Archbishop expresses his inability to promise anything, and is doubtful whether any help can be expected from the people or from the pupils, or any subsidy from the government.

However, nothing happens after this initial communication, probably due to the unacceptability of the conditions. This is also the conclusion of Archbishop Perier when he discovers these letters of Don Bosco and Don Rua in the Archives of the archdiocese and forwards to Msgr. Mathias copies of these "precious relics."

Don Bosco not only receives a formal invitation to start missionary activity in Calcutta, but he also ***sees Calcutta*** as a centre of his sons' missionary work ***in a dream-vision.***

In the famous missionary dream of Barcelona in 1886, the "Madonna" shows him the great things that the future holds in store for the Salesian missionaries. In that dream Don Bosco sees "a great flock of sheep" under the charge of a shepherd girl.... She turns to Don Bosco and asks:

- "Do you see all that is here before you?"
- "Certainly", says Don Bosco, "I see everything quite plainly."
  Then she tells Don Bosco and the boys to follow her to one side and commands:
- "Look now from here, look all of you and tell me what you see written. What do you see?"
- "I see," says Don Bosco," some mountains and then the sea, then some hills..."

- "And I", says one of the boys, "see Valparaiso."
- "And I", says another, "see Santiago."
- "Turn round now to this side, draw a line mentally from here and then look again"...The boys strain their eyes in the direction indicated and exclaim in chorus:
- "We can see Peking."
- "Very well, now", said the maiden, "just draw a line from one extremity to the other, from Peking to Santiago...draw a line from Santiago to the centre of Africa and now what do you see?"
- "I can see", replies Don Bosco," ten stations or centres"...
- "And now, just turn from the middle of Africa to Pecking...There you have Hong Kong, CALCUTTA, and farther over here Madagascar. These other centres, besides, will have their houses, *studentates*, and novitiates."[22]

2.2 The Arrival of the Salesians in India in 1906[23]

The bishops of the *Padroado* diocese of Mylapore in South India are instrumental in bringing the Salesians to the country for the first time in 1906. On coming to know that Don Bosco had the desire to send missionaries to India, Msgr. Antonio de Souza Barroso begins negotiations in 1896. He has a letter sent to Fr. Rua by Fr. Festa, rector of the Salesian house at Alexandria, Egypt. In this letter he advances a proposal that he himself renews two years later. His successor, Rev. Teutonio Vieira de Castro, has also a personal reason to pursue the cause. As a young seminarian, he was an ardent admirer of Don Bosco and, after his ordination, travelled twice to Turin to meet him. Blessing him and his future works, Don Bosco told him that time, "You will do much good."

2.2.1 Tanjore (1906)

After protracted negotiations, the first group of Salesian missionaries to India lands in Bombay on 6th January 1906, under the leadership of Fr. George Tomatis.[24] With him are two other priests, one Brother, a scholastic,

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[22] Ceria, *Memorie Biografiche*, Vol. XVIII, Torino, SEI, 1937, 72–74. English Translation of the same is in J. Bacchiarello, *Dreams of Don Bosco (1815-1888)*, Book II, (Shillong: Don Bosco Depot, 1970), 54–57.

[23] Cfr. E.Ceria, *Annali della Societa' Salesiana*, Vol. III, Torimo, SEI, 1946, 568–577.

[24] Fr. George Tomatis is born on 31.10.1865 at Mondovi (Italy), makes his first profession on 4.10.1885; is ordained a priest on 31.5.1890, comes to India in 1906, and dies at Bangalore on 25.11.1925.

and an aspirant. Travelling by train from Bombay,[25] they reach Tanjore on 14th January. At the station they receive a very enthusiastic reception from the parish Priest and the people who solemnly escort them to their new home. They settle down in a temporary residence, until a new one is built in August 1907.



At Tanjore, the new missionaries start their work with six orphans at the St. Francis Xavier Orphanage. Soon the number begins to rise steadily, till it reaches 800 in 1928. The first baptism is administered in June 1906. Besides the orphanage, they are also running the parish school. The Salesians start a trade school for shoemakers and blacksmiths, which is later turned into a school for carpenters and cotton weavers. This small trade school will soon receive official government recognition, a yearly

[25] Today the name for Bombay is Mumbai. We shall use the name Bombay for most of this work.

subsidy and the faculty of giving diplomas. The system of Don Bosco soon starts producing its fruits as shown in the good behaviour of the children, obedience and piety and in the sprouting of vocations to Salesian life. The first Indian boy to join is Karunai, who is sent to Italy in 1907 as an aspirant. From Italy he proceeds to Portugal for his novitiate. Unfortunately, he falls ill and dies in Lisbon in 1909. The next ones are Ignatius Muthu and Maria Arulsamy. These two are also sent to Italy in 1908 and, later, proceed to Portugal for novitiate. They make their first religious profession in 1911. Ignatius Muthu is ordained a priest in Mylapore in 1916 and dies on 23rd November 1967. Maria Arulsamy after ordination joins the diocese of Mylapore and dies shortly afterwards.[26] In 1907, Fr. Ernest Vigneron, one of the pioneers, passes away after an operation, and Fr. Eugene Mederlet,[27] originally destined for China, substitutes for him.

2.2.2 Mylapore (1909)

On 10th January 1909, Fr. Tomatis leaves Tanjore and goes to Mylapore to start the second foundation in India, the San Thome Orphanage. Fr. Mederlet takes charge in Tanjore. To the great joy of the Salesians, in 1915, the bishop gives them also the parish. Fr. Mederlet is made the parish priest, and rector of the orphanage and of the schools. Only now the Salesians can dedicate themselves to the care of souls and thus fulfill their missionary aspirations.



Fr. GEORGE TOMATIS, SDB (1865-1925)

The reception accorded to the Salesians in Mylapore is quite different from what they received in Tanjore. They traverse the city quietly, enter the house where nobody receives them and, what is worse, they do not even know how to provide food for themselves and for the boys, because the previous parish priest, not pleased with the coming of the Salesians, takes with him all the kitchen utensils and cutlery. In the house they find 20

[26] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India*, 121–122.

[27] Fr. Eugene Mederlet is born on 15.11.1867 at Metz (France), makes his profession on 11.12.1891, is ordained a priest on 8.7.1994, comes to India in 1907, is consecrated Archbishop of Madras on 28.10.1928, dies at Palikonda on 12.12.1934.

Anglo-Indian boys, mostly orphans and several foundlings, all of them very poorly clad. The government is paying a subsidy for them and is helping them to obtain a certificate, which gives them the possibility of getting a job in the Railways and in Post and Telegraph offices.

The arrival of the Salesians in the orphanage brings fresh vitality and enthusiasm in the lives of the boys. Their material and spiritual needs are well taken care of. After three months of an intense catechism course all the boys receive first Holy Communion. A successful catechetical competition is conducted in the presence of the Bishop Teutonio that wins the admiration of every one. On the feast of the Assumption in 1909, a candle light procession, with the statue of Mary Help of Christians, makes a deep impression on all the bystanders. In the city, Protestants and even non-Christians become friendly soon.

Once the Salesians become known in Madras and in the surrounding areas, the number of boys in the orphanage increases from twenty to fifty in the first year, reaching 180 later on, requiring larger space. The boys begin to do well in the exams, something that increases the reputation of the Salesians, and with it, the requests for admissions. The government is paying Rs.5 per month for each orphan, to this are added the tuition fees of other students, the subsidy from the Curia, and income from other sources. An agreement is made with the bishop regarding the administration of the orphanage. It is similar to the one made previously for the administration of the orphanage at Tanjore.[28] The clerics are attending classes in the diocesan Seminary were Fr. Tomatis is spiritual Director.

From 1906 to 1912, the Salesians in India belong to the Province of Portugal. From 1912 to 1923 they are under the care of the Roman Province of St. Peter. In 1923 they become part of the Indian Visitatory, with Msgr. L. Mathias as Superior.[29]

[28] Cfr. Ceria, *Annali della Societa' Salesiana*, Vol. III, 570.

[29] In January 1923 Assam Mission is made into a Visitatory with Msgr. Louis Mathias as its Superior when Rome appoints him as Prefect Apostolic of Assam, Bhutan and Manipur. Cfr. Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India, I*, '97.

PART I

THE SALESIANS IN ASSAM 1922–1934

CHAPTER I
ASSAM: A NEW MISSION FIELD FOR THE SALESIANS

1. Assam: The Land and the People 1. 1 The Land 1. 2 The People 2. The Mission of Assam is entrusted to the Salesians 3. On the Way to Assam: 3. 1 The Call 3. 2 The Recruitment of Personnel 3. 3 The Great Vigil 3. 4 A Dream and a Motto 3. 5 In *Viam Pacis*

1. Assam: The Land and the People

1.1. The Land

The Assam at the time of the arrival of the Salesians in 1922 comprises the whole of Northeast India and not just one of the seven States in the region as we have today. Northeast designates that portion of the country that lies to the North and East of Bangladesh connected to the mainland through a narrow corridor between Bhutan and Bangladesh. The seven States in the Northeast are Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura.[1]

From the political point of view Assam[2] practically remains always isolated from the rest of India, until it is annexed by the British, against their will.

The Mughal Empire tries 18 times to invade it but without success, at least completely and permanently. The British occupy only the plains and some areas in the hills, neglecting that broad band of mountainous land between the Brahmaputra valley and Tibet.

The entire area covers 254,993 square kilometres, which, by way of comparison, is 25,000 square kilometres smaller than the single State of Andra Pradesh. Though the largest portion of the area is hilly or mountainous, the majority of the people inhabiting the region live in four plains areas: the Brahmaputra and Barak (Surma) valleys of Assam, the

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[1] Cfr. F.S. Downs, *History of Christianity in India*, Vol. V (Bangalore: The Church History Association of India, 1992), 1–6.

[2] We shall use Assam to refer to the whole of Northeast India.

Tripura plains and the Manipur Plateau. For the most part, the plains are fertile, thanks to abundant rainfall and the many rivers and streams that flow through them.

In fact, Assam has a kind of pre-eminence in the world with regard to atmospheric precipitation. Cherrapunjee gets a yearly average of more than 12 metres of rain. But it has gone up to 16, and even to 18 metres. On 14th June 1876, in 24 hours, it receives more than 1 metre of rain. All this overabundance of rainfalls is from June to October. After that the weather is dry, with the exception of some light rain around Christmas, and some storms in April and June that precede the monsoon. Even though the whole of Assam is not like Cherrapunjee, the rainy season is heavy and prolonged.

The rainy season coincides with summer. April and May are hot months, but being dry heat, it is still bearable. While, instead, from June to October the heat is humid and heavy, and becomes unbearable. During these months all kinds of insects abound: swarms of gnats, mosquitoes, bugs, and grasshoppers. This is true especially in the plains, where the thermometer may even shoot up to 45 degrees. In the hills the climate is temperate. Shillong is a health resort and the temperature never crosses 30 degrees. Between the months of October and March Assam experiences a mild winter and a wonderful spring season.

Assam witnesses a lot of seismic activity throughout the year. Seismologists consider the region as one of the most unsettled in the world. During the rainy season, Shillong, for example, experiences almost daily tremors, and occasionally even some strong ones. However, the damages are not generally very heavy, since the houses are made of wood and bamboo. Today there are a number of big buildings in reinforced concrete, which are built to withstand earthquakes, using appropriate technology. Of the five most violent earthquakes that the world has witnessed, two occur in Assam. The first one is in 1897, which destroys several small towns and becomes, for a long time, the point of reference for the illiterate people to indicate dates of birth: "I was born two years before the earthquake," or time of occurrence of an event, "This happened the year after the earthquake." The second one takes place in 1950, which devastates

especially upper Assam. It lasts seven and a half minutes with after-shocks continuing for a month. Some rivers change their course and the resulting floods cause even more damages than the earthquake itself.

Assam is rich in flora and fauna. It is said that Assam has the greatest variety of trees and flowers in the world. The forests are rich in sal, teak, sandalwood, pines and, especially bamboo. The region also abounds in coconuts, betel, bananas, oranges, mangoes, papayas, and other kinds of fruit trees, and timber for woodwork and for building. The plains are rich in agricultural products, such as, rice, jute, and especially tea. Assam has also rich deposits of oil and coal.

As regards fauna, the unicorn rhinoceros is found only in Assam. Herds of elephants roam the forests making occasional forays into the tea gardens. Tigers, leopards, bears, and buffaloes inhabit the forests, while stags, antelopes, and especially wild boars are not rare. Crocodiles bask in the sun in the small islands of the Brahmaputra. Snakes, poisonous and non-poisonous, are to be found everywhere claiming many victims yearly. The most common ones are cobras, pythons, kraits, and many kinds of vipers. Scorpions and centipedes, whose sting at times is fatal, are common. Jackals, whose howls reverberate through the nights, monkeys, which destroy the agricultural produce abound. Among the birds, we have the crows, known as the scavengers of India. Another special bird is the *myna*, a kind of blackbird, which can imitate man's voice.[3]

1.2 The People

The ethnic composition of the population is extremely complex. Though it is difficult to determine the exact percentage, the great majority of the more than thirty-five million inhabitants of the region are of Mongolian racial stock. They immigrate during the last three or four thousand years, though there is no agreement among scholars concerning the precise time of their settlement in the region.

According to some scholars, the first inhabitants are the Khasis, coming, probably, from Indochina. There is reference to an eighth century Arian conqueror, Laladitya by name, coming into conflict with a kingdom of women, which probably is the matrilineal tribe of the Khasis. About

[3] Pianazzi, *Ardisci e Spera*, 34f.

2000 B.C., there is a movement of peoples from China to India through Assam.

The last invaders in the thirteenth century are the "Shan" tribes. They are called *Ahoms*, the *"Unparalleled"*, because of the way with which, even though small in number, they impose themselves on the other tribes. Scholars opine that the name Assam refers to the *"land of the Ahoms."*

Decadence, which weakens the previous invaders of Assam, does not spare the strong Ahoms too. King Gaurinath, to avoid being deposed, seeks the help of the British who come in 1792. But, once order is re-established, the British withdraw and the kingdom lapses into anarchy once again. At the time of another crisis, the Ahoms seek the help of the Burmese. This angers the British and they vanquish the Burmese and take control of Assam after the treaty of Yandabo in 1826. First they take total control of the Brahmaputra valley, and later, to defend the people of the plains against the raids from the hill tribes, gradually, and almost against their will, they occupy part of the hills. By 1892 the occupation of Assam by the British is complete, with the exception of Arunachal Pradesh.[4]

No one even knows for definite how many languages are spoken in the region. Suffice it is to say that estimates of the number of languages spoken in the region, language being indicative of cultural diversity, put the number of major language groups at fifty, with, perhaps, as many as one hundred and fifty minor ones. Though a majority of the people speaks Sanskrit-based languages (mainly Assamese and Bengali), the linguistic and, hence, cultural diversity of the region plays a major role in its historical development.

Another way of classifying the people in the Northeast, which is especially useful for a study on the impact of Christianity, is to distinguish between those who are sanskritized and those who are not, before the coming of the British. S. Barkataki describes the progress of sanskritization prior to the advent of the British thus:

[4] Kottuppallil, "A Historical Survey," 36.

A very significant fact about Assam is the fusion which takes place here of Aryan and Mongolian cultures. We find here an example of how a dominant culture, although supported numerically by a few, can seep into, and impose itself on, weaker cultures. Thus we find in Assam, a population by and large Mongolian but speaking Assamese, which is an Aryan Sanskritic language. The Brahmins from northern India succeed in absorbing into Hinduism all the tribal people of the plains including the powerful Ahoms who rule Assam for over six hundred years and in course of time not only adopt the Hindu religion, discarding their own, but also forget their own Shan language and adopt Assamese…The plains people's fear of the fierce tribes, as well as the remoteness of their villages, prevents penetration of sanskritic culture into the hills. Whatever penetration begins to take place is stopped with the arrival of the British.[5]

[5] Downs, *History of Christianity in India*, Vol. V, 3.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL MAP OF NORTH EAST INDIA



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(For Private Circulations only)


MEMBAS
KHAMBAS
BOKARS
BORS
SHIMONGS
IDU MISHMIS
PAILIBOS
TAGINS
MINYONGS
PADAMS
PADAMS
DIGARU MISHMIS
GALLONGS
PASIS
PANGGIS
MIJU MISHMIS
NEPALIS
KHAMTIS
SINGPHOS
NISHIS
GAILONGS
MISHINGS
MORANS
MIRIS
SINGPHOS
MISHINGS
APATANIS
SANTALS
TANGSAS
BODO-LACHARIS
NOCTES
NISHIS
AHOMS
KARBIS
WANCHOS
KONYAKS
MISHINGS
AOS
LOTHAS
RENGMAS
KARBIS
SEMAS
RENGMAS
ANGAMIS
KHEZAS
SANGTAMS
KUKIS
MAOS
MARAMS
ZELIANGRONGS
NEPALIS
TANGKHULS
KUKIS
KABUIS
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ZOUS/AHALS
LAMKINS
HAYOLS
CHOTES
KUKIS
ZOUS
ZOUS/AHALS
MYANMAR
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E

With regard to the religious composition of the region, the plains people are, as has been noted, substantially Hindu with a sizable Muslim minority. In the hills today, especially in Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya Christians constitute the majority.

The cultures of the hill tribes are so pluriform and varied that it is difficult to speak of a common tribal culture. Each of the tribes has been living in isolation for centuries with its own history, traditional practices, social structures and village polity. The situation is further complicated by the fact that among most tribes the village is an autonomous unit, a kind of village-state, which is often in conflict with neighbouring villages of the same tribe. Social systems range from the matrilineal to the patriarchal, and political structures, from elected village headmen (as among the Aos) to powerful hereditary chieftainships (as among the Mizos and Konyaks).

Not surprisingly, there is also considerable variety in their religious beliefs and practices. With the exception of a few small Buddhist groups in Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, and Mizoram, the traditional tribal religions are of the primal type (commonly but improperly called "animism"). Within that broad classification there is much variety. Most of the tribes have a concept of benevolent gods, including gods of creation and gods responsible for general human welfare to whom periodical sacrifices are made. However, actual religious practices consist in sacrifices and observances of taboos designed to propitiate malevolent spirits.[6]"

2. The Mission of Assam is entrusted to the Salesians[7]

Fr. Albera, the Rector Major of the Salesian Society, towards the end of his tenure accepts the Assam Mission, in spite of tremendous odds against such a decision. He manages to convince the members of the Council about the urgency of accepting the mission by exhorting them not to allow themselves to be guided by human prudence. He has the consolation of blessing the missionaries who are being sent to Assam, the last missionary expedition that he sends out. The new mission consists of Assam, the greater part of which is ruled by the British, the independent kingdom of Bhutan and the tributary state of Manipur. It has seven and half million inhabitants spread over an area of 267,960 square kilometres.

As mentioned earlier, in 1889 Assam becomes a Prefecture Apostolic and is entrusted to the German Salvatorian fathers who work there till 1914. At the outbreak of the First World War, the British rulers in India

[6] Downs, *History of Christianity in India*, Vol. V, 1–6.
[7] Ceria, *Annali della Societa' Salesiana*, Vol. IV, (Torino, SEI, 1951), 417–422; Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India*, 2–6.

expel the German fathers and sisters from the country. When they realize that they will not be able to return for a long time, in their General Chapter of 1918, they decide to withdraw permanently. The Holy See temporarily entrusts the care of the Mission to the Belgian Jesuits of Bengal, who, with the help of their confreres in Calcutta, and under the guidance of the Archbishop, himself a Jesuit, take care of the Prefecture to the best of their ability. In the meantime the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith, thinks of entrusting Assam to the Salesians, in the firm hope that through their zeal the Prefecture would soon be raised to the status of a Vicariate and then, later, a diocese. Negotiations with the Salesian Procure in Rome begin unofficially in 1918, and on 20th June 1920, Fr. Albera receives an official letter.



V. Rev. Fr. PAUL ALBERA, SDB
Rector Major (1910–1921)

Born:	06.06.1845
First meeting with Don Bosco:	October 1858
Salesian: (one of the first 22)	14.5.1862
Priest:	02.08.1868
Rector:	1871-'81
Provincial (In France):	1881-1892
Catechist General:	1892-1910
Rector Major:	1910-1921
Death:	29.10.1921

While understanding the importance of such a proposal wherein lies the golden opportunity to fulfil the dream of Don Bosco, Fr. Albera is not oblivious to ground realities. There is acute shortage of personnel. The War claims the lives of many confreres, and added to that are those who fall victims to epidemics. Added to that there are the pressing needs of the recently established Missions in China, Rio Negro, Chaco Paraguayo, and in Congo. Hence Fr. Albera humbly asks the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation to spare the Salesians of such a heavy burden that is beyond their capacity to shoulder. However, to manifest his good will, he proposes to withdraw the Salesians from Mylapore and Tanjore and send them to Assam. On hearing this the bishop of Mylapore, not only begs Fr. Albera not to deprive his diocese of the services of the Salesians, but also he personally goes to Rome and to Turin to plead his cause. Even the Prefect of the Propaganda considers the proposal of removing the Salesians from there not opportune, nay, even harmful to the faithful. He, therefore, once again implores Fr. Albera not to close his eyes and heart to the most urgent needs of Assam.

What worries the Prefect especially is the fast growth of the Protestants in Assam. To this he adds one more reason, which alone, he thinks, should be sufficient to make the Salesians accept the Mission: the almost total absence of Catholic schools in the whole of Assam and the mushrooming of Protestant schools.

He writes in his letter of 24th May 1921:

> It is not convenient to insist on the proposal of withdrawing the Salesians from Mylapore and Tanjore, since this is not only inopportune, but also even manifestly harmful to the interests of the Faithful in those places. Propaganda, therefore, earnestly begs that, notwithstanding the very serious and real difficulties presented, the Salesians do not deny the most needed help the Assam Mission is waiting for.[8]

He concludes his letter with the following data:

> At this moment in the whole of the Prefecture there are only six Catholic missionaries; the Protestants take advantage of this to invade the field completely. It is enough to bring to your notice that against 9 Catholic schools there are 600 Protestant schools. I am sure that this detail alone will be sufficient to spur the Salesians to make any sacrifice to help that most unfortunate Mission.[9]

To this very pressing letter Fr. Albera answers on 17th June, and after having listed once again the serious difficulties that are dissuading him from accepting the offer concludes thus:

> Not withstanding these enormous difficulties that beset us, I do not have the courage to give Your Eminence a negative answer. I called my Council together to discuss the situation. We tried to find someone who could go, but without success... Now, if Your Eminence confronted with this state of affairs feels inspired to dispense us from what you have asked of us, we will thank Divine Providence for it; but should you think that, for the greater glory of God, you will need to persist on your first idea, then we will humbly beg Your Eminence to give us some time... and if obedience to the Holy See, a thing which the Salesians consider to be their very

[8] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 3.
[9] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 3–4.

special duty, will demand from us to shoulder this new venture, we will do so with the firm hope that the Lord will send us the necessary means.[10]

In the session of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda held on 12th July 1921, His Eminence Van Rossum makes known the contents of the letter of the Rector Major. In the discussion that follows due consideration is given to the great sacrifices the Salesian Society will have to make and also takes note of the praiseworthy disposition of the Salesians' readiness to comply with the wishes of the Holy See. The Cardinal, however, concludes that it is necessary for the good of that mission that the whole of Assam, and not merely part of it, as suggested by Msgr. Becker, be entrusted to the Salesians, so that they can have a free hand in the region and erect their foundations in strategically important places.

In his letter of 14th July 1921, the Cardinal Prefect writes to Fr. Albera in reply to his letter of 17th June:

> The very difficult circumstances that the Missions in general and that of Assam in particular are facing compel me to insist on the proposal made to the good Salesians who, I know, are able to do the impossible to comply with the wishes of the Holy See. Once again, therefore, I renew my resolve to entrust to them the Prefecture of Assam.[11]

The will of the Holy See to entrust to the Salesian Society the Mission of Assam, in spite of great difficulties, is too strong to continue resisting any further. And so, Fr. Albera, on 21st July 1921, answers the letter of the Cardinal Prefect thus:

> Since Your Eminence makes it clearly known that the Holy See thinks it necessary to insist on the proposal of entrusting to the Salesians the Prefecture Apostolic of Assam, it is only left to us to repeat the evangelical words: *"In verbo autem tuo laxabo rete* – at your word I will let down the nets", and put at the disposal of the Holy See our feeble strength for the task...We want to place all our trust in the Lord and so, bringing to our minds the spiritual dictum, "*vir obediens loquetur victorias* – the obedient man will speak of

[10] Ibid. 4.
[11] Ibid.

victories", strengthened by obedience to the Supreme Pontiff, we consider it a great fortune to be able to manifest our full submission, notwithstanding such difficult circumstances and when everything would make us incline to resistance. It is this that makes us firmly hope that the good God will sustain our weakness and give us all the necessary help.[12]

To this the Cardinal Prefect answers on 31st July 1921, with a letter in which he thanks the Rector Major, and, after expressing the great consolation that the letter of 21st July 1921 has caused him, continues:

> I am particularly grateful to you for this favourable decision, which is certainly inspired to your heart by the Venerable Don Bosco who surely rejoices in Heaven to see his children contributing ever more to the spreading of the Kingdom of God. The Salesians will be able to betake themselves at the earliest to that Prefecture where for a short time they will be assisted and guided by the Jesuit fathers of Bengal who are temporarily taking care of it, and as regards the activities to be carried out, they will take opportune decisions in agreement with the Archbishop of Calcutta. Don't be dismayed by the many and grave difficulties which you will meet with and remember always the words of the Apostle: "*Omnia possum in eo qui me comfortat* – I can do all things in him who comforts me."[13]

Thus, the Salesian Society accepts the Prefecture Apostolic of Assam. On hearing about this, the Salvatorians send their best wishes to the Salesians. Fr. Christopher Becker, the former Prefect Apostolic, on 28th September 1921 writes a letter to Fr. Albera expressing his desire to meet the new Superior of Assam Mission. In his monumental work in German, *Im Stromtal des Brahmaputra*, referring to the transfer of the Assam Mission, he writes about the difficulties that the future missionaries will have to face in Assam:

> On leaving Assam, a beautiful Indian custom comes to my mind. When a person in India wants to make a gift to some friend on the occasion of some festive occurrence, he makes use of a plate of fruit or of a bouquet of flowers. But the fruits and the flowers are only the external appearance. The real gift, such as gold, jewels, or

[12] Ibid. 5.
[13] Ibid.

precious stones, is hidden below the fruits or the flowers. The friend knows this very well and does not look at the external appearance. The German missionaries offer to the new evangelisers a big bouquet of flowers, flowers of a sombre colour and without any scent: passionflowers...But this is only the appearance. The real gift lies below the flowers. Besides, the Divine Savour, the prototype of every Apostle, chooses for himself suffering and the Cross. This is the way He saves the world and redeems mankind. May the Lord grant that the sufferings of the first missionaries of Assam may bring Redemption and Salvation to all the people of that immense region on whose behalf they offered the best of their efforts.[14]

That the Salesians will have their share of suffering and trials, is mentioned also by Fr. P.H. Josson in his work, *The Mission of West Bengal*:

"In this very difficult Mission of Assam, the Salesians will find a field of work open to every form of genuine self-sacrifice and the most perfect form of abnegation."[15]

3. On the Way to Assam[16]

3.1 The Call

Once the Assam Mission is accepted, the main preoccupation of Fr. Albera is to find the required personnel for the first expedition. He writes a circular letter immediately to all the Provincials of Europe entreating them to find among their subjects two young and enthusiastic priests who are ready to work in the new mission, and to send them to Turin immediately.

The urgency noted in the letter is very opportune, as the Cardinal Prefect soon writes to Fr. Albera asking him to organize the expedition to leave at the earliest. He also mentions that there should be at least six members in the first batch and that they should reach Assam by November of that year. They are told to go to Calcutta, and receive the necessary instructions from the Archbishop there. In the meantime, the Procurator General of the Society, Fr. Munerati, contacts the superiors of the men

[14] Ibid. 6.

[15] Pianazzi, *Ardisci e Spera,* 44

[16] Ceria, *Annali della Societa' Salesiana*, Vol. IV, Torino: SEI (1951), 422–426; Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 33–61; Pianazzi, *Ardisci e Spera,* 21–29.

and women religious who are already working in Assam. They are the Irish Christian Brothers running a school in Shillong; the Loreto Sisters who have a convent and a school there; and the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions who have an English-medium school for day-scholars, an orphanage, a dispensary, a work-room for girls, and a boarding for local girls in Shillong, and other foundations elsewhere in Assam. Fr. Munerati makes it a point to mention to them that the Salesians are going there out of obedience, and that they rely very much on their friendship and co-operation. To have taken these steps makes a good impression on all.

Fr. Louis Mathias, rector of the Salesian house of Pedara in Sicily, is chosen to lead the first batch of missionaries. Already towards the end of July itself he gets an inkling of what is happening from Fr. Calogero Gusmano, the secretary to the Superior Council of the Society. In the *postscript* of a letter conveying the answer of the superiors to a cleric who has applied for the Missions in China, Fr. Gusmano adds that the superiors have accepted a new Mission in India, the Prefecture Apostolic of Assam. He concludes the *postscript* by asking him whether he is willing to go as a missionary to Assam.

This suggestion touches a familiar chord in him as he has been dreaming to be a missionary right from his younger days. At once he realizes that in the desire of the superiors there is the manifestation of God's Will in his regard. He writes in his memoirs: "The die is cast! There is nothing else for me to do but to wait for the dispositions of the superiors. In the meantime I am praying and...dreaming about India, Assam, Bhutan, and Manipur."[17]

On 9th September the official intimation arrives. The Rector Major has appointed him to be the leader of the first missionary expedition to Assam. The dream is becoming a reality. At once he goes to the library to look for material on India and particularly on Assam. Everything is of interest to him, everything is fascinating and feeding his imagination. However, he has to keep the secret to himself and go to preach a retreat to the confreres gathered in S. Gregorio (Catania). At the end of the retreat, the Provincial of Sicily, Fr. Minguzzi, breaks the news to the confreres, expressing his joy and just pride in the choice of Fr. Mathias as the leader of the expedition. Fr. Mathias goes back to Pedara to hand over charge to

[17] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India*, 1.

his successor and to say goodbye to the confreres and the people who give him a touching and memorable farewell. He is moved to tears by the expression of love and affection from the people among whom he has been working. Everything leaves an indelible impression on him.

After this he leaves by train for Rome where he has to meet the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda and Fr. Christopher Becker, the first Prefect Apostolic of Assam, who fortunately is in Rome. The meeting with Fr. Becker is particularly enlightening for the graphic description he receives about those far away places; the difficulties which the Salvatorians have overcome; the great hopes the numerous tribes of the mountains are offering with their favourable disposition towards Christianity; the description of Shillong as "the city of flowers", with its beautiful church and flourishing Catholic institutions, etc. "I would have remained for days listening to him...I come out all full of joy from that meeting that has brought me in the very heart of the Mission."[18]

He presents himself to the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide, Cardinal Van Rossum, C.S.S.R., a tall and straightforward man from Holland who receives him cordially. He expresses great satisfaction at the acceptance of the mission by the Salesians. He recommends that the Salesians remain with the Jesuit fathers till they are able to gain sufficient mastery over the language and learn the customs of the people. He suggests to them to be in Calcutta by 21st November, in order to attend the Episcopal consecration of Msgr. Ferdinand Perier, S.J., as auxiliary to Archbishop Meuleman, S.J. Unfortunately this does not work out.

He visits also the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation, Msgr. Laurenti, who tells Fr. Mathias to establish good relationships with the local authorities.

In the meantime the Procurator General, Fr. Dante Munerati, obtains a private audience with the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XV. During the meeting the Pope gives the impression of being busy and enquires about Cardinal Cagliero and about the health of Msgr. Marenco who is seriously sick in Turin. There is only a brief hint at the topic closest to Fr. Mathias' heart and the audience closes with a word of encouragement and a blessing.

[18] Ibid. 34.

Before leaving for Turin, F. Mathias visits the Major Basilicas and prays at the tomb of St. Peter and Paul to obtain through their intercession apostolic ardour and courage to face the difficulties and obstacles that await him.

In Turin Fr. Albera welcomes him in a fatherly manner. He writes in his memoirs: "The venerated Rector Major, Fr. Albera, receives me in Turin as Don Bosco himself would have done, so also all the other members of the Council. My good friend, Fr. Gusmano, informs me of the circular letter sent to all Provincials of Europe asking for personnel for the new mission."[19]

3.2 The Recruitment of Personnel

The search for the required personnel to constitute the first expedition to Assam is a big challenge that the major superiors face now. After much effort, including the Circular to the Provincials of Europe, they manage to put together a small band of missionaries, all of them priests. Here is the first list:

1. Fr. Louis Mary Mathias, aged 34, French.
2. Fr. John Deponti aged 34, Italian.
3. Fr. Emanuel Bars aged 32, Spaniard.
4. Fr. Joseph Gil aged 36, Spaniard.
5. Fr. Joseph Hauber aged 43, German.
6. Fr. Paul Bonardi aged 32, Italian.

Fr. Bede Mc Conville, from Liverpool, born of Irish parents, is to be the 7th one in the list but at the last moment he opts out. To his great surprise, Fr. Mathias notices that there is no lay Brother on that first list. He is convinced that a few lay brothers are indispensable in the missions and he speaks about it to Fr. Ricaldone, a member of the Superior Council and Councillor for Professional Schools. He also asks the permission to be able to speak about this to the members of the Superior Council gathered together in an extraordinary session. He is anxious to tell the superiors about what he has learnt from Fr. Becker in Rome regarding the needs and the possibilities of Assam Mission. He gets the opportunity to do so and he does it with great élan.

[19] Ibid. 36.

Emerging from the meeting, Fr. Ricaldone tells him: "You have spoken well. Have no fear. Just to start with, I will give you five lay Brothers. Are you happy?"[20]

The following Brothers are chosen:

1. Bro. Peter Aprile aged 24, Italian.
2. Bro. Mario Calzi aged 24, Italian.
3. Bro. Agostino Conti aged 34, Italian.
4. Bro. Laureano Santana aged 30, Spaniard.
5. Bro. Gumersindo Cid aged 28, Spaniard.

3.3 The Great Vigil

Practically all the parents of the departing missionaries arrive in Turin, as the solemn farewell ceremony is drawing near. Preparations are in full swing to get everything ready before departure. This being the first expedition to Assam, so many things need to be gathered. Besides, there are many formalities to go through, obstacles and difficulties to be overcome. It is rumoured that members of those countries that have remained neutral during the War will not be able to enter any British colony. This is the case with four Spanish confreres. But the greatest obstacle, which threatens to derail the missionary venture at the very start itself, is the fact that members of a Society or Religious Congregation not officially recognized by the British government will not be allowed to enter a British colony. The Salesian Society is one among them.

Fortunately, the British government nominates Cardinal Bourne, Archbishop of Westminster, to be the mediator between Religious congregations and the British authorities. Every application has to go through him. To facilitate matters the government authorizes Cardinal Bourne to choose from the various congregations an English confrere to countersign the various applications that are to be forwarded together to the concerned Ministry. The Cardinal chooses our confrere, Fr. Macey, to do this for us. Fr. Mathias writes in his memoirs: "How not to see in all this the hand of Divine Providence?"[21]

All the documents and passports are ready. Fr. Mathias is about to leave for London to obtain the required visas, but is stopped in Turin for the farewell ceremony. In a solemn and impressive ceremony on 23rd

[20] Ibid.37.
[21] Ibid.39.

October 1921, the Salesians in Turin bid farewell to the missionaries leaving for India, and others leaving for South America. Msgr. Castrate, representing Cardinal Richelmy, presides over the function. He delivers an excellent farewell speech and gives the crucifix to the missionaries. The Rector Major, Fr. Paul Albera, is deeply moved. This is to be his last good-bye to the missionaries.

Fr. Mathias is to be the official speaker for the occasion. For nearly an hour he keeps the audience spellbound. Naturally, he speaks on the Assam Mission. He describes it in detail as if he has already been there, calling it 'The Incomparable', 'Our Promised Land,' 'Our New Patagonia'. Speaking of the great variety of languages and dialects spoken in that region – as many as 167 – and of the difficulty to be understood by all those peoples, in a moment of ecstasy, he exclaims: "We Salesians will speak the language of the Lord and shall repeat the miracle of the first Pentecost. As on that occasion the various peoples understand the language of the Apostles, so now will the various peoples of Assam understand the Sons of Don Bosco."[22] Among his listeners there is a young man, Oreste Marengo, who is fascinated by Fr. Mathias' personality. In 1923 he will be in the first batch of young men who will go to Shillong to make the novitiate and who will be one of the eminent missionaries the Assam Mission will have. Successively he will be bishop of Dibrugarh, of Tezpur, and the Administrator Apostolic of Tura. He will go to his reward at the age of 92 on 30th July 1998.

Two days after the farewell ceremony, Fr. Mathias leaves for London to finalize all the formalities for the visas from the British government. He will have to book eleven berths on an English ship and fix the date and port of embarkation. Passing through France he stops at Lyons to meet the Director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith to solicit subsidies for the Mission. It is here at Lyons that he receives the sad news of the death of Fr. Paul Albera, the Rector Major. Though he desires to rush back to Turin for the funeral, he is advised to complete his urgent and important mission. In Paris he visits the Director of the "Holy Childhood" who promises help. On reaching London, he receives the welcome news that the British government has withdrawn the restriction for nationals of neutral countries and that, therefore, the way is open to the Spanish confreres. Cardinal Bourne receives him cordially. One of those days the

[22] Ibid.

Salesian Society is also officially recognized. The applications of the missionaries are validated by Fr. Macey, forwarded by His Eminence Cardinal Bourne and approved by the Minister for Colonies. All the obstacles, which seemed to be insurmountable, crumble in a very short time, as if by a miracle. Fr. Mathias instinctively thinks of the saintly Fr. Albera, and believes that it is he who has seen to it that the missionary expedition proceeds unhampered. Fr. Mathias books without difficulty eleven second-class berths on an English ship, *Kaiser-I-Hind* (the Emperor of India). Embarkation date is fixed for 23rd December 1921, from Marseilles.

From England Fr. Mathias crosses over to Germany. In Munich he has the satisfaction of meeting Fr. Becker who, once again, furnishes him with fresh information on Assam. Passing through Strasbourg in Alsatia, he stops for a few days to say good-bye to his relations, especially to a very dear FMA sister of his, who comes to meet him. On 12th December he is back in Turin.

Though he is convinced that everything is in order, a big surprise awaits him when he goes to the British Consul to endorse the passports. The Consul refuses to do so by saying he has not received any authorization from the Minister for Colonies. That same evening he leaves for Rome. The next day he gets all what is required from the British Consul General in Rome. Before leaving Rome, Fr. Mathias goes again to St. Peter's to ask for a special blessing on himself and his companions.

3.4 A Dream and a Motto

In Turin another surprise awaits him. The rector of the Mother House, Fr. Savarè, calls him apart and tells him: "What I am going to tell you and what I am going to show you, must remain strictly confidential. You are about to leave for India and it is only right that you should know what Don Bosco sees in a 'dream'. While being the assistant of the printers at S. Benigno Canavese, the superiors give us the famous 'dreams' of Don Bosco to print. These are to be sent to Rome for the Cause of Beatification. We are told to give back all the copies, as everything has to remain a secret. No one has to keep any copy for himself. Making use of a mental reservation, I have kept with me the 'proofs' of the dreams we have printed. I think it opportune for you to read the dream of Barcelona. I am sure you will go to India with greater confidence and courage."[23]

[23] Ibid. 42.

Today all of us know about the dream of Barcelona (1886), but at that time when the Church has not yet given her last word on Don Bosco's holiness, many things and his 'dreams' in particular cannot be exposed to the public. "My heart gives a start", writes Fr. Mathias, "when I read the words *"There...Calcutta."* Does this mean that Don Bosco, our good Father, has seen us on our way to mysterious India? If so, we can be trustful for the future, certain that our powerful help of Christians will help and protect us."[24]

On 18th December the missionaries go on a pilgrimage to Valsalice to pray at the tombs of Don Bosco and of Don Rua. There they stop to make the monthly "Exercise for a Happy Death." Before the venerated tomb of our Holy Founder and of his first successor, Fr. Mathias addresses a few words to his companions, inviting them to promise Don Bosco and Don Rua:

1) Always to do honour to our beloved Congregation;
2) To spread everywhere devotion to Mary Help of Christians;
3) To remain always faithful to the vows and to the Constitutions.

The next day they visit the birthplace of Don Bosco at Becchi, to refresh their memory of the youthful Johnny Bosco, of Mamma Margaret and of the prophetic 'dream at the age of nine'.

On reaching Valdocco, his old professor, Fr. Vismara, meets him and invites him to visit his *Alma Mater*, Foglizzo, where he has studied theology. He cannot say no to Fr. Vismara. That evening in Foglizzo the community is having an entertainment to which Fr. Mathias is invited. On the programme there is an *operetta*, "The boy Bosco". At the end of the second act, Johnny Bosco finds himself alone, as if lost, in the grip of anxiety and fear. He feels called for a great mission, but does not know how to go about it and what means to use. He feels totally discouraged, but at that moment an angel appears to him and says: "Do not be afraid, Johnny...*Ardisci e Spera!* Dare and Hope!" At that point, Fr. Vismara who is sitting beside him, as if inspired, tells him: "Fr. Mathias, what a beautiful motto for a missionary! Dare and Hope!" Deeply moved, Fr. Mathias answers: *"And this will be my motto."* Ever since he receives his mandate to lead the first missionary expedition to Assam, he has been on

[24] Ibid. 43.

the look out for a programme of life, a kind of motto that would synthesize all what he is feeling in his heart.[25]



The Pioneers On the eve of their departure from Turin
Fr. P. Ricaldone (centre) with Fr. L. Mathias on his left.

3.5 *In Viam Pacis* – "On the Way of Peace"

On 20th December, at 6 a.m., the missionaries gather in the room of Don Bosco that has been transformed into a chapel. Fr. Ricaldone celebrates Mass for them and wishes them farewell on behalf of the major superiors. He comments on a verse of the *Itinerarium Clericorum - In Viam Pacis* (on the way of peace). He develops the thought of peace so necessary for those who are going to proclaim peace: *evangelizers of peace*. He reminds them that to preserve and increase peace it is important to take care of certain relationships:

1) With God: a true spirit of piety.

2) With the representatives of God: obedience, respect and love

3) With one's neighbour: charity among the confreres, spirit of sacrifice, and total dedication to the young. "Devotion to Mary Help of Christians", he concludes, "must be the characteristic,

[25] Ibid. 44.

the consolation of the Salesians and especially of the missionaries of Don Bosco."[26]

At 8.30 a.m. the missionaries leave by train for Nice and reach there by evening and are cordially received by the rector, Fr. Cartier. The next day, 21st, is the feast of St. Thomas the Apostle. During Mass Fr. Mathias puts a very special intention. They are about to become "Indians" and they ask the Apostle of India to obtain for them light, strength, and a great faith in their great task for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. The following morning they leave for Marseilles, where that very evening, they are to board the ship that is to take them to India.

Fr. Antony Candela, a future member of the superior council who will be extraordinary visitor to India in 1937-38, is the rector of the Salesian Oratory of "St. Leo", Marseilles. He receives the missionaries most cordially. After lunch he takes them out to visit the city. On 23rd morning they say Mass at the majestic shrine of 'Our Lady of the Guard' to ask our Blessed Virgin to bless them on their journey to India.

On 24th December, vigil of Christmas, at 6 p.m. their ship sets sail for India. On board are 400 passengers, mostly British nationals and Protestants who are officers, and industrialists. There is also an Irish Carmelite priest, who speaks French fluently and kindly puts himself at their disposal. It is really a great fortune for them who can hardly speak just a few words of English.

The commanding officer kindly puts at their disposal the dining room of the economy class for the midnight Mass. The Carmelite priest celebrates the solemn high Mass, with Fr. Mathias at the piano to accompany the singing, together with a Maltese gentleman playing the Cello. The assembly consists of about 50 persons, including some members of the crew. About 20 of them receive Holy Communion. At the end of the Mass, Fr. Mathias gives to each one a medal and a picture of Mary Help of Christians.

On 28th December they touch Port Said, where they leave the ship temporarily to visit the city. In the afternoon of the same day they enter the Suez Canal. On 29th they enter the Red Sea, and their imagination is filled with biblical reminiscences: Pharaoh, Moses, the Israelites, the Egyptians, the people going into the midst of the sea on dry ground. ...

[26] Ibid. 46.

31st December is the last day of the year and Fr. Mathias writes the very first letter to Fr. Philip Rinaldi, the Prefect General of the Society, giving him news of their journey. It is also the last night of 1921, next day "the first year of their missionary life will begin." While the passengers celebrate the end of the year by merry-making and dancing, the missionaries gather together on the stern of the ship to sing the *Te Deum*, to thank the Lord for their missionary vocation and for all the blessings granted to them, especially in the last days of the year. "The year 1921", writes Fr. Mathias, "is about to end. I think with trepidation at what the New Year will bring to us all. But soon I remember my motto, *Dare and Hope!* and I go to bed more calm, repeating the last words of the *Te Deum*: *In te Domine speravi; non confundar in aeternum* – in you Lord we put our trust; we shall not be put to shame."[27]

On 1st January the commanding officer puts the hall of the first class at their disposal for celebrating Holy Mass, again presided over by the Carmelite priest. In the afternoon the ship touches Aden. The missionaries take the chance to visit the city mainly to post their letters to Europe. They also go to visit a church, not very far from the port, and there with great joy they meet the Capuchin fathers of the Tuscan Province. Msgr. Evangelista Vanni, the Vicar Apostolic, receives them with open arms. They cannot imagine at this moment that 15 years later the same Msgr. Vanni be made Archbishop of Agra at the death of Msgr. Bernacchioni who would receive the Salesians in his own diocese at Saharampur, near Delhi, and would be a true father to the sons of Don Bosco.

When Fr. Mathias goes back to the ship, he notices an Indian gentleman who is crying bitterly. The wife, seemingly a European, sitting at his side is trying to console him. When Fr. Mathias asks the reason for his crying, the lady tells him in perfect French that her husband has just received the news of the death of his brother. Fr. Mathias offers to say a Mass for the repose of his soul, thinking that he too is a Catholic. Instead, the husband, Mr. Supermantosh, hailing from Bengal, is the only catholic in his family. He is very grateful to Fr. Mathias for praying for his dead brother and from that time onwards he becomes a very generous benefactor of Fr. Mathias and of the Salesians in Assam, supplying to them for many years the needed milk free of cost.

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[27] Ibid. 50.

On 6th January 1922 they arrive in Bombay.[28] No one awaits them there. They have with them the address of St. Xavier's College run by the Jesuit fathers, and with some difficulty they manage to find the place. The fathers who know of their arrival but not of the exact day, receive them with exquisite cordiality. The Minister, Fr. P. Dhur, from Luxembourg, takes charge of them. He sees to it that the heavy luggage is taken immediately to the station and that their berths are booked on the train for the following day. They board the train for Calcutta at 1.30 p.m. and reach there on 9th January after 46 hours journey. A Jesuit priest is waiting for them at the station with a bus and he takes them to St. Xavier's College, Park Street. Passing through a good portion of the city, they are surprised to see so many big palaces. Calcutta, in fact, is known as 'The City of Palaces'.

After a meal, they go across to the Archbishop's House to greet Msgr. Perier, only recently consecrated Coadjutor bishop, and Fr. P. Weiss, the Superior of the Jesuits, who both are extremely kind to them. Msgr. Perier, in the absence of the Archbishop, invites Fr. Mathias to stay with him so as to be able to acquaint him with the past and present situation of the Assam Mission. The other missionaries have a chance to go around a little visiting the second Capital of the then British Empire. They are amazed at the great traffic and the throng of people in the streets. They stop to admire the majestic and colossal 'Victoria Memorial'. But soon they also realize how Calcutta is indeed a city of contrasts. They see splendid avenues and very narrow, winding and dirty lanes; big palaces and squalid, dreary, wretched huts without light; rich merchants and numberless beggars. The next day the missionaries go to visit the zoo and the botanical garden. Fr. Mathias remains back to be able to discuss with Msgr. Perier matters important to him. Thus, Msgr. Perier begins to shower his fatherly attention towards the Salesians, a kindness that he continues till the end of his life. In the 13 years that Fr. Mathias spends in Assam, he finds in him his greatest support and considers him the first and the greatest benefactor. Before leaving Calcutta they visit the old quarter called Murghihatta, where stands the Cathedral and the diocesan press called 'The Catholic Orphan Press." Three years later, in 1925, Msgr. Perier will

[28] Today's name for Bombay is Mumbai. We shall continue using the name Bombay for most of this work.

entrust to the Salesians the care of the Cathedral and they will become the owners of the press. The dream of Barcelona will come true shortly!

Their stay in Calcutta has been enjoyable and fruitful, particularly for Fr. Mathias. He gets a clearer idea of the Assam Mission, its problems and its immense possibilities. "No! I have not made a mistake in accepting to come to India", he writes, "now I know that on the mountains and in the Assam valleys there live numerous tribes well disposed towards our holy religion. It is only a question of having a bit of patience, and in the mean time prepare the plans for our unfailing success."[29] They take leave of Msgr. Perier and of the good Jesuit fathers, who have been extremely good and kind to them. They leave for Sealdah Station and at 16.42 leave the Bengal Metropolis on their way to Assam.

[29] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India*, 61.

CHAPTER II
SHILLONG
1922: A YEAR OF APPRENTICESHIP[1]

1. *ET Mater Jesu erat ibi* – "And the Mother of Jesus was There" 2. The Catholic Institutions of Shillong 3. The Missionaries become Students again 4. A Journey and an Acquisition 5. The Dispersion of the Eleven 6. The Sisters in Raliang 7. The Father's letter 8. In the Jungle 9. The New Superior 10. The First Feast of Mary Help of Christians 11. New Experiences 12. Smoking is Forbidden 13. Transfer of Powers: Fr. Lamberghe Leaves Assam.

On the morning of 12th January1922 the missionaries reach Amingaon station, on the right bank of the Brahmaputra River. They cross over by steamer to Pandu ghat on the opposite bank.

At Pandu they find Fr. P. Lefebvre, S.J., the vice-administrator of Assam Mission, waiting for them with a truck. They head for Gauhati, a few kilometers to the North on the bank of the river. Gauhati is first the Capital of the Kingdom of Kamrup, under the Ahoms, and is now the Capital of Assam Province under the English. It is the first residence of Fr. Jacopo Broy (PIME), who stays alone here for eighteen years.

The Catholic Mission owns a big piece of land in the very heart of the city. The missionaries are impressed to see on one side the residence of the Father – a two-storey building and a beautiful church. On the opposite side there is a house that is occupied by the Catechist Missionaries of Mary. Fr. Carbery, an Irish Jesuit, the resident missionary is on a tour visiting his Catholics working in the tea gardens. "Besides," Fr. Lefebvre remarks, "there is very little to do here in Gauhati. In a population of a little more than 20,000 inhabitants we have only 19 Catholics." "In our youthful enthusiasm," remarks Fr. Mathias, "we are thinking soon there will be only 19 non-Christians left". How far we are from the truth! After 40 years of our arrival, Gauhati still remains a non-Christian city."[2]

The next morning, on 13th January, they celebrate an early Mass, and at 7.30 a.m. leave by bus for Shillong. Shillong, 'the city of flowers', is 105 kms. from Gauhati, situated at an altitude of 2000 metres above sea

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[1] For this Chapter the sources are mainly: Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 61–97; Pianazzi, *Ardisci e Spera,* 45–52.

[2] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 64.

level. At 2.00 p.m., they reach Laitumkhrah, the seat of the Catholic Mission. Their hearts are thrilled at having reached at last, after 24 days, their 'Promised Land'.

The Papal flag, white and yellow, is fluttering over the beautiful and big church of the Divine Saviour. On the steps of the church a group of boys with Fr. Van Lamberghe, a Belgian Jesuit, and Brother Brisson, a Canadian Brother of the Holy Cross Congregation, welcome them in Italian: *Buon giorno, Padri* – 'Good afternoon, fathers!' Deeply moved the missionaries respond to their greeting and enter the church to thank God and the Holy Virgin for Her visible protection during the long journey.

1. *Et Mater Jesu erat ibi* – "And the Mother of Jesus was there"

While they are still praying before the Blessed Sacrament they hear Bro. Calzi exclaiming excitedly: "Fr. Mathias, Fr. Mathias, Mary Help of Christians is here!" Fr. Lefebvre who is by the side of Fr. Mathias smilingly remarks in an undertone: "These good Italians, cannot keep quiet even in the Church!" "In the meantime" – remarks Fr. Mathias – "I too, realizing that it is indeed the statue of Mary Help of Christians placed on a side-altar, full of emotion exclaim: *Et Mater Jesu erat ibi!* All, leaving Fr. Lefebvre alone in the middle of the Church, move towards the *Madonnina*, who seems to smile and 'welcome' us his children coming from far. Fr. Lefebvre comes behind me and asks in French:

"What is all this fuss about?"

"It is the statue of Mary Help of Christians," I answer, "it is our Madonna, Don Bosco's Madonna!"

"What do you mean by Don Bosco's Madonna?" – queries Fr. Lefebvre somewhat annoyed – "It is the Queen of the Apostles. All Catholics here venerate Her as the Queen of the Apostles."[3]



Et Mater Jesu erat ibi – and the Mother of Jesus was there (Jn. 2.2)

[3] Ibid. 66f.

An excited discussion takes place between the Jesuit Father and the Salesian who wants to defend his Madonna. He tries to explain the origin of the picture of Mary Help of Christians as drawn by the painter *Lorenzone* under the guidance of Don Bosco, of which the little statue is an imitation. Father Lefebvre does not seem to be totally convinced, but at least understands the reason for their joy and enthusiasm.

"At this moment" – remarks Fr. Mathias – "we understand many things: the reason why the journey has gone so smoothly; the reason why all the obstacles have just vanished; the reason why all receive us so cordially; and, above all, the reason why we are all so full of zeal and enthusiasm. ...I have no more doubts. 'Our' Madonna really wants the Salesians to come to these far away lands and She gives us a proof of it, She has come to prepare the way for us. Our first preoccupation is to give back to our Madonna the royal sceptre that, we do not know how, She has lost. By so doing we want to give her back the symbol of her dominion over our hearts, over our missionary work and over the innumerable souls we want to bring under Her mantle."[4]

For a long time Fr. Mathias tries to understand how that statue of Mary Help of Christians could have reached Shillong and why it is venerated here under the title of 'Queen of the Apostles'. The answer he gets later in 1929, when he goes to Rome for the Beatification of Don Bosco. He gets the opportunity to pay a second visit to the Generalate of the Salvatorian fathers. It is there that the enigma is solved! It is to be noted that the Salvatorians venerate their Patroness Mary as *Regina Apostolorum* - Queen of the Apostles. One of them, a certain Fr. P. Augard, while working in the Assam Mission, goes to Europe for some rest. Passing through Turin he visits the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians at Valdocco. He is greatly impressed by the big picture on the main Altar. Seeing the Madonna of Don Bosco surrounded by the Apostles, he thinks that the same Madonna can as well be venerated under the title dear to them. Visiting the *Alto Adige* region, he stops at *Ortisei,* a place famous for excellent woodwork, and there he sees a statue of Mary Help of Christians. He buys it, brings it to Shillong and presents it to the people as 'Queen of the Apostles', the Patroness of their Society. All these circumstances confirm Fr. Mathias in his belief that God's Providence and the intervention of Mary Help of Christians are guiding all events. This very same statue, some years later, 1936, miraculously escapes a devastating fire that destroys

[4] Ibid. 67.

the magnificent Our Lady's House, the seat of the Novitiate and of the Studentate of philosophy and theology. Now it is kept in the novitiate at Sunnyside.

2. The Catholic Institutions in Shillong.

From the Church Fr. Lefebvre leads the missionaries to their rooms and then to the refectory where a good lunch is waiting for them. In the middle of the dining table, there is a big cake with the words: "The Loreto Sisters wish a hearty welcome to the new missionaries!" In the afternoon, Fr. Lefebvre takes them to visit the two convents of sisters on either side of the hill on which stand the "Catholic Institutions."

At this time all the Catholic institutions in Shillong are concentrated on two hills separated by a public road. The parish church and the residence of the Prefect Apostolic stand on the first hill. On both the sides of the church there are two long buildings housing the offices, the private rooms, the refectory, the library and the guestrooms. The whole complex gives the impression of a big aeroplane.



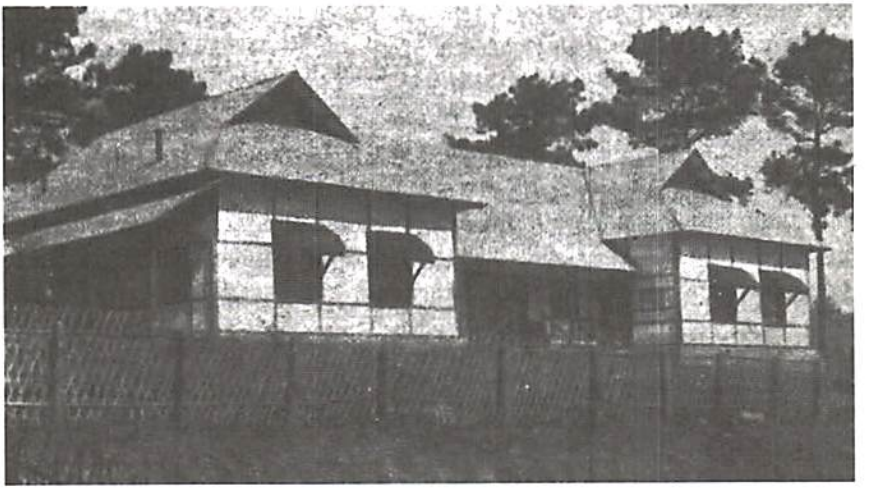
Shillong: The Salvatorians' Church and Mission House
At the Salesians' arrival in January 1922

On the same hill, to the left, there stands the convent and school of the Irish Loreto Sisters who are preparing British and Anglo-Indian girls for the 'Senior Cambridge' examinations. On the right, the Sisters of our Lady of the Missions have an orphanage for the Khasi girls, a workroom, a dispensary, and a home for the aged. They are also administering the

St. Mary's Middle English School for about 200 Khasi girls. They have taken the place of the German sisters who have been repatriated during the war.

On the opposite hill stands St. Edmund's College administered by the Irish Christian Brothers, who have a boarding for about 120 boys whom they are preparing for the 'Cambridge' examinations.

Between the two hills, by the side of the public road, there is 'the St. Antony's School and Orphanage' for boys with about 50 boarders and 300 day scholars. On the hill on which the Mission stands, between the Prefecture Apostolic and St. Mary's school, the Salvatorians have put up a building, which was functioning as a technical school with a small press. At the time of the arrival of the Salesians, it is used as a workroom for girls under the direction of the sisters.



Shillong: The Technical School of the Salvatorians

All that complex of works is a clear witness to the organizational genius of Msgr. Becker, and to the patient and persevering work of the Salvatorians. Fr. Mathias realizes that the nucleus of the Mission is solidly built. It will be the task of the Salesians to expand it outside Shillong.

After visiting the Catholic institutions, in the evening, the missionaries gather together in the church to conclude that memorable day by singing a solemn *Te Deum* of thanksgiving.

The 15th of January is a Sunday, their first Sunday in Shillong. In the morning three of them go to say Mass in the Catholic institutions. At 8.00 a.m. there is a solemn Mass celebrated by Fr. Lefebvre. The Salesians sing the Mass *Te Deum* by Perosi, in two voices, and various polyphonic hymns, which are much appreciated by those present.

At midday, Fr. Mathias gives a conference to the group on the theme suggested by the first reading of the Mass of the previous day, feast of St. Hilary: the recommendation of St. Paul to his disciple Timothy: *Predica verbum, insta opportune et importune* – "Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season" (2 Tim.4: 2). "This" he says "will be our programme of life as missionaries."

In the afternoon, they pay a visit to the cemetery, wich they find well kept, and pray at the tombs of the first missionaries. Towards evening, after the solemn benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, they receive the official "welcome" by the Khasi people, to which Fr. Mathias responds in French. He tells the people how happy they are at having found in the church their Madonna, 'The Help of Christians.' Fr. Lefebvre translates the talk and tells the people about the joy of the new missionaries in finding in the church of Shillong the statue of the Madonna as conceived by Don Bosco. At the end, he exclaims enthusiastically: "From now on, the Madonna which is placed on the left side of the altar, will not be venerated as 'Queen of the Apostles', but as 'The Help of Christians'."[5] Clearly Fr. Lefebvre is won over by the Salesians!

At the end of the gathering, all those who are present, over 500 in number, receive a picture each of Mary Help of Christians. Thus, 'Don Bosco's Madonna' enters for the first time, into the homes of the Khasis of Shillong.

3. The Missionaries become Students again

On the 16th the missionaries begin regular life with a timetable they have agreed upon on the previous Saturday. Great insistence is placed on the need for learning English at the earliest. They make tremendous effort to speak only English among themselves unmindful of the howlers and the poor figure they are cutting at times. To learn the pronunciation better, for a full month, every morning from 9.30 to 11.00 a.m. they go to

[5] Ibid. 72.

St. Edmund's College for English classes from the Irish Brothers. To this they add one more hour of class in the afternoon. There, on the school bench, Fr. Mathias becomes convinced of the necessity of inviting missionaries to come from Europe when still young, not like themselves who are in their 30s and 40s.

In the days that follow they receive some sad news. On the 22nd a telegram arrives announcing the death of Pope Benedict XV. On 27th another telegram informs them that Fr. Carbery, the missionary entrusted with the care of the Catholics in the Brahmaputra valley, has fractured his leg, which will be amputated later. This renders him unable to do any missionary activity amd calls for immediate substitution.

4. A Journey and an Acquisition

There is news that the government is auctioning a piece of land with a house in it in Jowai, the chief town of the Jaintia Hills District, about 50 kms from Shillong. Jowai is an important centre because it is on the way to Raliang, which already has a Catholic Mission. It is a stronghold of Protestants. Various sects are having absolute monopoly in the educational and religious field. The Catholics have not yet been able to set foot in that town. So it is a beautiful opportunity to establish a foundation there, which will serve as a springboard for future ventures. F. Lefebvre too is of the same opinion. Nay, it is he who suggests to Fr. Mathias to accompany him to Jowai to purchase that land. From there they will also visit the Mission of Raliang, 25 kms away. At this time the only means to reach there is to go on foot. Two days journey is required to cover the distance. The property is bought for Rs. 2000. Great is the dismay and the opposition of the Protestants so that they complain to the authorities in Shillong. The Governor of Assam, himself a Protestant, on meeting Fr. Mathias makes his displeasure known: "How is it that you go to plant your church in Jowai where there are already quite many other churches?" "Your Excellency," Fr. Mathias answers smilingly, "I am anxious to plant there the only true Church of Christ!" The Governor makes a grimace, but does not continue with the conversation.

The next day they proceed to Raliang where Fr. P. Grignard, S.J. is working alone. They visit the church, which needs extensive repairs, the house of the Salvatorian Sisters, now empty and dilapidated, and the orphanage, which is also in great need of repairs. The residence of the priest is poor, but decent. What impresses Fr. Mathias most is the vast piece of land that belongs to the Mission and that is quite fitting for an

agricultural school. Bro. Conti, who is an agriculturist and is accompanying him, is enthusiastic.[6]

5. The Dispersion of the Eleven

The day after their return to Shillong, Fr. Mathias gathers together the confreres to share his impressions about his first missionary journey. They make the Exercise for a Happy Death, recalling the last one they have made in Valsalice. In the closing conference Fr. Mathias tells them that, after much thought and after asking the opinion of the Jesuit fathers, he is of the opinion that the time has come for them to separate. This implies the suspension of the English classes. But pressing reasons force them to separate and start their apostolic work. Fr. Carbery, with a broken leg, is unable to continue visiting the Catholics in the plains, and Fr.Grignard is sick and insists on being relieved at the earliest. Fr. Mathias then gives them the first obedience. Fr. Hauber, Fr. Deponti, Bro. Conti and Bro. Calzi will go to Raliang;[7] Fr. Gil and Bro. Santana will go to Gauhati;[8] Fr. Bonardi will be in Shillong in charge of St. Anthony's School and orphanage, together with Fr. Bars, and Bro. Cid will take charge of

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[6] Bro. Agostino Conti: born on 6.1.1887 at Coriano (Rimini-Italy), makes his profession on 29.9.1908, comes to India in January 1922, dies in Calcutta on 21.10.1970, aged 93. An expert and successful agriculturist at Raliang he tries also at Saharampur, but the infertility of the soil is against his efforts.

[7] Mawkyndeng (Raliang) is in the Jaintia Hills District of Meghalaya, 100 kms away from Shillong. The first Catholic Missionaries, Frs. Gruchot and Thaddeus Hoffmann, reach Mawkyndeng in 1892. Despite the opposition from the Methodists, the missionaries engage in education, health care, and evangelization. They bring relief to all the people, especially in the wake of the devastating earthquake of 1898. They also establish an orphanage to care for the destitute children. The outbreak of World War I brings a sudden end to their mission. The Mission comes under the Jesuits, but they can hardly do anything due to lack of personnel. In 1922, Frs. Hauber and Deponti and Bros. Calzi and Conti are assigned to Mawkyndeng. They continue the work of evangelization. It is from Mawkyndeng that the faith spreads throughout the Jaintia Hills. Now there are four parishes carved out of the early parish of Mawkyndeng. The Salesian Sisters also stress on education to pave the way for evangelization. The parish has today 28 primary schools, 20 adult education centres, 4 M.E. Schools, one High School and one Higher Secondary School. Cfr. *History of Salesian Centres* Vol.VIII (Guwahati: Archival Publications, 1996), 68–69.

[8] The Salesians come to Gauhati in 1922. Don Bosco Technical School is started in 1926; it is transferred to Maligaon in 1969. In 1947 a college hostel is opened which lasts only for five years. On 1st February 1948, Don Bosco High School is opened together with a small boarding. The boarding is closed down in 1965. In 1959, the Provincial Office of the newly erected Province of Gauhati is set up. By 1971 the Provincial House is built to cater to the growing needs of the Province. Cfr. *History of Salesian Centres* Vol. VIII, 43.

the technical section, Bro. Aprile will be in Shillong looking after the kitchen and the sacristy. All receive the appointments with great enthusiasm. To complete their joy a telegram arrives that day announcing the election of the new Pope, Pius XI.

On 11th February 1922, as a group they go to thank the Irish Brothers for the month long English lessons. In the afternoon Fr. Mathias blesses the missionaries leaving for Raliang. Fr. Van Lamberghe wishes them a fruitful apostolate. The four with a knapsack each on their shoulders and a stick in their hand start the 100 km trek to Raliang. After a few days, the two destined for Gauhati leave Shillong. Thus, the sons of Don Bosco start their missionary adventure in Assam!

6. The Sisters in Raliang

In those days the Provincial of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions happens to be in Shillong. Fr. Mathias takes the opportunity to talk to her of the need to have the sisters in Raliang to take the place of the Salvatorian sisters and, thus, give a new life to the orphanage and to the school. The Provincial very kindly assures him of a positive response. In fact, to his great surprise, a week later the Provincial herself leads four sisters to Raliang.

7. The Father's Letter

On the last day of February the mail brings to the missionaries a most welcome letter from Fr. Rinaldi, dated 3rd February 1922. He writes:[9]

My dear Fr. Mathias,

We have received your letter from the high seas and from Calcutta, but nothing yet from the new Mission. I understand that you want to get some experience first before giving your impressions and this is a good thing. However, I cannot delay any further to send you my best wishes. The more so, because I was not able to see and wish all the confreres who make up your group.

During your journey I have accompanied you with my prayers for all and for each one in particular. The Assam Mission has for us such special characteristics, which makes it deserve a preferential

[9] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India*, 77.

attention. You are the last missionaries sent by Fr. Albera and have left for the Missions when the Congregation was orphan of its Father. Besides, it is the Mission made up of confreres of all nationalities; it represents the universality and the catholicity of our Society. You are not chasing away the German fathers, but are there to substitute for them and they, in moments of so much hatred, have been generous and good brothers to you. Again, this year is the centenary of St. Francis de Sales; hence our Mission must manifest the very special spirit of our Patron. Because of all these reasons, allow me to send you this first wish that wants to be the wish of our mother, the Congregation.

Be always united in the charity of Our Lord, Jesus Christ. Make it be felt that this is the source of true paternity, that we are all brothers, that we want to be true sons of Don Bosco, Salesians in name and in fact.

On the feast of St. Francis de Sales, we have prayed for you and we will continue to do so, because we are not unaware of the difficulties you will find, because of the language, of the climate, and of the religious pluralism present in that vast country.

Remember that D. Bosco saw his missionaries triumph under the banner of Mary Help of Christians. Put all your trust in this good Mother. With Her you will overcome the external and internal enemies that will not be lacking.

May the Lord bless you. Remember us in your prayers and be sure that, if we can help you, we want to cooperate with all our strength.

Wish for me the confreres one by one and consider me,

Yours affectionately,
Father Rinaldi.

8. In the Jungle

Fr. Lefebvre has great love for the mission and the Khasis. He is, therefore, feeling it much as he knows that soon he will have to leave this field of apostolate. The Salesians have taken charge of two centres already and he does not hide his regret. Not withstanding this, he wants to acquaint

Fr. Mathias with everything and make him familiar with the most difficult places.

At the beginning of March he invites Fr. Mathias to go with him on a missionary journey to the 'Bhoi Country', the most backward, unhealthy and farthest region of Khasi hills. In order to make sure that people are in the villages when one visits and also to make sure of a place to stay, it is customary before setting out on a visit to send someone ahead. Fr. Lefebvre sends the faithful and trusted Boniface, the *factotum* of the Mission.

The journey is full of adventures. They have to walk through forests, rice-fields, mountains and valleys. There are no paths or there are too many of them and it is not easy to choose the right one. It takes them four days to reach the village they intend to visit. The first three days they lose the way and end up in wrong villages late in the night. The first day, at 11.00 p.m., attracted by the sound of drums, they reach a village where there are no Christians. Though they are cordially received and given accommodation, it is not the ideal one to spend a restful night. The second day, again late at night attracted by the sound of drums, they reach a Mikir village, outside the 'Bhoi Country.' They are given shelter in a nearby hut, but again they can hardly close an eye due to the din of the drums, as the people are celebrating one of their feasts. The third night they land up in a village where there are Catholics who have apostatized. Grudgingly they are given shelter for the night, but refuse to return to the Faith, something that makes the two missionaries sad and disappointed.

Only in the afternoon of the fourth day they reach their destination. The sadness of the morning turns into joy in the afternoon, when they see Boniface and the whole village ready to welcome them. Then they come to know that their misadventure, however, turns out to be a blessing in disguise. "Had you been here the other night probably the elephant would have killed you," says the headman of the village. In fact, two nights before, the elephant in search of paddy, unroofed the hut they were supposed to have slept in. They stop for three days in that village. These are the first days of apostolic life for Fr. Mathias: catechism classes, baptisms, and confirmations, blessing marriages, visits to other villages. Fr. Mathias is extremely happy.

Their return journey is more consoling as Boniface is with them except for one difficulty. Their provisions for the trip are over. They have to eat what the people offer them and drink water from the streams and rivulets.

The last leg of the return journey turns out to be tough, especially for Fr. Lefebvre. He is mumbling some ejaculations and dragging himself with great difficulty. They reach back Shillong late at night. Nobody is waiting for them. Boniface prepares some food that they share and all three retire to bed. The first apostolic journey is over. But it cost them dearly, as Fr. Lefebvre who is a brave missionary endowed with a strong constitution and a great spirit of sacrifice, falls ill. Even though he is running a temperature, he wants to go down to Gauhati and Fr. Mathias goes down with him. Back in Shillong after over a month, he wants to preside over all the Holy Week services. On Easter Monday he collapses. A team of doctors try their best to bring him back to his feet again, but to no avail. He expires on April 19th. His last words are: "I willingly offer my life for the Assam Mission and that the Salesians may be able to do much good." His funeral turns out to be a grand affair. The Khasis love him immensely, as he has been a true father to them. Many people are seen weeping inconsolably. Fr. Mathias is convinced that Fr. Lefebvre has asked from the Lord the grace not to be separated from his beloved people and God has heard his prayer. The Khasi people have never forgotten the one who has loved them dearly. Fresh flowers adorn his tomb.



Fr. PAUL LEFEBVRE, S.J.
Mission Superior of Assam
1915-1922

9. The New Superior

On 24th April 1922, Archbishop Meuleman arrives from Calcutta, and remains with the missionaries till 16th May. Only three months have passed since the arrival of the Salesians, and they do not yet feel sufficiently equipped with the knowledge of the language to be able to take up the responsibility of the Prefecture. Hence Fr. Mathias begs the Archbishop to appoint Fr. Van Lamberghe as vice-administrator in the place of Fr. Lefebvre. The Archbishop grants the request and appoints Fr. Van

Lamberghe as the Superior of the Mission. Going back to Calcutta he has the joy of informing the Salesians by telegram of the election of Fr. Rinaldi as the new Rector Major, which he comes to know from the French paper *La Croix*. This news fills the confreres with a great joy, and they at once go to sing the *Te Deum* to thank the Lord for giving them such a virtuous and holy person, Fr. Rinaldi, as their Superior.

10. The First Feast of Mary Helps of Christians

To the great joy of the confreres, their big boxes containing, among other things, pictures and medals of Mary Help of Christians, arrive from Turin. On the eve of the feast, they present to the three religious communities of St. Edmund's, St. Mary's and Loreto a beautiful big oil painting each of Mary Help of Christians. They add to these a sufficient number of pictures and medals of the Madonna for the students, boys and girls. To St. Antony's orphanage they donate, besides the oil painting, a big picture each of Don Bosco and Dominic Savio with the motto, "Death rather than sin." They put aside hundreds of copies of the Novena to Mary Help of Christians to be distributed the next day to all those who will be coming for the Procession.

The devotion to Mary Help of Christians is already finding its way into the hearts of the Khasi people and the European Catholics of Shillong. A confirmation of this takes place on 24th May. Even though it is a weekday, a large number of people gather in the evening at 6.30 p.m. for the procession with the Statue of Mary Help of Christians. Slowly the procession begins to wind its way along the avenues and lanes of the Mission. The first halt is in front of the convent of the Loreto Sisters. Their beautiful grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes is all a twinkling of lights. The sisters and their pupils line up along both sides of the road and receive Our Lady with the singing of hymns. Here Fr. Van Lamberghe addresses a few words to them on Mary Help of Christians and thanks the community for the witness of faith they are giving by taking part in the function.

The procession resumes, and on reaching the grotto of St. Mary's convent, the statue is placed on a beautifully decorated dais prepared for the occasion. Here they recite the rosary and Fr. Mathias reads his first speech in Khasi, praising Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco. Fr. Van Lemberghe, interpreting the desire of the Salesians, makes a public consecration of the whole Assam Mission to the Madonna. From there the candlelight procession begins to the church where it is concluded with

the benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. All the participants are given a picture each of Mary Help of Christians.

In the evening, at about 9.00 o'clock, when all lights are switched off and a profound silence descends, the small Salesian community of Shillong is prostrate at the feet of Mary Help of Christians, to consecrate the whole Assam Mission to the Madonna of Don Bosco. Now it is being done in a private ceremony but later on a solemn public consecration will be done. Fr. Mathias with surplice and stole, Fr. Bonardi and Fr. Bars with surplice on and the Brothers with a heart full of emotion pronounce the formula of Consecration to Mary Help of Christians that has been prepared for the occasion.[10]

Our Blessed Mother must have been so pleased with the feast celebrated in Her honour and with the consecration made with such great fervour that she clearly shows her love by granting them a particular blessing. They are anxious, especially Fr. Bars, to revive the small press the Salvatorian fathers have set up and to start again the publication of the Khasi monthly *Ka Iing Kristan* – 'The Christian Family'. But the old place of the press is now being used as a workroom for the girls. Besides, there is no printer among the Salesian Brothers. The first difficulty is solved by Sr. Berchmans, the superior of St. Mary's, who spontaneously proposes to shift the workroom elsewhere. The Archbishop of Calcutta comes forward to solve the second difficulty. Being pleased with his visit to Shillong and being aware of the desire of the missionaries, he puts at their disposal a Jesuit Brother, Bro. Rome, the present director of the Catholic Orphan Press. More could not have been desired. At the beginning of June, the press comes alive once again and the publication of *Ka Iing Kristan* follows.

11. New Experiences

The monsoon season sets in. After the feast of Pentecost, Fr. Van Lamberghe invites Fr. Mathias to go with him to visit the mission centres of Cherrapunjee and Laitkynsew, overlooking the great Barak (Surma) valley. They have to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation. Fr. Mathias is happy to go, as he is keen to know more about the field of apostolate entrusted to them. Cherrapunjee, as we have seen earlier, is the place that receives the highest rainfall in the world. On the day of their visit Cherrapunjee receives 60 cm. of rain. The little church there has a tin roof and the deafening noise that accompanies the rain makes it

[10] Ibid. 86.

impossible to talk to the people. Fr. Van Lamberghe places himself in the centre of the church and speaking in a loud voice he gives a short instruction on the Sacrament of Confirmation. The next day they visit Laitkynsew from where they have a wonderful view of the Sylhet plains and the far away Surma and Barak rivers.

Back in Shillong, Fr. Mathias, thoroughly convinced of the need of learning English better, thinks of going to spend one more month with the Irish Brothers at St. Edmund's. He becomes their chaplain and during the day joins the classes of the boys making an effort to speak and make himself understood. One of the Brothers kindly offers to give him coaching lessons in the morning and evening and helps him to prepare his Sunday homily.

Fr. Gil has already been four months in Gauhati visiting the Catholics several times during that time. He feels the tedium of the work and as the heat becomes unbearable he decides to go up to Shillong for some rest. Fr. Mathias goes down to substitute for him. It is the month of August. The heat becomes suffocating, the mosquitoes become a menace and at night he can hardly sleep. Barely fifteen days have passed when one night he experiences severe stomach pain. He becomes restless in bed and spends the rest of the night in an armchair. In the morning, with great difficulty, he manages to offer Mass. He thinks that his last hour has come. He goes back to Shillong and reaches there in a critical condition. He is diagnosed as having a severe attack of typhoid. He recovers after a few days but only to have a relapse with serious complications, such as pleurisy and phlebitis. He thinks that there is no hope for him. He recalls how the first Superior of the Salvatorians dies a few months after arrival. Fr. Lefebvre dies after 3 months of their arrival. Does God want a third victim? His confreres take all possible care of him and are praying and asking others to pray to Mary Help of Christians to obtain a cure. He recovers in two months time and resumes celebrating Mass. During the month of October the Salesians increase their efforts to popularize the devotion to Don Bosco's Madonna. On the last day of that month our Lady gives them a beautiful gift, they get the first reinforcement of personnel, an international *quadrumvirate:* Fr. Raygasse, a French man; Fr. Tormo, a Spaniard; Fr. Piasecki, a Pole; and Fr. Mazzetti, an Italian.

12. Smoking is forbidden

The Salesians do not forget the solemn promise they have made to Don Bosco in Valsalice: "To faithfully observe the Rules and Regulations." On reaching India a case presents itself that is totally opposed to the

teaching of their Founder, the question of smoking. In Bombay, in Calcutta and, even more, in Shillong, the Jesuits insist that in tropical countries, such as India, smoking is a necessity. The Salesians give their reasons for not smoking, those given by Don Bosco himself: 1. As Salesians, according to the Preventive System, they have to be always with the boys and be of good example to them; therefore, it is not opportune for them to smoke. 2. They are members of a congregation that lives on charity. Their benefactors will have reasons to complain, should they know that their money is going up in smoke. 3. As Salesians they have no unusual penance to perform; abstaining from smoking is mortification willingly accepted by them.

These arguments, however, do not convince the old missionaries in India. It is Dr. MacDonald who comes to their defence. Fr. Mathias is still convalescing. Fr. Van Lamberghe is a chain smoker. He wants to win Fr. Mathias over to his side and, turning to the doctor who has come to visit him, asks:

> "Major, don't you think that Fr. Mathias, now being convalescing, can smoke a cigarette or two?"
> "Tell me, Father", asks the doctor turning to Fr. Mathias, "were you smoking before?"
> "No, never," answers Fr. Mathias forcefully.
> "Then, if you have not done before, don't begin now."
> And turning to Fr. Van Lamberghe, he continues:
> "Smoking is a habit that has no meaning and...no scope! It does not prevent sickness. Nay, its abuse causes many more of them."[11]

Something similar happens about a year later. Fr. Tormo[12] goes to Badarpur, a railway centre, in the Sylhet valley. He is going to substitute for the Jesuit Fr. Vial who, before leaving, tells him: "My dear Father, if you don't want to get malaria, you must start smoking." The Assam plains, as well as those of West Bengal, are highly malaria prone areas. In fact, Fr. Tormo after some months in that railway centre has a violent attack of it. When he gets better, his parishioners want to convince him that smoking is the only remedy against malaria. He is almost convinced, and writes to Fr. Mathias about it. Fr. Mathias writes back saying that he would soon

[11] Ibid. 94.

[12] Fr. Raphael Tormo: born at Cordoba (Spain) on 1.2.1881, makes his first profession on 27.9.1898, is ordained a priest on 24.9.1904, comes to India on 31.10.1922, dies at Uteri on 28.6.1964, aged 83.

be coming to visit him and they should discuss that point together. If it is really necessary, he will write to Turin to get a special permission for him. When, after some weeks, Fr. Mathias reaches the station of Badarpur, Fr. Tormo is waiting for him, together with Doctor Lee and his wife. They are Catholics and they invite the fathers for lunch in their own house. At the end of the meal the waiter passes round the cigars and cigarettes. Fr. Mathias declines the offer, and then turning to the doctor asks:

> "My dear doctor, you know that Fr. Tormo has had a violent attack of malaria. His parishioners want to convince him to smoke, as the smoke of cigarettes will keep mosquitoes away. What do you say about it?

"As a young man I got into the habit of smoking", the doctor answers, "but I would prefer now that I had not done so. Malaria attacks both smokers and non-smokers. Mosquitoes cannot bite the face, because of the smoke, but they bite hands and legs. Besides, your parishioners, he adds turning to Fr. Tormo, are chain-smokers, and yet they are suffering from malaria. If smoking was truly useful, I would have suggested it to my wife who would like to smoke, but it is neither useful nor, much less, necessary."[13]

13. Transfer of Power: Fr. Van Lamberghe leaves Assam

On the eve of their departure, Fr. Rinaldi gives to Fr. Mathias a plan of action: "In the first year, observe; in the second year, make your plans; but wait for the third year to implement them." Faithful to this programme, during the first year, they observe much. Being under the 'tutelage' of the Jesuits, they make efforts to moderate their youthful enthusiasm and are satisfied with making plans for the future.

The year is almost coming to an end. Fr. Mathias receives a letter from Fr. Weiss, the Regular Superior of the Jesuits of Bengal, in which he says that it is now time for the Jesuits to hand over their responsibility to the Salesians. He is, therefore, recalling Fr. Van Lamberghe and the Jesuits back to Calcutta. He only asks for the favour of allowing Fr. Letellier to remain a little longer in Haflong.

Gathering the confreres together, Fr. Matthias reads out the letter to them and asks their opinion on the matter. They are all of the opinion that

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[13] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India*, 95.

they are now sufficiently prepared to take over the administration of the mission.

Fr. Van Lamberghe, to whom Fr. Mathias shows the letter, is somewhat disconcerted. He too, like Fr. Lefebvre, is attached to the mission and the people. He admits that he will feel the separation very much, but realizes the necessity of it. When he goes to wish good-bye to the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions, in his simplicity, he expresses to Mother Berchmans his concern about leaving such a beautiful mission in young and inexperienced hands. To this Mother answers: "My dear Father, we are all like window panes; when one gets broken, we substitute it with another one that will do just as well, if not better."[14]

They decide that the handing over will take place on the first anniversary of their arrival in India. Fr. Mathias himself will accompany Fr. Van Lamberghe to Calcutta. It is for the Archbishop of Calcutta, who is still the Administrator of the Prefecture Apostolic, to effect the transfer of powers.

On the last day of the year, which is a Sunday, they sing a solemn *Te Deum* to thank God for all His blessings. He has not only protected them from many dangers, but has also sent them good reinforcement of personnel.

They have a farewell gathering in honour of Fr. Van Lamberghe who is getting ready to leave. On the eve of his departure they host a dinner to which they invite the Christians Brothers and a group of friends. Father Van Lamberghe speaks at the end of the meal wishing the Salesians great success. He also thanks them and expresses his great appreciation for their deference, obedience and cooperation. Fr. Mathias responds on behalf of the Salesians, thanking the Jesuits who have so wisely introduced them to the mission.

On the day of the Epiphany, the first anniversary of their arrival in India, Fr. Mathias accompanies Fr. Van Lamberghe to Calcutta. While still in Calcutta, his appointment as Prefect Apostolic of Assam, Bhutan and Manipur arrives from Rome. Together with the appointment letter, the Archbishop gives him also the accounts of the mission. "Here is the greatest source of headache", says the Archbishop giving him the accounts, "but have confidence in Divine Providence who will never abandon you."[15]

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[14] Ibid. 96.
[15] Ibid. 97.

CHAPTER III
THE FIRST YEARS[1]
1923–1926

1. Prefect Apostolic 2. Constructions, New Experiences and Acquaintances 3. The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Assam 4. A Dream becomes a Reality: 4.1 The First Novitiate 5. New Experiences 6. The Salesian Cooperators 7. Roses and Thorns 8. The Horizon gets Broader: 8.1 Bombay 8.2. Madras 8.3 Tanjore 9. Salesian and Missionary Formation 10. The Apostolic Visitor 11. The Salesians in Calcutta 12. The Flowering of Works: 12.1 The Shifting of the Works of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions 12.2 Our Lady's House 12.3 The Technical School 13. New Arrivals 14. Two Missionary Figures 15. The Festive Oratory 16. The Canonical Erection of the First Indian Province: 28.5.1926.

1923

1. Prefect Apostolic

When Msgr. Mathias comes back from Calcutta as Prefect Apostolic of Assam, Bhutan and Manipur, the confreres and the people give him a rousing welcome. Among the many gifts he receives there is a bamboo cane:

> "This," they say, "has a double purpose: the first is to support your still feeble leg, the second is to use it on us when we don't behave well."
>
> "I have to say," remarks Msgr. Mathias, "that it helped me for the first, but never for the second purpose."

As a first thing, Msgr. Mathias effects some changes in the placement of personnel:

- Fr. Raygasse: Rector and Parish Priest.
- Fr. Bonardi: Rector of St. Antony's orphanage and confessor of the community of the Apostolic Prefecture.
- Fr. Bars: assistant parish priest, councillor for the technical school

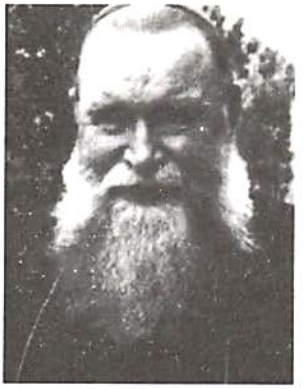
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[1] For this Chapter the main sources are: Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India*, 99–202 and Pianazzi, *Ardisci e Spera* 53–72.

and confessor of St. Anthony's orphanage.
- Bro. Santana: in charge of the tailoring.
- Bro. Gumersindo: in charge of the shoemaker's shop and assistant of the carpentry.
- Bro. Conti (recalled from Raliang): general assistant of the orphanage.
- Bro. Aprile: continues to take care of the main community, of the sacristy and of the infirmary.

The 13th of January is the first anniversary of the arrival of the Salesians in Shillong. Fr. Bonardi's chronicle[2] gives a vivid account of the first year's events. "How many events in such a short time! Moments of anxiety and moments of enthusiasm; little time to study and many activities; great hopes and plans for the future..."[3]

The appointment as Prefect Apostolic implies also the faculty of performing 'pontifical' ceremonies. The confreres insist that Msgr Mathias celebrate his first



Msgr. LOUIS MATHIAS, SDB
Prefect Apostolic of Assam, Bhutan, Manipur (1923-1934)
1st Provincial of the Indian Province (1926-1934)
1st Bishop of Shillong (1934-1935)

Msgr. Mathias is born in Paris on 20th July1887. In 1895 together with his parents he leaves for Tunis. In 1900 he enters the Salesian boarding school in Tunis. In 1903, the laws expelling Religious Orders oblige him, a postulant, to leave for Sicily. He makes his novitiate at San Gregorio, near Catania (Italy) and makes his first profession on 8th May 1905, and the perpetual profession on 6th October 1911, at San Gregorio.

From 1911 to 1913 he studies theology at Foglizzo and on 20th July1913 he is ordained a Priest. He obtains his Doctorate in Theology and Licentiate in Sacred Music. From 1915 to 1918 he is a Stretcher-bearer with the 140th French Infantry Regiment. On 31st July1918 he is taken prisoner. On 11th January1919 he is released from captivity. In 1920 he is made rector of St. Joseph Institute at Pedara (Catania). On 9th September 1921 he is appointed head of the first missionary expedition to Assam, and leaves Marseilles for India on 24th December 1921 as the leader of eleven Salesians. On 6th January 1922, Feast of the Epiphany, the missionaries arrive in

[2] *Cronaca Ispettoria Salesiana Nord India di S. Giovanni Bosco, 1921-1927*, in *Archivio Generale*, F.176 (Roma: Casa Generalizia, Salesiani, Via della Pisana, 1111).
[3] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India*, 100.

Pontifical Mass on 29th January, feast of St. Francis de Sales. Pontificals like the Mitre, Staff, etc., are missing, but the ingenuity of Fr. Bars and Fr. Bonardi provides all the needful from the Mitre to the Pectoral Cross, the Ring, and the pontifical Canon. Fr. Bars directs an excellent rendering by a mixed choir of *Missa Tertia* by Haller and polyphonic *motets* by Victoria.

At the end of February there arrives a new reinforcement of personnel: Fr. John Fergnani, an old missionary from China, and two Brothers: Bro. Hercules Matta, a printer, and Bro. Ernest Ferraris, an accomplished cabinetmaker.

The first year, as we have said, is a year of apprenticeship, a 'missionary novitiate', as Msgr. Mathias calls it. The Salesians study and reflect a great deal on the needs and possibilities of this very promising mission. They find a lot of precious material in the archives, the reports and correspondence between Msgr. Becker, the first Prefect Apostolic, his Superior General and the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide.

Bombay, and on 13th January they reach Shillong. On 15th December of the same year Fr. Mathias is nominated Prefect Apostolic of Assam, Manipur and Bhutan.

On 10th November 1934 he is consecrated bishop of the newly erected diocese of Shillong, together with Msgr. Stephen Ferrando, who is the new bishop of the diocese of Krishnagar. On 12th December 1934 Msgr. E. Mederlet, the first Salesian Archbishop of Madras, dies suddenly at Palikonda. On 18th February 1935 Msgr. Mathias is appointed Archbishop of Madra On 29th November 1952 he is transferred to the new archdiocese of Madras-Mylapore. In 1963-1964 he attends Vatican Council II. On 3rd August 1965 he dies at Legnano (Italy) before the last session of Vatican II.

Open-minded and far-sighted, Msgr. Mathias establishes, both in the North and in the South, houses of formation, studentates, schools, churches and chapels, new mission centres and social works such as, clinics, dispensaries, old age homes, and homes for the poor. His foresight, organizing qualities and experience make him practically the 'leader' of the Church in India and of the Indian hierarchy. He loves Don Bosco and the Salesian Congregation like a true son. "I am a Salesian from head to foot," he says on one occasion.

Now it is a question of finding the means to execute the plans Msgr. Becker has chalked out and which they now make their own. The means common to all missions are two: personnel and funds! But where to find them?

To get the required funds they think of setting up a *propaganda* office to find the means to propagate the Faith. The motto *Ardisci e Spera* –

'Dare and hope,' comes in very opportune. Msgr. Mathias invites the confreres to start an intense campaign to raise funds by contributing articles to reviews and by writing to private people to make their needs known. The appeals to the Salesian Bulletin in particular are of great help and the cooperators are generous. The bulk of the appeals to private individuals are mainly addressed to France. In Shillong itself, Msgr. Mathias makes some good friends, such as, the Pierroz couple, the Brown couple of Barisal, and the elderly Mr. Forbes. Another great helper for getting cheap machinery is a Russian Jew who has escaped from Russia at the time of the Russian Revolution, Mr. Comens. Providence also sends them an engineer and an architect who will direct their building projects in the person of Mr. Barrington. For a number of years he never accepts any remuneration for his services.

The Rector Major, Fr. Philip Rinaldi, comes to Msgr. Mathias' help in his struggle for *personnel.* Fr. Rinaldi himself has written on several occasions that, if they need anything, they should feel free to write to him. Msgr. Mathias answers that what they need is personnel, an abundance of personnel. "Assam needs Salesians," he writes, "Assam has urgent need of labourers!"

Besides 'desperate' appeals to Turin, Msgr. Mathias begins to look for some promising vocations in Shillong itself. That year itself he finds two candidates: an Anglo-Indian, Douglas Wollaston, a teacher at St. Edmund's, who will later be ordained a priest in Crocetta, Turin, and a Khasi, Andreas Well, who a few months later will just disappear.

These first 'aspirants' make it necessary to start a novitiate as well. Together with it, the idea that suggests itself on the school benches of St. Edmund's becomes more pressing: Why not to imitate the Jesuits who are getting their recruits from Europe soon after the novitiate? Nay more, why not to go one step ahead and get young aspirants to make their novitiate in the missions? Certainly it is a risk, but if the aspirants are well chosen, then it is a worthwhile risk. Msgr. Mathias, following his motto 'Dare and Hope', writes to the superiors, mentioning all the advantages that will accrue from such an experiment.

Without even waiting for a reply, Msgr. Mathias writes directly to Fr. Rinaldi asking him for permission to start a novitiate on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, 8th December 1923. He also asks him to send a group of novices from Europe. He hopes to have some young men

from the two houses of Tanjore and Mylapore and the one he has in Shillong itself, Douglas Wollaston.

Fr. Mathias waits anxiously for an answer from the Rector Major. It is the first such experiment in the history of the Catholic Missions. But he has great hopes too. And the answer comes on 4th September. Fr. Rinaldi approves and blesses the idea. A month later, on the 24th of October, the document also arrives by which the novitiate is canonically erected at Shillong, under the title of Mary Immaculate. Fr. Mathias remarks: "Our Lady really loves us."[4]



V. Rev. Fr. PHILIP RINALDI, SDB
Rector Major (1922–1931)

Born:	28.5.1856
First saw Don Bosco October	1861
Salesian:	09.09.1880
Rector:	1883-1892
Provincial in Spain:	1892-1901
Prefect General:	1901-1922
Rector Major:	1922-1931
Death:	05.12.1931
Declared Blessed:	29.04.1990

2. Constructions, New Experiences and Acquaintances

All the Salesians immerse themselves in feverish activity. They want to bring honour to the Congregation. They are eager not only to reactivate the works that have been languishing during the *inter regnum*, but to begin new activities and initiatives. It is a great joy for the Prefect Apostolic to see the good spirit and enthusiasm of all the confreres. It almost gives the impression that a building 'mania' has seized them all. It is necessary to build a suitable house for the novices who will be coming by the end of the year, a residence for the FMA Sisters in Gauhati, a workroom for the girls of the Sisters of Queen of the Missions in exchange for the one which has become a printing press again, at Raliang the church and the residence of the sisters need urgent repairs. What is considered most urgent is the house for the future novitiate and studentate of philosophy. Providence supplies the means required.

[4] Ibid. 105.

3. The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Assam

It is quite fitting that the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians should come to Assam. After all, is not this the Mission of Mary Help of Christians? Has she not preceded the Salesians to prepare a place for her children, and therefore, also for her daughters? The Sisters of the Queen of the Missions take the place of the German sisters at Shillong and Raliang. But the Catechist Missionaries of Mary are not substituted for in Gauhati. For many years nobody is taking care of the girls there.

Msgr. Mathias writes to Mother Daghero, the Mother General of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, requesting her to open a house in Gauhati. Towards the end of August, Mother Daghero writes back accepting the offer and promising that she will send the sisters before the end of the year. In fact, they reach Shillong on 8th December 1923, feast of the Immaculate Conception, under the leadership of Mother Innocenza Vallino, who has been for many years in Sicily and seems to have acquired the fiery temperament of the Etna!

With great enthusiasm the sisters apply themselves to learning English and Hindi. But even before they can pick up the rudiments of the same, they throw themselves into apostolate. Sister Giulia, endowed with extraordinary energy, gives life to a flourishing Oratory. Soon there start also the orphanage, the workroom, and the dispensary. As a result, the premises, which appeared to be too big at first, become quite inadequate. What wins over the general admiration of all is the sight of the white-clad sisters visiting the government hospital, passing through the various wards like an array of angels. Their superior, especially, full of life and enthusiasm, but still ignorant of the language, starts visiting the nearby villages.[5]

4. The Dream becomes a Reality

From the time of his arrival in Assam, Msgr. Mathias is dreaming of getting young recruits, who, full of enthusiasm and free time, would be learning the languages and the customs of the people, and later, when ordained priests, would be ready for the mission entrusted to them.

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[5] Today the FMA Sisters have six Provinces in India, of which three in the Northeast with their headquarters at Kolkata, Guwahati and Shillong, and three Provinces in West and South India with headquarters at Chennai, Bangalore and Mumbai.

Now these 'daring young men,' led by Fr. Stephen Ferrando, a heroic officer in the First World War, are about to arrive in Bombay. There are eight aspirants who have been admitted to the novitiate and their assistant, cleric Joseph Foglia. This is a historic missionary expedition, not only because it is the first of its kind, but because its leader, Fr. Ferrando, later will become the bishop of Shillong; and two novices: Oreste Marengo, will be the first bishop of Dibrugarh and Tezpur, and Administrator of Tura; and Eligius Cinato, will be the first Salesian Provincial of South India.

4.1 The First Novitiate

The 5th batch of missionaries (taking the FMAs as the fourth batch) reaches Shillong on 22nd December 1923, at about 8 p.m. The new missionaries receive a most cordial and solemn welcome. The church is lit up as on solemn occasions, the band is playing festive tunes, the boys are singing loudly, and repeating, 'Welcome Brothers'.

It is thought not opportune to start the novitiate immediately. The Christmas, New Year, and the Epiphany celebrations will bring in some distractions. Besides, the novices, who have just arrived from Europe, are eager to see something of the 'mysterious India.' Besides, a few Indian novices have still to arrive from Tanjore. As we have seen, so far three novices have gone to make the novitiate in Portugal.

The novitiate starts on 20th January 1924. Fr. Deponti is the novice master, with Fr. Ferrando as *socius* and Bro. Foglia as assistant. There are thirteen novices: eight from Italy, four from South India and among them are cleric Joseph Sandanam and Bro. Saverimuthu, and one from Assam, cleric Douglas Wollaston.

1924

5. New Experiences

On their arrival in Assam, the Salesians find a small number of 'catechists'. They try to animate and encourage them, realizing their importance in carrying out the mission. The catechist, in fact, in the missions, is not merely the one who teaches catechism, but one who is the right hand man of the missionary, a kind of 'lay parish priest'.

We have seen how anxious Msgr. Mathias and all the Salesians are to start an apostolate so dear to the heart of Don Bosco, *the apostolate of the press*. They consider it as a special blessing of Mary Help of Christians to be able to activate the little press that the Salvatorian fathers have started and which now is lying unused. With the help of Bro. Rome, S.J. and the head typesetter of the Catholic Orphan Press in Calcutta, the press starts functioning again at the beginning of June 1922. By the end of February 1923, there arrives Bro. Hercules Matta, a printer. By the Feast of Mary Help of Christians of the same year, they resume publication of the monthly *Ka Iing Kristan.*

Fr. Bonardi, in his chronicle, gives us an account of the publications during the first three years: a catechism, a Bible History, text books for the lower classes, a great number of commercials, both for Shillong and other places, three periodicals: *Ka Iing Kristan*, *Scintille Assamesi* – Assamese Sparks - a leaflet prepared by the novices for circulation among other formation houses; and *U Symbai* – The Seed. From Shillong, the Salesian Bulletin in English is being sent to 130 Cooperators.[6]

One of the initiatives of this year is *the care and resettling of the poor and destitute.* The recalling the words of Jesus who considers as done to him what is done to the little ones and the poor enthuse them to start taking care of the orphans and the elderly people. By the end of 1924, there are five orphanages with 162 orphans, both boys and girls. The Salvatorians have built a two-room hospice for the elderly and the sick, one each for men and women. At their departure, the hospice is closed down and it becomes dilapidated. Msgr. Mathias gets it repaired and enlarged in order to accommodate more people. Some girls, who are desirous of giving themselves to God's service, while remaining in the world, take turns to care for them. The hospice is named 'St. Vincent's Home' which will be further enlarged after the arrival of Fr. Vendrame. Later it will become a hospital under the care of the Missionary Sisters of Christ the King.

6. The Salesian Cooperators

The prophetic words of Don Bosco: *Salesian Cooperator will become synonymous with a good Christian,* urge the Salesians to do something in this regard. If they succeed in making the faithful, good

[6] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 143.

Salesian Cooperators, they will be *ipso facto*, according to Don Bosco, *good Christians*. At this time Pius XI, launches *Catholic Action*, and the Salesian Cooperators, in the opinion of the Salesians, will materialize the desire of the Holy Father.

In the month of May, a Congress is held in Shillong and the main themes discussed are: the teaching of catechism, and the laying of the foundation for the Salesian Cooperators' Movement. Regarding this initiative Msgr. Mathias writes to the Rector Major on 23rd November 1924, giving all the details of the plan. Unfortunately, there are practical difficulties, the main one being that of not having a person to implement these plans. They are too few and all are overburdened with various responsibilities. In the following year, they will hold the first Congress of Salesian Cooperators at Laitkynsew during the holidays of the clerics under the leadership of Fr. Bars. The movement has some flash of light, but it is not constant. Not everyone understands the importance of it.

The rector of St. Xavier College, Calcutta, Fr. P. Roland, S.J., asks Msgr. Mathias for the rules of the Salesian Cooperators, since he wishes to start the movement in Calcutta. Msgr. Mathias sends him the rules. A little later, however, he receives another letter from the same rector who, while thanking him for sending the rules, adds that the Ecclesiastical authority is not granting him permission to start the same. Msgr. Mathias then writes to his friend, Msgr. Perier, but the death of the Archbishop, Msgr. Meuleman, in July, puts a stop to all plans in this direction. When Msgr. Mathias goes down to Calcutta to take part in the funeral, he speaks to Msgr. Perier, the new Archbishop, about the Salesian Cooperators. Smilingly the Archbishop answers: "It is better to wait a little longer. When you Salesians will have settled here in Calcutta, it will be easier to think about it, don't you think so, Monsignor?"

In a letter to Fr. Ricaldone, the Prefect General, dated 12th May 1925, Msgr. Mathias will mention about the Archbishop of Calcutta giving to the Salesians ample freedom to expand their work and to begin the work of the Salesian Cooperators in Calcutta.[7] However, no more mention is made in *Quarant'anni in India* about the movement of the Cooperators during the rest of the years of Msgr. Mathias' tenure in office as Provincial.

[7] Cfr. *Archivio Generale*, F.176, *Provincial Archives* of Calcutta, C.70.2.

During the time of Fr. Scuderi, Fr.Uguet, Fr. Pianazzi and Fr. Alessi as Provincials, in chronicles, Provincial Council meetings, rectors' meetings, and Provincials' circular letters, mention, at times, is made of the Cooperators, but nothing is said about their activities or efforts being made towards strengthening the movement. Probably this is due to a deficient understanding of the Cooperator's identity. It seems that for most people, including Salesians, to be a Cooperator means only to be a benefactor of Salesian Works, and this is not appealing to many, especially to the Calcutta clergy. It gives the impression that the Salesians want to get all the benefactors for themselves. It is during the time of Fr. Ziggiotti as Rector Major that Fr. Ricceri, the then Councillor for the Cooperators and Past Pupils, will clarify the identity of the Cooperator according to the mind of Don Bosco and this process of clarification will continue with General Chapters XIX to XXII.

In the 1950s and most of the subsequent decade, the Cooperators' movement is practically non-existent in the Province. A new start is made in 1968. Sometime in the middle of 1968, the then Provincial, Fr. Stroscio, and his Vicar Fr. Lo Groi will ask the Archbishop, Msgr. Albert D'Souza, to allow the setting up of the Cooperators in Calcutta archdiocese. The permission is easily granted and units are set up in the schools of Don Bosco Park Circus, Don Bosco Liluah, Auxilium Dum Dum, and Auxilium Bandel. From this time onwards the Cooperators will grow in strength, but the growth will not be uniform.

7. Roses and Thorns

As the proverb goes, "there are no roses without thorns." The Salesians receive many beautiful roses during the year 1924, such as, the establishment of the FMAs in Gauhati, the Novitiate in Shillong, the Salesian Cooperators, the apostolate of the press and the flourishing of apostolic works. Other roses will be: the blessing of the foundation stone of the new Novitiate and Studentate of philosophy on 19th October 1924; the arrival of the second batch of novices led by cleric Igino Ricaldone, the nephew of the Prefect General of the Salesian Society and future rector Major, Fr. Peter Ricaldone. This is the first part of the 6th missionary expedition which will be followed by the second one led by Fr. Costantino

Vendrame,[8] who, in the words of Msgr. Mathias, will become 'the Francis Xavier of Assam',[9] with three more novices, two clerics and one brother.

Thorns are not missing either. A picnic is organized to Upper Shillong. During the return journey, while some are walking back, a few others, Fr. Bonardi among them, are traveling on bicycles. At one moment those who are walking are horrified to see Fr. Bonardi lying by the side of the road unconscious and bleeding profusely from the head. They carry him home where he regains consciousness, but is complaining of severe pain in the head. The doctor is called in, but there seems to be very little hope of survival. A renowned surgeon, who happens to be in Shillong on holiday, is summoned. He opines that only a delicate surgery can save him and fixes the operation for the following day. During the night Fr. Bonardi's condition worsens. They administer to him the sacraments for the dying. With a broken heart Msgr. Mathias goes before the Blessed Sacrament and weeps like a baby.

At that moment an inspiration comes to him. He has with him a little piece of cloth that has touched Don Bosco's head. Full of faith he

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[8] Fr. Vendrame is a legendary figure in the history of the Assam Mission. He is born on 27.8.1893 at S. Martino di Colle Umberto (Italy). He makes his novitiate at Ivrea and the first profession in 1914. During World War I he serves in the frontline. Back to the Salesian house of Chioggia in 1919, he begins the study of theology and is ordained a Priest in 1924. On 23.12.1924 he reaches Shillong. He will be 32 years in India, and becomes the *Apostle of the Khasis*. He starts a movement of mass conversions which brings the number of Khasi Catholics, from a few hundreds on his arrival at Shillong to 30,000 on the day of his death, on 30.1.1957, aged 64. During the Second World War he is interned first at Mawlai itself and then at Deoli, made Rector of the interned confreres, then at Dehra Dun where he succeeds Fr. Scuderi as parish priest of the internees. Not allowed to return to Shillong, he goes to Madras and is made parish priest at Wandivash. Here he learns the language and the customs of the people and makes many conversions in his six years of stay in the South. Back to Shillong, he is asked to open a parish at Mawkar, the stronghold of the Protestants. He alone can make a break through, conquering everything and everybody, working alone practically all the time. It is not easy to live and work with a hero! After six years of hard work, Mawkar has 2000 Catholics. At his funeral, a Protestant pastor remarks: "Fr. Vendrame! Alone he is worth more than 12 of our pastors!" (Msgr. Mathias speaks of 10 in page 192.) He wants to die a martyr. Terrible bone arthritis is his martyrdom. He dies, away from his beloved people on 30.01.1957, but his body is brought back to Shillong for the funeral. He dies in Dibrugarh hospital, amidst excruciating pain. His funeral is a veritable triumph, with more than five thousand Catholics weeping and praying behind the bier. Cfr. A. Alessi Jr., *Una vita per l'India* (Torino: LDC, 1981), 222–225.

[9] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India*, 136.

takes that and places it over the head of Fr. Bonardi. At its touch Fr. Bonardi opens his eyes. He feels as if some new energy is passing through his body. On the following morning the surgeon from Calcutta is surprised at this sudden improvement and rules out the need for operation. Two weeks after this Fr. Bonardi offers a thanksgiving Mass. On 25th October he takes part in the procession of the *Corpus Christi.*

The serious sickness of Bro. Rudolf Toigo, a novice, causes a lot of concern to all as his condition turns critical. All invoke the name of Mary help of Christians and he is miraculously cured. Another crisis that year is the serious sickness of the novice master, Fr. Deponti. Without completing the novitiate year he is repatriated. He dies in Turin on 8th December 1925.[10] Fr. Stephen Ferrando succeeds him as novice master.

8. The Horizon gets Broader

8.1 Bombay

The confreres of Madras (Mylapore and Tanjore) insist with Msgr. Mathias to visit them. He receives an invitation also to go to Bombay. A certain Mr. F.X. Rebello, supported by the bishop of Daman, Msgr. Pereira, wants the Salesians to accept the care of several works, among them, a school for boys of Goan origin. All these works are under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Daman who is residing in Bombay and has personal jurisdiction over the Portuguese and the Goans residing in the city, over churches and institutions. He can also open new parishes, if he thinks them necessary for the good of his subjects. Daman together with Goa and Diu are three Portuguese colonies in India.[11]

The fact of 'personal jurisdiction' is an abnormal situation, but, for the Salesians, it turns out to be a kind of *felix culpa*, because it is what opens the doors in Bombay. Another premise to be considered: Ecclesiastical territories depending on the Congregation of Propaganda Fide are almost all entrusted to some order or religious congregation that considers that territory as its own domain and with difficulty allows other congregations or orders to enter into it. This is not the case with the dioceses

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[10] Fr. Deponti Giovanni: born on 11. 3.1887 at Bergamo (Italy), makes his profession on 15.9.1910, becomes a priest on 17.8.1919, comes to India in January 1922, dies on 8.12.1925 in Turin (Italy).

[11] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 135.

of the *Padroado*. These easily allow or even invite the help of 'foreigners', provided of course, they accept their jurisdiction.

On reaching Bombay Msgr. Mathias is the guest of Msgr. Pereira, who gives him ample freedom to study with his Vicar General Msgr. Luis Claudius Pera the possibility of starting a new foundation in Bombay. Msgr. Pera insists that the Salesians open a high school where there are numerous groups of Goans, in places such as Andheri, Chembur and Bandra. He wants also a technical school and an agricultural school. But when the question of the finance comes, Msgr. Mathias realizes that these gentlemen expect everything to come from the Salesians, thinking that the Congregation has all the necessary means. Msgr. Mathias clearly states that it is his desire to come to Bombay, but that it is not possible to do so on these conditions. It is necessary to wait for better times and better conditions, which come three years later.

8.2 Madras[12]

While Msgr. Mathias is in Bombay, Fr. Vendrame and his group of young missionaries arrive. Monsignor makes them proceed to Calcutta, while he boards the train for Madras. Fr. Tomatis waits for him at the station. The Vicar General, Msgr. Texeira, who wants him to be his guest, receives him very cordially, but Msgr. Mathias expresses his desire to be with his confreres in the adjacent orphanage.

The orphanage of San Tome is the real model of a Salesian house. A wonderful spirit reigns there and Fr. Tomatis is much loved by the orphans to whom he is a true *Ma-bap,* a mother and a father. Fr. Tomatis is a true Salesian; he has known Don Bosco, and is a veteran in India where he has already been for 19 years.

Two things, however, cause some misgivings in Msgr. Mathias. The institute is not belonging to the Congregation. The confreres are administering a diocesan institution. The second cause of apprehension is the fact that the boys are not always under the care of the Salesians, but during school hours they are in St. Bedes, directed by a diocesan priest. This is something not wholly in agreement with the Salesian principles of assistance and education.

[12] Today's name for Madras is Chennai. We shall continue to use the name of Madras for most part of this work.

8.3 Tanjore

Fr. Mederlet comes to Mylapore to accompany Msgr. Mathias to Tanjore where he is parish priest and rector. At Tanjore a grand welcome and some pleasant surprises await Msgr. Mathias. In the beginning the Salesians are only directing the orphanage. Later on the parish is also entrusted to them together with the missionary district under the parish. In a few years, under the leadership of Fr. Mederlet, a number of other flourishing works arise, such as the Don Bosco Technical School with weaving, carpentry and the press. The Salesians build the St. Antony's middle and high school, considered to be one of the best in the city. Msgr. Mathias is overjoyed to visit these flourishing works, the fruit of the untiring activity of the Salesians. Wherever he goes, he hears greatest praises showered on Fr. Mederlet and on the Salesians.

Here there are some problems with regard to the apostolate and the ownership of property. Fr. Mederlet has bought a good bit of land and built up a lot of works with Salesian funds. Even the subsidies of the government are given to him as a Salesian. If any day the Salesians have to withdraw, what will happen to all those works? It is a question that has not occurred to the Salesians. The problem will arise much later. It will be the Administrator of the diocese of Mylapore who will solve the problem when we will have to withdraw, as we shall see later.

Msgr. Mathias is sad to take leave of the confreres in Madras. When embracing Fr. Tomatis, he never imagines that it would be for the last time. Struck by sunstroke and a heart attack he dies on 25th November 1925 in St. Martha's Catholic Hospital, Bangalore. The Administrator Msgr. Texeira arranges for his body to be brought back to Mylapore and buried, close to his beloved orphans.

On his return journey, Msgr. Mathias stops in Calcutta to speak to Msgr. Perier about the Salesians coming to the archdiocese. He reaches Shillong on 12th January 1925, the eve of the third anniversary of the Salesians' arrival in Shillong.

1925

9. Salesian and Missionary Formation

Now that Msgr. Mathias' dream of getting young recruits from Europe and from India to make their novitiate in Shillong is realized, his

concern is to establish solid traditions for the apostolic and Salesian formation of these young men.

On the day of the profession, he gives the newly professed the traditional 'Souvenirs' to guide them in their missionary life. He develops a thought from Bossuet: One leader, Christ; one law, the Gospel; one flag, the Cross. "We come to the missions," he says, "with a great ideal. We are soldiers of the glorious, peaceful army of Christ. Let us keep his flag aloft. Let us spread the Gospel without any fear. Let us throw ourselves with great zeal in the apostolic life. If God is with us, who will be against us?"[13]

A few days after the profession, the newly professed leave for Laitkynsew to spend there the holidays. Msgr. Mathias is very keen to give 'the budding missionaries' a truly missionary formation by putting them in contact with the people and the difficulties they will encounter in their future work. Laitkynsew,[14] situated 60 kms from Shillong on a hilltop overlooking Sylhet, is an ideal place for 'apostolic holidays'. The climate is better than that of Shillong; the view is wider, with extensive orange and pineapple plantations, and numerous villages.

Msgr. Mathias wants to impress on the brothers that walking does good to one's health, that sleeping on a hard bed is healthy, that it is useful to subject the body to fatigue, and even more useful to make the most of one's own hidden energies. But in a special way he wants to drive home the point that this contact with the people will prepare them more easily for their apostolic activities through self-dedication, which will one day be the soul of their apostolic life. Starting on foot early in the morning under the leadership of Msgr. Mathias, they head towards their destination in two stages of 30 kms each day, carrying on their shoulders all what they need: blankets, foodstuff, a small harmonium and some musical instruments. Nothing seems too heavy. They are young and strong. They reach the place in the evening of the second day. The school by the side of the mission residence serves as study hall, refectory and dormitory. They eat sitting on the floor and sleep on straw. After supper, sitting on

[13] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India*, 145.

[14] Cherrapunjee starts as a Parish on 5th March 1897. About this time the missionaries residing in Shella, come to start the centre at Laitkynsew. Here Fr. Geband Abele (SDS) starts the first printing press. Later Msgr. Christopher Becker takes the press to Shillong. Cfr. *History of Salesian Centres*, VIII (Guwahati: Archival Publications, 1996), 57.

the edge of the mountain, under the starry sky, with the immense valley studded with villages at their feet, they sing away their choice songs to the delight of the people listening to them.

Soon they start their 'apostolic tours', which remain unforgettable. Their destination is one of the villages situated in the valley or on the top of a mountain. They carry lunch along with them in their knapsacks. They take along the small harmonium, visual aides for teaching catechism, and some trumpets. They enter a village singing and blowing the trumpets. The people come out of their huts; the children follow them happily. They go to a little playground in front of the chapel, if there is any, or to an open place. They start with some games for the children and then catechism class follows. Max, the catechist, translates what they say. They have their lunch by the side of a brook. Towards evening they return to the mission, their hearts brimming with joy and their knapsacks full of oranges and pineapples offered by the people.

During the years that follow, instead of remaining with the newly professed during the holidays, Msgr. Mathias chooses a group from among them and goes for a 'propaganda tour' to remote places, taking with them the 'bioscope' for the evening show. The programme is always the same: one or two films of Charlot, and the 'King of Kings' depicting the life of Christ, which makes a tremendous impression on the people. Many weep aloud when the passion and death of Jesus on the Cross is shown. Msgr. Mathias continues this practice of leading these groups to the villages for many years.

In the conclusion to the chapter on 'the apostolic life,' Msgr. Mathias in his book describes the contribution of the Assam Mission to the Missionary Exhibition held in Rome and Turin during the Holy Year 1925 and on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the Salesian Missions. Fr. Bars and Fr. Bonardi work hard to collect abundant and varied material that can be seen even today in the Salesian missionary museum at Colle Don Bosco. Among the Indian exhibits, there is the magnificent collection of 6000 butterflies, a gift from a Catholic sergeant, Delanougerede. They send also 100,000 well-selected and properly arranged stamps to be sold on behalf of the missions and a *myna*. This bird is a hit as it is able to speak such words as *Kyrie eleison* and is quick to learn new ones.[15]

[15] Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands,* 54.

Later in his life, Monsignor Mathias will recollect these first years he spends in the midst of these young Salesians as truly 'Salesian years': "these are truly 'Salesian' years full of intense missionary activity and of true *family spirit.*" The priests are very few and all are overburdened with work. Fr. Ferrando, for instance, besides being novice master, is also professor of philosophy, catechist of the house, and vice-rector during the protracted absence of Msgr. Mathias. Fr. Vendrame is assistant parish priest, director of the incipient festive Oratory, and, whenever he is able, teaches some subject to the clerics. Before the end of the year he will be the parish priest taking the place of Fr. Hauber, when the latter goes down South to take the place of Fr. Tomatis who passes away.

From the very beginning it is Msgr. Mathias' concern to create in the studentate an atmosphere of serenity and cordiality, in other words, the 'family spirit' which is one of the most beautiful characteristics of the Salesian Congregation and the secret of the Congregation's prodigious activity and expansion in the world. "Seeing myself surrounded by many young men," writes Msgr. Mathias, "who have extreme need of affection and of Don Bosco's *amorevolezza* – loving kindness – also because they are so far away from their dear ones, I get ever more convinced that only through family spirit I can put solid and sure bases, both for the Congregation and the Church, in this remote corner of India. Although I am very busy as Prefect Apostolic, I want to keep for myself the role of rector, I am taking pains to be present as much as possible among the clerics, to take part in their conversations and receive their 'manifestation'. To keep always alive the family spirit I am happy to play the piano and teach them some joyful song. But the practice that I start from the very beginning is to invite the confreres around the table of the superiors and spend some time in joyful conversation. There is a kind of competition to relate some pleasant anecdote, to crack a joke. That furnishes the occasion to share with all the various projects and to give an account of my visits to the various centres. It is a dialogue between father and sons on the family events. I am convinced that these 'family circles' serve very much to keep us united in *vinculo caritatis et fraternitatis* – in the bond of charity and brotherliness. They are called *in circuitu* or 'family circles'."[16]

Later, one of these clerics, already a priest, confesses to Monsignor: "Monsignor, in those first years in Shillong life was hard. We had plenty of work; the food was quite ordinary. And yet, we were happy. No

[16] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India* 177–178.

homesickness, no sadness. Those evening spent *in circuitu* were sufficient to fill our hearts with the greatest joy. We felt we were in a family."[17]

10. The Apostolic Visitor[18]

On 13th February Msgr. Mathias receives a telegram from Calcutta informing him that Msgr. Lepicier, the Apostolic Visitor, wants to meet him. Immediately he leaves for Calcutta. He also takes the occasion to invite him to spend some time in Shillong. The Visitor promises he will willingly do that, as he needs some rest. He is sent as Apostolic Visitor to India by Pius XI to find out the religious situation of the Catholic highschools and University colleges of India.

His Excellency receives a very solemn and cordial welcome to Shillong. He wants to visit at once all the institutions and mission centres in the Khasi Hills. What impresses every one is his simplicity and fatherliness. He feels very much at home with the Salesians, as if in a family, and wants to follow in everything the Salesian way of life. All are edified by the way this learned and eminent prelate takes part in all the common practices of piety of the community. Often he gives the 'good night'. He gives several conferences and he even lends his services as a regular English teacher to the clerics. This month of his presence in Shillong is particularly precious for Msgr. Mathias who has several meetings with him to discuss a variety of matters. After visiting St. Edmund's, he is asked to give his opinion on the Christian Brothers. To this he says that he has a great admiration for them as excellent teachers and their day schools deserve to be encouraged, but he has some misgivings regarding the boardings directed by them. At this point he stops, becomes serious and, holding the hands of Monsignor Mathias, adds with emotion, "Monsignor, Monsignor, fill India with Don Bosco."[19]

What preoccupies His Excellency is the fact that Catholicism has not sufficiently penetrated among the Hindu intelligentsia. With the exception of the Jesuit fathers in Trichinopoly, very little is being done in this regard. He is all praise for Fr. Johanns and Fr. Dandoy who are trying to make an approach towards the intellectuals through their Review *The Light of the East*. The Visitor, however, insists that before launching into such a venture, one has to have sufficient grounding in Thomistic philosophy and theology, besides a deep knowledge of the Hindu thought.

[17] Ibid. 178.
[18] Ibid. 153–161.
[19] Ibid. 154–155.

His Excellency has also been giving a serious thought to the idea of an 'Institute of Higher Studies' open not only to our Catholics but also to the Hindu scholars who wish to benefit from it. He is deeply concerned as to whether our schools in India can truly be called 'Catholic schools,' since little is done for the Catholic pupils and practically nothing for non-Christian pupils, except teaching them some 'moral science.' The publication of an article by a Hindu writer in the *Indian Review* from Madras, in which he labels Christian schools and in particular Catholic schools as 'atheistic' schools, since they do not speak about God to their pupils, comes as a veritable bombshell.

On 26th April 1925 the Apostolic Visitor leaves Shillong touched by the many proofs of sincere affection given to him by the Catholics. He leaves for Rome on 15th February 1926, after 16 months of stay in India.

11. The Salesians in Calcutta

On 25th September 1925 Msgr. Mathias goes to Calcutta for the second time this year. He is dreaming of having a residence in the metropolis of Bengal, the true Capital of India, which is proud of being the second important city of the British Empire. The purpose of his journey this time is to discuss with the Archbishop the possibility of opening a house in that metropolis. But he does not yet see clearly as to how this will take place[20]. Various projects are taken up for consideration. They think first of an orphanage attached to a technical school. Then the idea comes to them of a hostel for students and work apprentices. Finally they come to the conclusion that, in the present circumstances, the best thing would be to take over the administration of the press known as the 'Catholic Orphan Press'. It is a diocesan work directed by a Jesuit Brother and operated with the help of workers. It is well known and a good source of income to the archdiocese. By the side of the press there stands the Cathedral. In the course of time the Catholic population shifts to other

[20] In his letter of 12 May 1925 to Father Ricaldone (with copy to Father Rinaldi), Msgr. Mathias gives a detailed account of the background history of the Catholic Orphan Press (COP), of its management, actual conditions, equipment, and financial benefits. He also mentions the desire of the Archbishop to entrust it to the Salesians, the proposed conditions and the agreement reached, a most favourable one. In it Monsignor also mentions the ample freedom the Archbishop is giving to the Salesians to expand their work and begin the work of the Salesian Co-operators in Calcutta. The whole council of the mission is favourable. Monsignor is counting on the approval of the superiors. (Cfr. *Archivio Generale*, F 176.) For a Xerox copy of this letter, cfr. *Provincial Archives* of Calcutta, File C 70.2.2.

quarters of the city and very few Catholics are left around the cathedral. The majority of the population around the parish are the Chinese who are not Christians. Years later, Fr. Attilio Colussi will receive numerous Chinese converts into the church.



Most Rev. Dr. FERDINAND PERIER, S.J.
Archbishop of Calcutta (1924–1960)

Born:	**22. 09.1875 at Amtwerp, Belgium**
Joined the Society:	**23. 09.1897**
Arrival in India:	**09. 11.1906**
Ordination:	**03. 10.1909**
Coadjutor to Archbishop:	**10. 07.1921**
Archbishop:	**23. 06.1924**
Resignation:	**August 1960**
Death:	**10. 11.1968**

The Archbishop wants to entrust to the care of the Salesians the parish and the press. Taking care of the Cathedral and the annexed parish would not be a difficult task but with regard to the press the terms and conditions will have to be worked out. The first idea is to accept only the administration of the press and receive remuneration from the Archbishop for the work done. The press would remain the property of the archdiocese. This proposal is soon put aside because it would give rise to misunderstandings. Then consideration is given to the acquisition of the press (machinery and all available material) after making an estimation of its value. The Salesians would pay back in installments. But also this idea too presents its difficulties.

Finally, they come to a third solution, which is acceptable to both the parties. The Salvatorians have left behind a fund for the Assam Mission. Surprisingly they come to realize that the amount is just sufficient to cover the cost of the press with all the machinery and the religious articles in the shop attached to it. Cede this fund to the Archbishop, which later the Salesian Superior of Assam would slowly revive.

Once agreed upon this condition, they proceed to finalize the date for the official beginning of the works in Calcutta. The Archbishop is in favour of beginning on 1st October. Msgr. Mathias would like to start on

11th November, which coincides with the golden jubilee of the Salesian missions. He wants to enter that day into to the city of Don Bosco's 'dream.' The Archbishop, always very kind and condescending, at once accepts Monsignor's proposal. Every thing is placed in the hands of the lawyer of the Curia who will prepare the deed. Monsignor leaves for Shillong with his heart full of joy promising he will come back in November together with the Salesians to begin the Salesian work in Calcutta. He will send three Salesians (two priests and a Brother) who will remain under the guidance of the Jesuit fathers and of Bro. Rome, director of the press, till the end of the year. The confreres will assume responsibility for the whole work from the beginning of 1926.

On 8th November there is a farewell lunch in Shillong and a small 'academy' in honour of those who are leaving for Calcutta. The three chosen ones are: Fr. Paul Bonardi, rector and in charge of the press, Fr. Gil, pro-Vicar of the Cathedral and parish, and Bro. Peter Aprile, *factotum* of the house, which will also become the 'procure' of our various works and mission centres in Assam. They leave for Calcutta the following morning. Due to some reasons, Msgr. Mathias cannot accompany them, but promises that he will visit them towards the end of the year, when they will take full control of the works in Calcutta.

In fact he keeps his promise and goes to Calcutta to be present for the transition. On the last day of December, after a solemn *Te Deum* in the Cathedral, a dinner is served in honour of the Archbishop and of the Jesuits who leave the next day. Msgr. Mathias thanks the Archbishop and the Jesuits for inviting the Salesians to work in the diocese: "This is a great honour for us," he says towards the end of the dinner, "and also a great stimulus to work with zeal and absolute dedication, following in everything your splendid example and precious advice."

His Grace answers on behalf of all the Jesuits and speaks about the great joy they feel to have the Salesians in Calcutta and to come in contact with their exuberant spirit. "I bless," he concludes, "this humble beginning in Calcutta, and I am sure that Don Bosco will work here also the miracles which he has worked in other parts of the world. I am happy to know that Don Bosco has seen in his prophetic dreams this city of ours. This is the best omen for the future of your work in Calcutta."[21]

[21] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 189-190.

12. The Flowering of Works

The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians are exercising a very intense and zealous apostolate in Gauhati, under the direction of Mother Innocenza Vallino. The sister who is most zealous in visiting the hospital is Sr. Maria Bricarello, young, full of life and zeal. All love her. All are pinning their hopes on her. But God's ways are different. While in Calcutta Monsignor Mathias on 24th February gets the news of her death. *Kala-azar* or black fever contracted in her visits to the hospital, in less than two days takes her to her grave. Jesus is plucking the first flower from the missionaries' garden!

The Protestants are often saying: "Oh, if we too had sisters as the Catholics do!" The Salesians have the great fortune of having three Sisters' congregations: the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions, the Loreto Sisters, and later also the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

Since some time Msgr. Mathias is thinking of having the Salesian Sisters in Jowai, a Protestant stronghold. In December he goes to Jowai and buys the hill opposite to the one on which stands the Catholic Mission. The owner, a Protestant, has many prejudices against the Catholics that leave him undecided whether to enter the church even after his many discussions with the Catholic Priest. Msgr. Mathias is keen to buy this property with a wooden two-storey house in it. With the help of Our Blessed Mother the property is bought and Mother Vallino immediately responds to the invitation to open a house. Together with two other sisters she comes to live in the old house of Babu Johns and opens a small school for the girls. After some initial difficulties, this work will have a wonderful future. In the years that follow Jowai will become an important centre for missionary activity.

12.1 The shifting of the works of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions

As we have seen, the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions take the place of the German Sisters when they are repatriated during the First World War. They are of great help to the Salesians when they arrive in Shillong. However, a problem arises with the starting of the technical school. Our orphans live a little away from the place where the school stands and have to go all around the hill to enter the workshops. The

closeness of the sisters to the technical school is not very convenient either as the Salesians are intending to expand the existing works.

The solution seems to be that of the sisters moving to another hill close by, known as Merryville, which offers a vast piece of land for future buildings. After much prayer and thought, Monsignor sends a letter to the Mother Provincial who is in Chittagong. She understands Monsignor's point of view and accepts the proposal. The mission will see to the new constructions. When she visits Shillong next all the details will be specified. However, the whole transaction does not happen to be that easy. Only three years later the shifting can take place, and it turns out to be a true blessing for the works of both groups. Today the Merryville hill hosts a number of institutions for works ranging from K.G. to a University College imparting education to numerous young people.

12.2 Our Lady's House

On 1st May 1925 there is the inauguration of the first half of the new building named 'Our Lady's House.' That day the clerics (novices and first year brothers) leave the old building, in a solemn procession singing the *Magnificat* and enter their new premises. Provisionally, a classroom is turned into a Chapel. Due to lack of personnel, Msgr. Mathias himself takes over as rector. He is immensely happy, but the financial situation is causing him worry. He has no idea as to how to finish the whole project with the church in the middle. One day while walking in front of the new building Fr. Ferrando tells Msgr. Mathias:

> "Monsignor, why don't you entrust the completion of this work to the Patroness of the Missions, St. Therese of the Child Jesus? You are a Frenchman, but you don't seem to have much confidence in the Little Flower?"
>
> Surprised, Monsignor answers:
>
> "But we have Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco. It is to them we have to entrust all our sorrows and our needs."
>
> An animated discussion follows between them. At a certain moment, almost to cut the discussion short, Fr. Ferrando says:
>
> "Monsignor, try and you will see that St. Therese will come to our help."

"Well," answers Monsignor, "I will throw a challenge to St. Therese. It is now almost the end of September. If by the time of her feast (in those days on 3rd October) she will send us some concrete help, it will prove that she has accepted the challenge and we will resume the work."

"And I will ask our novices to pray," concludes Fr. Ferrando.

The feast of St. Therese arrives. Monsignor has forgotten all about the challenge to the Patroness of the Missions. On that day he receives a bundle of letters. On opening the first one he finds a cheque for Rs. 15,000. He cannot believe his eyes. He opens the second letter and there is another cheque for Rs. 5,000. Rupees 20,000 are exactly what he needs to resume and go ahead with the work. The calendar on his desk indicates third October, feast of St. Therese of the Child Jesus. Deeply moved he rushes to Fr. Ferrando who is in class with the novices and shows him the two cheque.

"St. Therese has worked the miracle," he says. "She has accepted the challenge! Now we can resume the building of the studentate."

Deeply moved Fr. Fernando tells the novices: "Let us go to the church to sing a *Te Deum* and thank St. Therese, our Patroness."

12.3 The Technical School [22]

On several occasions, Msgr. Mathias, speaking to his confreres, expresses his conviction that the Salesian Congregation has the special

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[22] From the Salvatorians the Salesians inherit an orphanage and a Middle English School dedicated to St. Antony. Fr. Bonardi is the first Rector of the Institution (10 August 1922). About the same time Fr. E. Bars and Bro. G. Cid are given charge of restarting the Trade School and the printing press left by the Salvatorians. In 1923 Bro. Ernest Ferraris, an accomplished cabinetmaker, and Bro. Hercules Matta, a printer, join the team. Bro. L. Santana has already opened the tailoring department and Bro. G. Cid the shoe-making department. Fr. E. Bars is given charge of the technical education. From this time the trade school is named "Don Bosco Industrial School". The mechanical workshop is opened in 1925 when Bro. Casagrande joins Don Bosco Shillong. Recognition from the civil administration comes fast. On 4 February, the Governor of Assam, Sir Henry Kerr pays a visit to Don Bosco and he is pleased with the reception given to him. He is astounded at the drill display and the gymnastics performed by the boys. In 1926 the Salesian complex, known as our Lady's House is divided into three

mission of giving to India well established technical schools. He says that India has already many schools, colleges and universities that provide excellent academic formation. Every year they produce a large number of young graduates who are not able to get employment due to the grave economic problems that the country faces. Schools that prepare skilled workers and technicians are needed for the small and big industries. Though it is easier to establish academic schools, technical schools need a lot more of finance for the building, machinery and equipment, besides qualified personnel as instructors. That is the reason why Msgr. Mathias insists on including among the first group of missionaries a good number of Salesian Brothers. So we can understand why the Salesians are keen to revive the old press and establish various other departments in the technical school. At the beginning of March 1923, the Director of Public Instruction visits the workshops and expresses surprise at what he sees. Later he brings the Minister of Public Instruction to visit the school. He also confesses that he has never seen in Assam similar institutions. In 1925, the Governor of Assam, His Excellency J.H. Kerr, and his wife make an official visit to the school and spend four hours in the premises. The following day he sends a letter to Msgr. Mathias expressing his deep admiration at all what he has seen: "I could never imagine that you have started such kind of works", he writes. After the Governor, several ministers come to visit the school and all express their admiration at what they see, in glowing terms. The successor of J.H. Kerr, after hearing about the school, expresses his desire to visit it.[23]

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separate entities: the Novitiate and Studentate, the Parish and the Don Bosco Industrial School with St. Antony's School. In March 1928, the Salesians lay the foundation stone of the mechanical workshop, and the present Don Bosco Complex is acquired from the RNDM Sisters. In 1928 Don Bosco Industrial School has the following departments: Press, Shoemaking, Carpentry and Tailoring. In 1949 Fr. A. Fedrigotti comes to Shillong as extraordinary visitor to the Province. He points out that most of the buildings are of wood and irk and that the workshops need modern machinery. The process of modernization begins in earnest in 1963. In 1966 with the help of Misereor, the Technical School is totally rebuilt with a ferro-concrete structure, 520 feet long, to house the various departments. Frs. Mario Porcu and Hermann Learhuis work hard at it. On 23 February 1971, the government of Meghalaya gives official recognition to the Diploma issued by Don Bosco Technical School. In 1975 the government of India gives provisional permission to send candidates for the All India Trade Test. The first batch appears for the ITI examinations in 1976. Cfr. *History of Salesian Centres*, VIII, 73–76.

[23] Cfr. Ibid. 61–62.

13. New Arrivals

The expansion of the existing works and the opening of new ones demand an abundance of finance, and even more, an increase of personnel. The year witnesses the arrival of new recruits from Europe. Towards the end of November, a letter from Turin announces the arrival of three priests: Fr. Efisio Sanna,[24] Fr. Elias Tomè [25] and Fr. Dominic Farina.[26] In addition to them, five clerics are still to come, and among them are Bro. Archimede Pianazzi, Bro. Antonio Alessi, and Bro. Carlo Mlekus – three persons who will have a great role to play in the history of Salesian India in the North and Northeast. There are also three Salesian Brothers: Bro. Giuseppe Casagrande, Bro. Filippo Scarlato, and Bro. Francesco Bonjak. The arrival of the novices is also announced, some of whom will also play significant roles in the future of Assam Mission and of Calcutta Province: Attilio and Ferruccio Colussi, Antonio Cucchi, Michele Devalle, Luigi Cerato, Carlo Talamona, Giorgio de Zorzi, Giuseppe Rippa, Giulio Costa, Luigi Rocca, and Ernesto Zanon. Certainly, Msgr. Mathias is extremely happy at this news, and the words of Msgr. Lepicier are always ringing in his ears: "Monsignor, fill India with your Salesians."

1926

Both Fr. Bonardi's Chronicle and Msgr. Mathias' *Quarant'anni in India* do not say much regarding the activities of the Salesians in the year 1926. The chronicle of Fr. Bonardi mentions some events that would be ideal matter for a detailed study of this year, but they do not have much significance for our narration. Msgr. Mathias is also very discreet in his account of the activities of the year1926.

14. Two Great Missionary Figures

In pages 192-194 of *Quarant'anni in India*, he presents "two great missionary figures": Fr. Costantino Vendrame and Fr. Leone Piasecki.

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[24] Fr. Efisio Sanna: born on 10.8.1890; makes his profession on 19.3.1910; becomes a priest on 21.5.1921; comes to India in 1925; dies at Saharampur on 1.7.1936.

[25] Fr. Elias Tomè: born on 19.11.1898 at Casarsa (Italy), makes his profession on 4.9.1921, is ordained a priest on 28.7.1925, comes to India in the autumn of that same year 1925, his missionary activity is exercised with great zeal at Jowai, Shillong Cathedral, Raliang, and Sunnyside. After his release from the Concentration Camp, for two years he is Rector at Roorkee. He dies at Vercelli (Italy) on 11.9.1966, aged 67.

[26] Fr. Domeniço Farina: born at Acireale (Italy) on 2.2.1884, makes his profession on 22.2.1903, is ordained a priest on 13.8.1911, comes to India in 1925, dies at Raliang on 2.6.1936. More about him is given in Chapter I of Part II.

Fr. Vendrame's tremendous missionary zeal is synthesized in the following words: "If in the Khasi Hills we have today such a flowering of works and Catholic life, it is due to him. For him the missionary is a fisher of souls, who has always and everywhere to cast the net *in altum.* A Protestant Pastor who attends his funeral in Shillong remarks: "Fr. Vendrame is worth ten of our Pastors."[27]

About Fr. Piasecki, Msgr. Mathias writes: "Fr. Piasecki is totally different from Fr.Vendrame, except in one thing, in his thirst for souls. What Fr. Vendrame is for the Khasis, Fr. Piasecki is for the tribals of the Brahmaputra valley."[28]

15. The Festive Oratory

In his writings Msgr. Mathias dwells at length on *The Festive Oratory* and attaches great importance to it. Fr. Vendrame has already opened one such Oratory in the parish campus where Bro. Bacchiarello spends his free time with the children, picking up the Khasi language. Inspired by this initiative of Fr. Vendrame, the Monsignor considers the possibility of opening such oratories in the villages around. It is certainly risky to send young and inexperienced clerics, still ignorant of the language, without a priest and even without an assistant, to villages still pagan or Protestant. But he asks himself: "Is not the Oratory the main work of the Salesian Congregation? And does not Don Bosco throw his young clerics in the apostolate among Turin's youngsters?" "To learn how to swim" – Don Bosco used to say, "the best way is to jump into the water."

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[27] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India* 192.

[28] Ibid. 183. Fr. Piasecki is born at Pyszaca (Poland) on 26 March 1889, and is ordained a Priest on 29 June 1921 at Krakow (Poland). He comes to India at the end of October 1922. For 20 years he is the indefatigable missionary of the Brahmaputra Valley, alone for quite some time, later in the company of Fr.Francis Marmol. He starts a monthly in Hindi, *Salesian Khabaren.* He opens schools and Chapels; in 1931 he re-opens the mission of Dibrugarh, where he builds a magnificent Church dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, today the Cathedral of the Dibrugarh Diocese. From 1940 to 1947 he is the Rector of the COP, and also the Economer of the Province. From 1947 to 1949 he is Rector of Dibrugarh and from 1949 to 1952, Rector of Bandel, where he builds the *Aspirantate.* During his stint as Provincial Economer he cooperates with the Provincial, Fr. Uguet, in the building of the first half of Salesian College, Sonada. In 1953 and 1954 he is in Sonada supervising the building of the first and second floor of the second half of Salesian College, and the enlargement of the playground behind the house. He dies tragically as a result of a road accident in Digboi (Assam) on 10 December 1957 Cfr. A. Alessi, *lettera mortuaria,* 1 July 1958.

He speaks about it to Fr. Ferrando who is enthusiastic about it. Just to start with, they choose three villages close to Shillong: Malki, Nongthymmai and Mawlai. Later they will increase their sphere of action, as more clerics arrive. And thus starts the great experience of the Sunday Oratories that become the best way to get access to Khasi families and bring them to the Lord. The clerics make friends with the boys after overcoming initial resistance created by the Protestants who are quite strong in Mawlai, and, in the opinion of Msgr. Mathias, "they prepare the way for the Missionary" to enter the families and bring the love of Jesus to the Khasi people. And, surely, Fr. Vendrame is not the one to miss this beautiful opportunity.[29]

16. The Canonical Erection of the First Indian Province: 28.5.1926

The chronicle and the work of Msgr. Mathias are conspicuous for the absence of any mention about an important event of the year in the history of Salesian India: the details regarding *the canonical erection of the first Salesian Province in India*, namely, the Calcutta Province, whose history is the principal object of the present work. There is no mention even about the nomination of the first Provincial.

Only in the General Archives of the Salesian Congregation at Pisana, Rome, there is a letter (not dated and not signed) by the Rector Major to the Holy Father, in which he writes: "Together with the members of the Superior Chapter of the Salesian Society, after having taken into consideration the observations of the local major superiors, and also what the experience of the past years suggests, we have decided to modify the Provinces of the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales as it is indicated below for the following reasons. ... For the above reasons the Rector Major of the Salesians implores from your Holiness the approval of the following Provinces and Visitatories, almost all already approved by other rescripts of the Sacred Congregation of Religious and which now for the greater part have undergone some minor changes."

The letter is followed by the list of the Provinces concerned.

[29] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India*, 185–198.

Twenty-second on the list is the *Province of India, with St. Thomas the Apostle as its Patron,* having 11 houses:

L. Calcutta, 2. Maliapore, 3. Tanjore, 4. Badarpur, 5. Gauhati, 6. Haflong, 7. Laitkynsew, 8. Raliang, 9. Shillong parish, 10. Shillong, Immaculate Conception, 11. Shillong, St. Antony's.

At the end of the list of Provinces is the rescript (in Latin) signed by C. Cardinal Laurenti (Prefect), but very faint and on this account it is written by hand again by the secretary and translated into English: "In virtue of the special powers received from the Holy Father, this Sacred Congregation of Religious having carefully considered the request of the petitioners, benignly grants to Rector Major the faculty to provide in all cases what is asked for, keeping all what Canon Law prescribes, notwithstanding anything to the contrary."

Given in Rome, 28th May 1926.

In fide, Vinc. La Puma, Secr.[30]

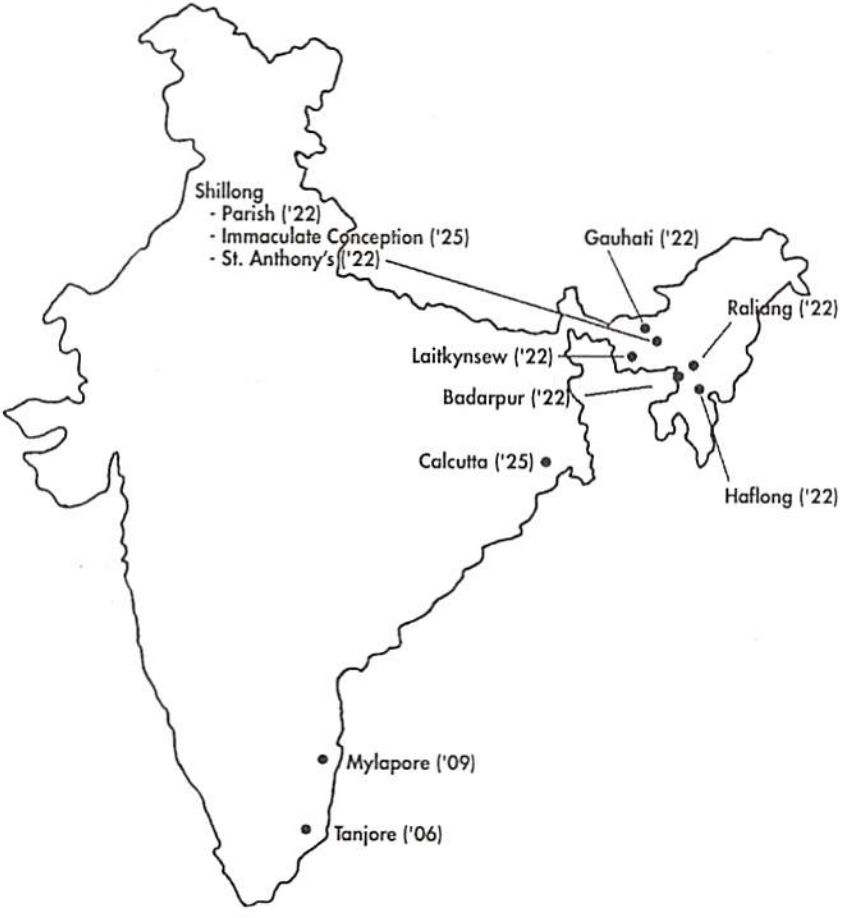
Erection of The Indian Province of St. Thomas the Apostle (28.5.1926)

The erection of the Province and the nomination of the first Provincial and his Council will be made known by Very Rev. Fr. Ricaldone, the Extraordinary Visitor, in the first meeting of the Provincial Council held in Shillong on 24th and 25th March 1927: "After announcing that the Visitatory of India had been erected into a Province, Fr. Ricaldone presents the new Provincial in the person of Msgr. Mathias and the members of the Provincial Council, three of whom were present: Fr. E. Bars, Fr. Paul

[30] The above letter of the Rector Major, the list of Provinces, and the rescript of the Sacred Congregation for Religious are to be found in the *Archivio Generale*, F and D. 518. An authenticated copy is to be found in Provincial Achieves of Calcutta, File +B.1.

THE INDIAN PROVINCE OF ST. THOMAS THE APOSTLE

Erected on 28.05.1926 with 11 Presences



Bonardi, and Fr. John Mora[31] the fourth one, Fr. Eugene Mederlet, was absent." [32]

The newly erected Province is called the Province of India and no special place is designated for the provincial office. At first the office is in bishop's House, Shillong, then in Don Bosco Shillong. From there it is shifted to Calcutta with short periods at Don Bosco Liluah, at the Catholic Orphan Press, at Don Bosco Park Circus and finally at its present location. At the next division of the Indian Province in 1934, the resulting Provinces are named North Indian Province, with Don Bosco as its Patron, and South Indian Province, with St. Thomas, the Apostle, as its Patron. In 1959, at the second division, the resulting Provinces will be named after the cities where the provincial houses are located, namely, Province of Calcutta with Don Bosco as its Patron, and Province of Gauhati under the patronage of Mary Help of Christians.

[31] Fr. John Mora: born at Novara (Italy) on 25.9.1886, makes his first profession on 15.9.1907, is ordained a priest on 14.7.1912, comes to India in 1912, dies at Katpadi on 5.8.1961, aged 75.

[32] Cfr. *Provincial Archives* of Calcutta, F, B. 8.2. During this Provincial Council meeting Fr. Ricaldone treats some very important matters concerning the good of the new Province, such as the division of the specifically salesian works from those of the Prefecture Apostolic, which, however, remain under the direct responsibility of the same person, the discussion about the need for starting a technical or agricultural school at Jowai, the discussion about the missionary centres of Raliang, Laitkynsew and Cherrapunjee, and about a Salesian and missionary centre at Haflong. There is also a discussion about the practical training and the studentate of theology. Several other matters are discussed and agreed upon, especially the animation work of the Provincial Councillors, and financial matters.

CHAPTER IV
A BIG LEAP FORWARD[1]
1927–1928

1. A Historic Extraordinary Canonical Visitation by Fr. Peter Ricaldone 2. The Year of the "Big Leap Forward": 2.1. Liluah 2.2. Bombay 2.3. Krishnagar 2.4. Madras: The Salesian Archbishop 2.5. Bandel 2.5.1 The 'Quantin Estate' 3. The Cachar and Sylhet Districts Transferred to Chittagong.

1927

1. A Historic Extraordinary Canonical Visitation by Fr. P. Ricaldone

The New Year Day of 1927 brings a pleasant surprise to the missionaries in India. That day Msgr. Mathias receives news of the imminent arrival of Rev. Fr. Peter Ricaldone, Prefect General of the Salesian Society, as an extraordinary Visitor to the Indian missions.

Fr. Ricaldone arrives in Bombay on 10th January and reaches Calcutta on the 13th, together with a cleric from Italy (Peter Robaldo) and two clerics from England (Anderson[2] and Haughey). Msgr. Mathias rejoices at their arrival. The two clerics from England will be of great help in the teaching of English and in doing translation work. One of them, Augustine Anderson, will later write an excellent biography of Don Bosco in English and will be the editor of the monthly *Don Bosco in India*, which for many years is the link between the Salesians and their friends and Cooperators in India.

After paying their respects to Archbishop Perier, Fr. Ricaldone, together with Msgr. Mathias, works out the itinerary for their visit to the various centres. They decide to start in the South, before the heat of summer becomes unbearable.

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[1] For this Chapter the sources are mainly: Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 127–274; and Pianazzi, *Ardisci e Spera,* 73–162.

[2] Fr. Augustine Anderson: born on 8.11. 1898 at Liverpool (Great Britain), professes on 18.9.1926, comes to India in January 1927, is ordained a priest on 31.3.1932, dies at Southport (GBr) on 30.8.1958.

As we have seen earlier, the Salesians are present in the South since 1906. At Tanjore they have established an imposing complex of works: a flourishing parish, an orphanage, a middle and high school, and a well-known technical school. At Mylapore they have the direction of an orphanage for Anglo-Indian boys.

Fr. Ricaldone and Msgr. Mathias leave Calcutta on 16th evening and reach Madras on 18th morning. The same day they pay a visit to the Administrator of the diocese, Msgr. Texeira. During the journey from Calcutta to Madras, Msgr. Mathias gets ample opportunity to acquaint the Visitor with the precarious situation of the Salesian works in South India. Strictly they cannot even be called Salesian works, as everything belongs to the diocese. The Salesians are only in charge of their administration.

In his protracted visit to the Salesian Missions of the East, Fr. Ricaldone has to solve many ticklish problems. In Mylapore he has to face one such problem that needs immediate attention. The contract between the ecclesiastical authority and the Salesians expires that year and he must decide whether to renew it or not. The terms and conditions of that contract are not at all favourable to the Salesians.

Fr. Ricaldone, with characteristic prudence, does not want to rush into a decision. He prepares a memorandum, spelling out his proposals, and gives it to the Administrator saying that he will return to Mylapore after visiting Tanjore and will take a final decision then on the matter.

On 22nd morning, in the company of Fr. Mederlet, Fr. Ricaldone and Msgr. Mathias leave Madras for Tanjore, where they receive a grand welcome. The 800 pupils of the Salesian schools, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and their pupils, and a large number of people gather in front of the parish church to welcome the Representative of the Rector Major. Fr. Ricaldone instantly creates a very good impression on all, especially when, at the end of an entertainment in his honour, he rises up to speak and does so in Tamil. At Mylapore he has sprung a similar surprise on everybody when, in reply to an address read by a boy in English, he answers in good English. During his journey from Italy to India, he has worked "day and night" to learn the rudiments of English, assisted by the two English clerics.

The return journey to Madras is via Pondichery, a small French colony on the coast, whose Archbishop, Msgr. Morel, is offering to the

Salesians a portion of the archdiocese, the North Arcot, as an independent Mission. Fr. Ricaldone wants to clarify certain points on this matter. The uncertainty of Salesian works in the diocese of Mylapore makes the idea of having an independent mission quite appealing.

The Vicar of Pondichery, Fr. Lesquit, takes the two Salesians for a tour of North Arcot, without giving the local missionaries any reason even to surmise the reason for their visit.

North Arcot is a vast district to the South of Madras; semi-barren and afflicted by frequent occurrences of famine. The majority of the population consists of Dalits. The fathers of the Foreign Missions of Paris have worked here with great zeal and charity and have made numerous conversions. One missionary in particular, Fr. Darras, has administered, it is said, over 40,000 baptisms and, as a thanksgiving for these conversions, he has erected a magnificent Shrine in honour of Our Lady of Lourdes, in the village of Chetpet.

Missionary work among the Dalits carries with it a number of challenges like illiteracy and low self perception, owing to the thousands of years of suppression and discrimination they have experienced.

The First World War breaks out before the new converts are sufficiently confirmed in their faith. Many missionaries have to return to France to be enlisted in the army, and many residences remain without pastors. Finance too becomes scarce. As a result not a few converts go back to Hinduism or abandon religious practices altogether.

Unaware of this situation, Fr. Ricaldone and Msgr. Mathias ask for information about the possibility of conversions from Fr Tridau, the missionary at Vellore, the District headquarters. "New conversions?" snaps the priest, "before thinking of new conversions, it is necessary to bring back the tens of thousands of apostates we have."

This state of affairs presents a delicate problem and a great responsibility to those who have to make the decision on accepting the mission. Msgr. Mathias is visibly upset, but Fr. Ricaldone smilingly tells him: "Mary Help of Christians - *ut castrorum acies ordinata* – as an army in battle array, is more powerful than Satan. She will think about bringing these lost sheep back to the fold."[3]

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[3] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India*, 208.

Back in Madras, they realize the advantages they have gained in visiting North Arcot and obtaining firsthand information about the mission. In fact, they are wondering about the answer Msgr. Texeira will be giving to the memorandum Fr. Ricaldone has given him before leaving for Tanjore. They are, therefore, totally disappointed when they see that their views are not given any consideration at all, while instead, the new conditions advanced by Msgr. Texeira seem totally unacceptable to them. Fr. Ricaldone then, making use of the full powers he has from the Rector Major, informs Msgr. Texeira that, due to the present circumstances and in view of new commitments, the Salesians will withdraw from Tanjore and Mylapore by first April, 1928. Msgr. Texeira, taken aback by this decision, expresses the desire to have further talks with the Visitor. Fr. Ricaldone at once goes to the bishop's house and joins him for lunch. But the Administrator does not seem to be ready to revise his standpoint. In fact, on his return to the house, Fr. Ricaldone tells Msgr. Mathias, "When the question of the North Arcot will be finally settled, you will have at your disposal the personnel for Madras and Tanjore."[4] Monsignor gets the point and adds no comment.

Back in the North, Fr. Ricaldone spends a few days in Calcutta to see some places where there is hope of setting up a technical school as desired by the Archbishop. Already during their absence, Fr. Bonardi sets his eyes on two places at the periphery of Calcutta, one behind Howrah Station, and the other at Liluah. The first one is discarded at once, while that of Liluah presents some advantages, but no decision is taken for the moment. Only later, with the help of Fr. P. De Wachter, S.J., the Salesians will buy the land where now stands the Don Bosco Technical School.

After this Fr. Ricaldone and Msgr. Mathias leave for Assam. During his stay in Assam which lasts for more than a month, Fr. Ricaldone visits all the institutions in Shillong, all the mission centres, meets individually all the confreres and novices, and gives a series of conferences on the Salesian Spirit to all the Salesians gathered together in Shillong. During the meetings he is keen to become aware of the problems they face and also adds his expert advice to the discussions that follow regarding their means of apostolate, the difficulties of particular places, the syllabus for catechetical instruction, the training of catechists, the management of mission schools, etc.[5]

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[4] Ibid. 212.

[5] Ibid. 213. Cfr. also Fr. Bonardi's Chronicle, 23.2.'27, 22.3.'27–27.3.'27, 16.11.'27, in *Archivio Generale*, F, 176.

He assures them that Turin will continue to send missionaries and novices, with an increase in their number. He is, in fact, convinced that Assam has a great future. "It will become the pearl of the Salesian Missions," he remarks. In concluding his visit, he tells Monsignor: "I did not expect to find such a beautiful country and such a promising mission well set on the right path."[6]

On his part, Msgr. Mathias considers the visit of Fr. Ricaldone as a big blessing from the Lord. The Visitor makes on the spot studies of problems and difficulties and indicates efficacious remedies possible to obtain the best results in this so vast a field, which, at the same time, is so very fertile and promising. During the days when the Visitor is with them, Mgr. Mathias is constantly at his side drawing inspiration from his suggestions and pieces of advice, which he considers to be valuable as Superior and as Prefect Apostolic. Hinting at certain characters, rather difficult to deal with, yet quite zealous, Fr. Ricaldone tells him: "Do you remember what Don Bosco was saying? We have to take men as they are, and not as we would like them to be. Don Bosco is able to draw blood even from turnips. Encourage always as Don Bosco used to do. Keeping the morale high is the best weapon to be victorious. Remember what Napoleon says: 'moral force is to physical force what three is to one'."[7]

On 27th April Fr. Ricaldone and Msgr. Mathias leave for Calcutta, and there before leaving for Siam (Thailand) and China Fr. Ricaldone asks Msgr. Mathias to accompany him, at least for part of the journey. The journey provides occasion for some very useful experiences. The Monsignor proves to be a good pupil. He observes everything, asks questions, and learns from him a lot.

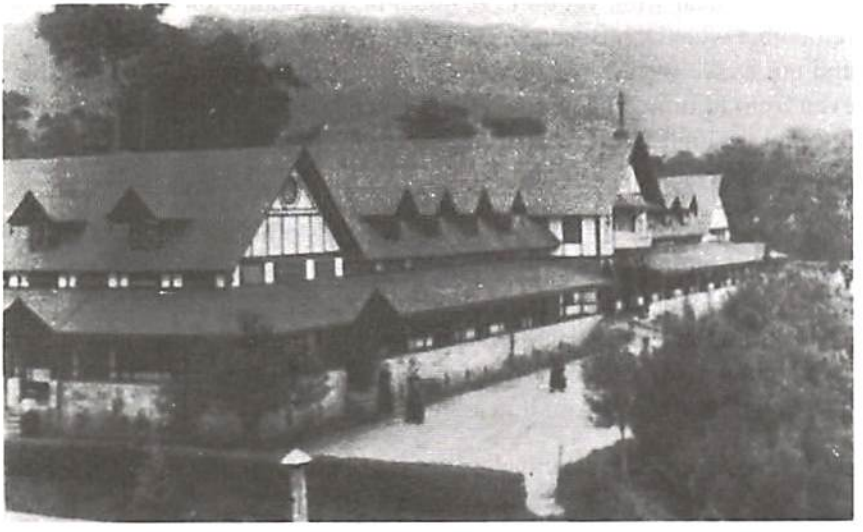
From Siam the two travelers move on to Saigon, where Fr. Ricaldone proceeds to China while Msgr. Mathias returns to India and reaches Calcutta on 20th May.

Fr. Gil awaits his arrival in Calcutta. Fr. De Wachter, S.J., the parish priest of Howrah, who is keen that the Salesians open an orphanage in that area, goes to see him and insists on his accompaning him to see some places he has found out in the absence of Msgr. Mathias. He has with him a considerable sum of Rs. 100,000 and wants to use it for buying

[6] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 214; Pianazzi, *Ardisci e Spera,* 75.
[7] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 219.

the required land for building suitable structures for the school and orphanage. Since Fr. De Wachter is very hard of hearing, Monsignor communicates with him in writing informing him that the Salesians will gratefully receive the money as a gift or as a loan, will buy the land, put up the buildings, and later will redeem the debt, if the money is given on loan. Fr. De Wachter understands, grasps the point, and says that he will speak to the Archbishop about it.

On 22nd May Msgr. Mathias leaves for Assam, and reaches there on the following day. On 24th he blesses the beautiful new church, the Brothers of St. Edmund's have built in honour of Mary Help of Christians. In the evening of the same day he blesses also the second portion of Our Lady's House, construction of which started in previous October under the protection of St. Therese of the Child Jesus.



Shillong: Our Lady's House

On 10th November 1927 Fr. Gil leaves for Spain[8] but disappears mysteriously on the way. There is no information about his whereabouts and all are worried. Finally a letter from a hospital in Singapore explains the mystery. He is down with typhoid in that hospital.

[8] Cfr. COP Chronicle, in *Provincial Archives* of Calcutta.

Msgr. Mathias calls Fr. Uguet, who, after his first short stint at Jowai, is now catechist at Gauhati and tells him, "I need you. I am deciding to make you the parish priest of the Cathedral of Calcutta. Go and present yourself to the Archbishop." "But I don't know English," Fr. Uguet answers. "Neither did we know the languages of the tribes among whom we went to work. Don Bosco says that the best way to learn how to swim is to jump into the water. Have no fears; have confidence in the help of the Madonna and you will succeed." On reaching Calcutta, Fr. Uguet presents himself to the Archbishop and acknowledges his ignorance of English, which is used for preaching in the Cathedral. "Let this not frighten you", the Archbishop answers lovingly. "You will soon get rid of this sickness. As a good Salesian go among the boys and you will soon learn. Write and read your sermons. Be brief and all will be happy."[9]

On 13th November 1927 Msgr. Mathias is back again in Calcutta to meet Fr. Ricaldone who is returning from China. Together they pay a brief visit to Shillong from the 15th to the 18th and then proceed to Bombay together. Monsignor's journey to Bombay is also motivated by his desire to conclude the negotiations for the opening of a house in that City. Together with Fr. Ricaldone he visits the Institute, or better the orphanage for young Goans in the area of Tardeo. Before leaving for Italy, Father Ricaldone authorizes him to do all what is required to finalize the project.

Msgr. Mathias remains a few more days in Bombay with Msgr. Desa, and has several meetings with Mr. F.X. Rebello, the President of the Goan community, who insists that the Salesians start working in Bombay. The contract is drawn up and Mgr. Mathias commits himself to send his Salesians to Tardeo in June of the following year to take up the direction of the "Mary Immaculate" Institute. So in Bombay too, it is Our Blessed Mother who is preparing the way.

The visit of Fr. Ricaldone leaves a lasting impression on the confreres who feel very much comforted and encouraged by his presence and his guidance. With meticulous care he prepares some concrete guidelines for future course of action in the form of 18 recommendations. He gives an accurate account of his visit to all the institutions and mission centres, with specific guidelines for apostolic activity for each, in agreement with the mind of Don Bosco and the Charism of the Congregation. In his first

[9] Cfr. A. Alessi, *Pionieri nel Cuore dell'India* (Turin: L.D.C., 1984), 15–16.

meeting of the Provincial Council on 24th and 25th March 1927, he announces the erection of the Indian Visitatory into a Province with Msgr. Mathias as its first Provincial. He sees the tremendous possibilities the Salesians have for doing good in the vast Indian subcontinent, especially in the promising Assam Mission. He approves their method of action and apostolate and encourages them to go forward with the same enthusiasm and zeal. On the eve of his departure, in a conference to all the missionaries gathered in Our Lady's House to bid him farewell, with fiery and often touching expressions – (*parole di fuoco e di santo*) – he insists on fraternal charity, mutual forbearance, and family spirit, which he finds flourishing in the Mission.[10]

1928

2. The Year of the 'Big Leap Forward'

On 29th February 1928, in Shillong, the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions leave the premises of St. Mary's Convent and occupy the adjacent new premises of Merryville, renamed 'St. Mary's'. On 1st March St. Antony's Orphanage is shifted to the house vacated by the sisters, and receives the name 'Don Bosco Technical School and Orphanage'. The other departments of tailoring, shoe making, bookbinding, and the press too are shifted to the same place. Soon a new building will be built for the mechanics and carpentry departments.[11]

2.1 Liluah

On 20th March 1928, Msgr. Mathias goes down again to Calcutta, as the Archbishop is very keen that the Salesians start a technical school for Anglo-Indian boys. The Archbishop hands over to him the sum of Rs. 100,000, which Fr. De Wachter has collected for the purpose. Fr. Uguet gives us the details about the transaction:[12]

"Monsignor, here you have the Rs. 100,000 collected by Fr. De Wachter. It is our wish that you build a technical school." "Together with

[10] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 242. For an accurate and complete account of Fr. Ricaldone Extraordinary Visitation, cfr. *Archivio Generale*, F. 177. For the 18 recommendations and reports of each house or centre, cfr. *Provincial Archives* of Calcutta, "Extraordinary Visitations", F. B.11.

[11] Cfr. Bonardi, 10.4.1928 & 16.4.1928, in , F. 176.

[12] Alessi, *Pionieri nel Cuore dell' India*, 26–28; Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 243.

Monsignor and the parish priest," continues Fr. Uguet, "we go immediately in search of a suitable place. The only place available is at Liluah, a suburb of Calcutta, an industrial zone in full expansion, near a railway junction, with workshops where a good number of Anglo-Indian Catholics are working."

"How many Catholics are there in this zone," asks the Archbishop.

"About 500," answers the parish priest.

"Well," continues the Archbishop, "let us buy the land and start a parish which we will dedicate to Don Bosco who is about to be declared Blessed."

"The contract is drawn up for about four acres of land. It costs 96,000 rupees, plus 5,000 rupees for the transfer of property; just a little more than what Fr. De Wachter has given us."

Divine providence once again comes to the aid of the Salesians. "A good friend of ours," writes Msgr. Mathias, "Mr. Commens, informs us that his Madras firm *Parry & Co*, is putting up on sale a huge iron shed, which the firm possesses close by, on the river Hooghly. I come to know that in England it costs Rs. 150,000, a huge sum at that time and totally beyond our financial possibilities. After buying the land we are short of funds!"

"I explain to the Representative of the firm in Calcutta what is the purpose for which we want to buy it, and I ask for a more favourable price. They say they are ready to sell it for 17,000 rupees, a paltry sum, if one considers the material involved and its size that gives the impression of a railway station. Once we sign the contract, we have the fortune of finding the Catholic firm Martin & Co. which offers itself to dismantle it and rebuild it on our land at very favourable terms and conditions."[13] In his report to the Superior Council[14] Msgr. Mathias writes that in 1930 a huge workshop is built (120x30). The scope of this work is to have a technical school (students and artisans) meant preferably for the poor Anglo-Indian children of Calcutta. During his stay in Calcutta, Msgr. Mathias hopes to prepare the plans for such a project. The Archbishop insists that the project be realized at once. Calcutta can or will be able in

[13] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India*, 290–291.
[14] *Provincial Archives* of Calcutta, F. B. 12.

the near future to supply the required finance. Unfortunately, subsequent events do not allow the realization of the project till 1937.

Fr. Uguet has some more interesting details about the technical school in Calcutta. He writes, "The 100,000 rupees, with which we buy the land, constitute the first obstacle. The Jesuit Visitor declares that the donation is invalid as Fr. De Wachter is a member of the Society of Jesus, and therefore, all what he has collected belongs to the Society. And so the Salesians come to an agreement with the Archbishop. We promise to pay back the whole sum in 30 years, without the interest. These are quite favourable conditions, but in a few years time, before I cease to be the provincial I have the joy of paying back the debt. To pay the cost of the shed, the Archbishop comes again to our rescue by advancing to us the required sum, which we are able to pay back almost immediately through a donation that a rich Hindu makes to us."

"Providence, as it is clear, continues to follow us at every step. However, because of various circumstances, but especially owing to lack of personnel, that venture has to take a number of years more before it can take off. It is Fr. Vincent Scuderi, the Provincial who succeeds Msgr. Mathias, who courageously solves that problem."[15]

2.2 Bombay

At the beginning of May, Msgr. Mathias meets Fr. Hauber,[16] Fr. Delhert,[17] and Fr. Piesur in Gauhati. They have left the orphanage of Mylapore for good and now are free to begin the Salesian work in Bombay. For that house, the Monsignor chooses Fr. Hauber as rector, Fr. Delhert as confessor, and two clerics, Bros. Haughey and Devalle. They leave for Bombay on 4th May.

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[15] Alessi, *Pionieri nel Cuore dell'India*, 27_28.

[16] Fr. Joseph Hauber: born at Kreuzfedd-Zabern on 2.1.1878, enters the Salesian novitiate of Lombriasco (Italy) on 29.9.1907 and makes his first profession on 29.9.1908. He is ordained a priest in 1915. In December 1921 he is in the first batch of Salesians leaving for India (Assam). He is a true missionary, robust, with iron will power, practical sense, a great worker, an exemplary religious, humble, prudent, a lover of poverty, a dedicated confessor and spiritual guide. He dies in Shillong on 21.10.1946.

[17] Fr. Augustine Dehlert: born at Ormland (Germany) on 12.10.1888, makes his first profession on 8.9.1920, is ordained a priest on 10.6.1922; dies in Bombay on 5.12.1958 at the age of 70.

But an unpleasant surprise awaits them there. The agreement concerning the school *Mary Immaculate* is stipulated with a bishop belonging to the *Padroado*. Now, on the eve of the Salesians' arrival, the jurisdiction of the *Padroado* in Bombay is abolished. The rector, Fr. Hauber, on arrival, presents himself to the Apostolic Administrator of the archdiocese, Fr. P. Bertram, S.J. who is taken aback, as he knows nothing about that agreement. They have to wait for the decision of the Archbishop who is away in Rome.

Fortunately, the Archbishop, Msgr. Lima, is a great friend of the Salesians whom he comes to know when he works as a diocesan priest in Portugal. Nay, he has even, at one time, expressed the desire to become a Salesian, but the Salesian Provincial of Portugal tells him: "No, my dear Fr. Lima, you are made to be a Jesuit, not a Salesian."

Hence, when the Procurator of the Salesians in Rome, who has been informed about the case by Msgr. Mathias, approaches him over the question of Bombay, his answer is most favourable. And when, after some time, Msgr. Mathias goes to pay his respects to him and to thank him, Msgr. Lima cuts him short by saying: "Monsignor, I want to assure you that I am very happy to have the Sons of Don Bosco in my archdiocese, because, if today I am a Jesuit and an Archbishop, I owe it to a Salesian Father."[18]

The Mary Immaculate School proves to be a difficult institution to handle. The previous year, when Monsignor accepts the school, he must have known the condition of the school. But, as it would be extremely difficult to get the archdiocese's permission to enter Bombay, due to the then prevailing 'monopoly of the Missions', he has no option other than through the *Padroado*. He also must have probably been informed of the imminent abolition of the *Padroado*. He plays the only card available to him. It is risky, but it proves to be the winning card.[19]

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[18] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 254–255.

[19] Pianazzi, *Ardisci e Spera* 79–80. For a more detailed history of the school "Mary Immaculate" of Tardeo, and it's being shifted later to Matunga and the future development of Matunga, cfr. "The starting and consolidation of the first Salesian work in Bombay (1928–1950) in "The memory of the Salesian Province of Bombay, 1928–1998" – Province Information Office, Don Bosco Prov. House, Matunga, Bombay, 6–36.
There are differences between the above account of Msgr. Mathias regarding the way Archbishop Lima happily gives the consent to the Salesians entering Bombay and the account given in "The memory of the Salesian Province of Bombay, 1928–1998," but the core content is the same.

2.3 Krishnagar

The year 1928 marks a high point for the Salesians since their arrival in Assam in 1922. To the works of Bandel, about which we shall deal with shortly, and Calcutta, is added the pastoral care of an entire diocese in Bengal, Krishnagar, bordering the archdiocese of Calcutta. Here we briefly present a short history of the diocese.

The first missionaries to come to what is today Krishnagar diocese are the Augustinians and the Jesuits at the beginning of the 17th Century. Around 1620 they establish a Catholic mission at Behrampore in Murshidabad to minister to the European Catholics.

Fr. Thomas Zubiburu, a Spanish Carmelite, is the first priest to set foot in Krishnagar, the capital of Nadia District, in April 1845. He builds a small church for conducting the liturgical services. Exhausted by work and afflicted by sickness, he is forced to go back to Calcutta, where he dies shortly. His little flock, deprived of its spiritual guide, slowly abandons the faith. In 1855 three priests and a lay Brother: Fr. Albinus Parietti, superior, Fr. Aloysius Limana, Fr. Antony Marietti, and Brother John Sesana, all of them PIME (Pontifical Institute of the Foreign Missions of Milan), come to this territory.

The Archbishop of Calcutta, Msgr. Carew, who has called them, asks them to take charge of this vast zone of his immense diocese immediately. "We cannot start work at once," answers Fr. Parietti. "We have just arrived, we know nothing at all of the environs, culture, mentality, customs of this people; furthermore we do not know the language." "Someone is better than no one," answers the Archbishop. "I have no priests to send there, you can at least celebrate Holy Mass and administer the Sacraments. Go without fear, pray and preach with your presence, in the meantime you learn the language and the customs."

The four courageous apostles go up the river Hooghly and reach Behrampore, a town close to Murshidabad, the then capital of Bengal. A small and bare Chapel is their first field of apostolate. As they explore the territory they find a second Chapel in Krishnagar, without a roof and completely in ruins. In the whole region the Catholics are not more than 150.

For one year they remain together in Behrampore to study English and Bengali. The following year they separate and open two more centres

at Krishnagar and Jessore, and plunge themselves with great zeal into the apostolate, obtaining numerous conversions. At the death of Fr. Parietti, in November 1864, the Catholics number 600. Five more priests and two Brothers come to swell their ranks.

In 1860, the Sisters of Charity of St. Bartolomea Capitanio come to help the missionaries. They will render an invaluable service to the church in the whole region.

In December 1870 the Holy See makes Krishnagar a Prefecture Apostolic with Fr. Antony Marietti, as its first Prefect Apostolic. In the midst of enormous difficulties and sacrifices, the Christian message spreads in the region and the Catholics number 1200 that year.

In 1886 Krishnagar is erected into a diocese, with Msgr. Francis Pozzi, who succeeds Msgr. Marietti, as its first bishop.

In 1887 a disastrous earthquake destroys the old church, and Msgr. Pozzi begins the construction of the present Cathedral, which will be enlarged and beautified by the Salesian Bishop, Louis L. R. Morrow.

Msgr. Santino Taveggia, the Vicar General, succeeds Msgr. Pozzi, who dies on 23rd October 1905. During his term as bishop, new mission centres are opened, especially among the Mundas, the Santals, and the Paharias to the North of the Ganges. Finding himself in great difficulties due to shortage of personnel and of funds, Msgr. Taveggia has for some time thought of dividing his vast diocese. He presents to the Holy See the plan of creating a new diocese, that of Dinajpur in the North. He suggests that all the PIME missionaries be withdrawn to the new diocese, and that the diocese of Krishnagar, be entrusted to another congregation or missionary society.

Fr. Ricaldone informs Msgr. Mathias that the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide is practically "forcing" the Salesians to accept the diocese of Krishnagar in Bengal. The superiors in Turin ask Msgr. Mathias to go to Krishnagar and make an on the spot assessment of the mission there and file a report back.

At the beginning of June, Msgr. Mathias together with Fr. Bars goes to Krishnagar to meet Msgr. Taveggia to finalize with him the modalities for transfer and the time for the Salesians to reach Krishnagar, but he is sick at Dinajpur. A few days later, a telegram announces the

news of his death. The two proceed to Dinajpur to attend the funeral of the great missionary bishop. Msgr. Santino Taveggia has spent more than 40 years in Bengal, and is well known and esteemed for the great good done and for his writings in Bengali. At the time of his death, he is preparing a translation of the Bible in Bengali.

Msgr. Mathias and Fr. Bars continue their visit of the mission centres: Behrampore, Khulna, Jessore, etc. They gather some very positive impressions about the mission during their visit. It does not seem to them that these centres are in any way inferior to what they have seen in North Arcot. The PIMEs have worked with great zeal for many years in these places, as we can gather from the doctoral dissertation of the late Fr. George Kottuppallil, SDB.[20]

Fr. Magni and the Vicar Capitular are extremely kind to the two visiting Salesians and give them all the desired information. They speak also of the division of the goods of the diocese, something that does not take much time, as there are only a few things to divide. They decide that the transfer could take place by the end of June.

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[20] Cfr. George Kottuppallil, *History of the Catholic Missions into Central Bengal* (Shillong: Vendrame Institute, 1988). In this excellent work Fr. George gives a detailed account of the dedicated missionary work done by the PIME fathers in Central Bengal, and in particular of what becomes the Diocese of Krishnagar. Cfr. Part I: Central Bengal on the Eve of the Arrival of the Missionaries of San Calocero 1. A Survey of Central Bengal; 2. Christianity in Bengal on the Eve of the Arrival of the Missionaries of San Calocero; 3. The Missionary Institute of san Calocero – Milan, 3–61. Cfr. The whole of Part II: Ch. IV The Central Bengal Mission under Albino Parietti (1955–1864); Ch.V, the C.B. Mission under Luigi Limana (1864–1870); Ch. VI, the C.B. Prefecture under Antonio Marietti (1870–1879); Ch. VII, the C.B. Prefecture under Francesco Pozzi (1879–1886). In Ch. VII cfr. especially: 1. Krishnagar (1879–1886); 2. Fulbari (1879–1886); 3. Jessore (1879–1996); 6. The establishment of the Diocese of Krishnagar; Ch.VIII, Obstacles and Methods. In this chapter Fr. George speaks of the obstacles, such as Indian social customs; adverse reaction to missionary work; Protestant antagonism; natural calamities; shortage of personnel and shortage of funds. Among the methods of missionary apostolate, he mentions: general methodology; the roles of the missionary personnel; developmental work; catechumens; attempts at enculturation and adaptation, Oratories and Confraternities; tertiaries of St. Francis; popular devotions.

On 28th October 1886, the Prefecture of Central Bengal is raised to the Diocese of Krishnagar, authorizing Francesco Pozzi to act as Administrator until a Bishop is nominated. Two months later, on 24th November 1886, the decree of nomination of Pozzi as Bishop is published, cfr. 261. Bishop Francesco Pozzi, born 3.3.1828, dies on 23.10.1905, cfr. 321. Msgr. Taveggia Santino, born 20.5.1855, arrives in Bengal in November 1879, and dies on 2.6.1928, cfr. 321.

The diocese of Krishnagar has, at this time, three mission centres: Krishnagar, Shimulia, and Bhoborpara. Catholics number around 6200, of whom 1300 are in and around Krishnagar itself, over 3000 belong to Bhoborpara, and over 1400 to Shimulia.

Msgr. Mathias chooses Fr. Piesur[21] and Fr. Pisano to go to Krishnagar under the leadership of Fr. Emanuel Bars. They leave Shillong on 20th June, accompanied by the prayers and the good wishes of everybody. A few days later on 24th June, they take possession of the new field of apostolate entrusted to the Sons of Don Bosco in India. About a month later, Fr. Bars is nominated Administrator Apostolic of the diocese.[22]

Msgr. Macchi, Fr. Rocca, and Fr. Martinelli, who are among the five Milan fathers who remain behind to assist in the diocese for a few months, warmly welcome them. Msgr. Bars and Father Piesur stay on in Krishnagar, while Fr. Pisano is sent to Bhoborpara, the most flourishing centre of the diocese. To these is added shortly after another priest, Fr. Leandro Ayuso. The first few months are spent in studying the language and the customs of the people and in touring the villages with the Milan fathers.

In November of the same year Msgr. Macchi is urgently called to Dinajpur and leaves the diocese for good.



Msgr. EMANUEL BARS, SDB
Administrator Apostolic of Krishnagar
(1928–1934)

Msgr. Bars is born at Torroella de Montgre' (Gerona, Spain) on 26th October 1889. He dies at Shillong on 4th April 1974, at the age of 84, after 66 years of

[21] Fr. George Piesur: born in Breslavia (Poland) on 16.10.1885, makes his novitiate at Lombriasco, first profession on 29.9.1909 and the perpetual profession on 11.7.1914; he is ordained a priest on 29.6.1921. In 1928 he is sent to Krishnagar. In 1933 he is Prefect at Vellore and in 1938 confessor at Tirupattur. Badly crippled by arthritis on 8.9.1941 he is admitted at St. Martha's Hospital, Bangalore, where he dies on 21.4.1945.

[22] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 246–247.

On 14th January 1929, two more Salesians arrive. Fr. Siro Righetto[24] and a cleric, Bro. Umberto Bianchi. The same day Msgr. Bars gathers all his confreres and addresses them in his characteristic fashion: " The Holy Father has willed that we should work in this place, and so we now begin in his name."

Life in the new mission is fraught with numerous difficulties. In 1930, the Administrator himself nearly dies of snakebite, but some native treatment saves his life.[25]

profession and 57 of priesthood. He spends in India 53 years engaging in intense missionary apostolate.

He is the first Salesian Administrator Apostolic of Krishnagar (1928–1934).

He is affectionately called 'Father Motor-car' for the speed with which he traverses the hills of Cherrapunjee. He is the first Salesian to penetrate into the hills of Nagaland, where today there is the flourishing diocese of Kohima.

He is one of the pioneers who come into India under the leadership of Msgr. Mathias in 1922. Msgr. Ferrando defines him as the patriarch of the Salesian missionaries in Assam."[23]

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[23] Ferrando, *"Nell'India Nord-Est"*, 247.

[24] Fr. Siro Righetto: born at Soave (Verona-Italy) on 22.8.1900, makes his first profession in October 1919, in the years 1919–1922 he is at Valsalice (Turin) for his classical studies; practical training at Venice (1922–1924), theology at Crocetta (Turin) and a priest on 11.7.1926. Towards the end of 1928 he is invited to leave for India, and he is sent to Krishnagar till January 1935. In the years 1935–1936 he is in Italy in-charge of the propaganda for the missions. Back in India he is sent to found the mission centre of Khulna. Two years later he is made parish priest of the Krishnagar Cathedral. In 1951 he becomes parish priest at Liluah, in 1952 catechist in Bandel, in 1955 parish priest at North Lakhimpur, in 1962 he is at Dibrugarh in-charge of the schools and Delegate of the Mission. In 1965 due to ill health he is forced to return to Italy. He dies at Verona (Italy) on 14.10.1977, aged 77. His characteristics: cheerfulness, very warm human relationships, obedience to the will of God, indefatigable worker, and a great missionary.

[25] It is on a Saturday (23 August) after lunch that a shout comes from the road near the Krishnagar convent: "Snake, snake". In no time the Administrator arrives on the spot and persuades the people not to kill the snake. It is a cobra, grey in colour, though rather small, and the Administrator wishes to bottle it and send it to a missionary museum in Turin. With his right hand and forefinger he caches the snake by the neck and tries to adjust its fangs and to close its mouth, when, disturbed by the crowds pressing round him, his left thumb strikes against the snake's fangs and gets poisoned.

He realizes at once the danger he is in. Still holding the cobra, he dashes back to his room upstairs in the mission house to get his anti-poison medicine. But there, to his dismay, he finds the phial altogether empty. Anyway, he calmly bottles the snake. The nuns, however, are there to attend on him. Directed by Monsignor himself, they begin to make a number of incisions on his left arm, each one higher up than the previous one, to ascertain how far the poison has travelled. From every incision flows out only black blood. But, providentially, just bellow the shoulder the blood is still normal, red in colour, and here they quickly tie a very tight bandage to arrest the further spread of the poison.

Happily, a Muslim presents himself claiming that he knows how to draw out the poison. In any case, this Muslim is the only man available now, and so he is asked to do

The snakebite is not the only trial for the Administrator. Fr. Pisano, who is sent to take over the centres of Bhoborpara and Shimulia, has to leave the diocese altogether owing to his repeated attacks of malaria. Father Igino Ricaldone, a nephew of the future Rector Major, comes in his place from Shillong. But after a short while he has a sunstroke and is unable to do any work. Another priest to get ill is Father Piesur, who has to be taken to a hospital in Calcutta towards the end of October 1930. Fr. Igino Ricaldone too has to be sent to hospital, and Father Ayuso, is exhausted with overwork.

In Krishnagar, Fr. Righetto is the first Salesian to be placed in charge of the parish, while Father Piesur and Brother Bianchi look after the school. Msgr. Bars undertakes the repair and construction of buildings and the embellishing of the church.

The church of Krishnagar is in a fairly good condition, and so is the convent of the sisters of Charity on one side of the church. But the residence of the fathers on the other side is indeed in a poor condition. And far poorer is another building close to the fathers' residence, serving as the primary school of Saints Peter and Paul and a boarding house for about twenty boys.

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his best. He begins to make, with a sharp razor blade, long and deep gashes close to one another, all over Monsignor's left arm to let out the poisoned blood. The next thing to do is to rub salt into the innumerable wounds. After the salt has done its work, lemon juice is poured into all the wounds to draw out more poison. Another man is now brought in, whose work is to draw out the poison with his mouth. This consists in actually biting hard into the wounds and sucking up all the blood in the arm. After a few hours of this treatment, a third man is brought in, whose function is to test now whether all the poison has been drained out. He asks for a chicken to be brought, which is done on the assurance that it would not be used for any religious rite. The man makes a cut on the chicken's back and then presses its wound on one of the wounds of the patient to see if the chicken would get poisoned or not. While all this is going on, it is absolutely vital for the success of the cure that the patient should not fall asleep. To prevent sleep, people are pressing him to eat hot chillies. Monsignor refuses to do so, but manages to keep awake all the same. The chicken shows no sign of poisoning, and consequently, the patient is pronounced cured. The people, who at the beginning think that Monsignor is a great sinner, now change their opinion. Naturally, Mgr. Bars' thoughts go to St. Paul, who had a similar experience in Malta. Cfr. J. Stephen Narayan, *The Heart of Bengal – A History of the Krishnagar Mission*, typed copy, in the *Provincial Archives of Calcutta.*

"Go first to the youth," is Don Bosco's injunction to his spiritual sons. Accordingly, the first efforts of the Salesians are directed to the improvement of the school. When its roof collapses, they build on its site a two-storied building and rename it "Don Bosco School". After some years this building becomes the bishop's House. Other little boys of the neighbourhood are not neglected. A cleric named Utari is given to Father Righetto to start a typically Salesian activity, the Festive Oratory. A musical band of sixteen instruments is soon added to make the Oratory more attractive.

In September 1930 Fr. Thomas Lopez[26] is assigned to the diocese. He is given the direction of the technical department, in which he has the assistance of Bro. Aloysius Cesarin. With six new machines, Fr. Lopez opens a technical section in the school to teach carpentry and mechanics.

As for the repair work and construction of chapels in the villages, Mgr. Bars decides that mud chapels are not worth repairing. Instead, in their place permanent ones are to be erected with bricks, one or two every year, and Father Lopez is put in charge of this work as well. Msgr. Bars buys more land to settle new Christians and to enlarge the Sisters' compound.

In his report to the Superior Council in 1932, Msgr. Mathias gives some details of the work of the Salesians in the diocese of Krishnagar:

- Territory: It comprises the five Districts of Nadia, Jessore, Khulna, Faridpur, and Murshidabad.
- Administrator: Msgr. E. Bars.
- Personnel: Salesians - 8 priests, 3 clerics; Sisters of Charity; the Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate (Indian Sisters).[27]

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[26] Fr. Thomas Lopez is born on 18.8.1901 at *Posoblanco* (Spain), makes his first profession in 1919, and is ordained a priest in 1928 by the Cardinal of *Sivlglia*. He comes to India in 1929. First he works in Perambur (TN), later he plans and designs the building of Broadway in Madras. Coming to the North he works in Krishnagar for six years, in Liluah, Sonada, Shillong. He dies on 24.7.1988.

[27] In 1922 Bishop Taveggia founds a small Congregation of Sisters under the title of "Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate", popularly known as "Bhoginis", under the direction of the Sisters of Charity. Four girls begin their Novitiate on 30th April 1922. One of them dies two months later. The other three receive the habit on 8 April 1923, in an impressive Ceremony in the Cathedral, and take the private vow of chastity. Their habit is an adaptation of the Indian sari; the three girls are Bhogini Maria Bartolomea

- Mission Centres:
- *Krishnagar*: bishop's house, cathedral – 3 Salesians, orphanage and school for boys directed by Salesians – 3 clerics, Orphanage and school for girls directed by the Sisters of Charity.
- *Bhoborpara:* church – 3 Salesians; convent, orphanage and school for girls directed by the Sisters of Charity.
- *Shimulia*: church – 2 Salesians.
- Residences without missionaries: Jessore (cared for by Shimulia); Berhampore (cared for by Bhoborpara); Ranabondo.
- Many substations with chapels.
  Msgr. Mathias remarks, "Nothing is Salesian, but everything is done by Salesians."[28]

In 1932 Msgr. Bars has another physical trial to endure. While riding back from Maliapota he falls from the horse and breaks his leg. His catechist following him on bicycle procures a bullock cart and has him brought to Bhoborpara for the night. Next morning he is taken to Krishnagar on a palanquin, and from there to a hospital in Calcutta.

After his recovery, towards the end of the year, he goes to Italy. He returns in 1933 with the intention of opening a seminary, but finds that the time for it has not yet come.

On 15 January 1934, about 2 o'clock in the afternoon a disastrous earthquake, which lasts for 3 minutes, hits Bihar. Its effect is felt in a milder form in Bengal. In Phulbari the roof of the chapel of our Lady Help of Christians collapses. By a very special protection of our Lady, the men at work move out in time.

Later in the year Msgr. Bars goes to Italy to attend the canonization of Don Bosco. Before he returns in November, his administration of the diocese comes to an end, and so he returns to Shillong.[29]

(Agnes Biswas), Bhogini Maria Vincenza (Suta Sabina), and Bhogini Santina (Maria Chomot Mullick). Sr. Vincenza subsequently leaves the Congregation owing to poor health. On the day these three receive the habit, other two girls begin their postulancy. Cfr. J. Stephen Narayan, *The Heart of Bengal – A History of the Krishnagar Mission*, typed copy, in the *Provincial Archives* of Calcutta, (Krishnagar), ch. XVI, 71. On pages 71–72 see the interesting story of Maria Rani Cadin, of Maliapota, who takes the name of Sr. Pia. – Cfr. also H.E. Bishop L. R. Morrow, "Memoirs of Father Bishop", 11–12.

[28] *Provincial Archives* of Calcutta, F. B. 12.

[29] Narayan, *The Heart of Bengal*, 75–80.

2.4 Madras: The Salesian Archbishop

In July 1928, a telegram brings the most unexpected news of the nomination of Fr. Mederlet as Archbishop of Madras.

We have seen how Fr. Ricaldone tells in very clear terms to the Administrator of the diocese of Mylapore that the Salesians will withdraw from Mylapore and Tanjore by April 1928. In the meantime an agreement is made with the Archbishop of Pondicherry to work in his diocese, in the territory of North Arcot. The confreres of Mylapore are summoned to Shillong and from there they proceed to open a house in Bombay. The confreres of Tanjore (Fr. Mederlet, Fr. Ignatius Muthu, and Fr. Paul Sandanam) and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians go to Vellore (1928). In the meantime the Holy See is preparing a new Concordat with the Portuguese government for the abolition, wherever possible, of the double jurisdiction.

The Delegate Apostolic, Msgr. Mooney, has prepared various schemes and proposals for the abolition of the double jurisdiction both in Bombay and in Madras. It works out well in Bombay but proves difficult in Madras. Several solutions are considered which eventually have to be discarded. Finally they come to the decision of dividing the city of Madras, leaving the Southern part to *the Padroado* (Mylapore) and making the rest of Madras into an archdiocese. Since Madras would have too small a territory, they think of attaching to it also the adjacent North Arcot and entrusting the new archdiocese to the Salesians who are already in Vellore.

The announcement about the new Archbishop takes everybody by surprise. Msgr. Mathias remonstrates with Fr. Ricaldone for having kept him in the dark about it. Fr. Ricaldone informs that the superiors too are probably the last persons to know about these events, and that he is informing him about it at once after getting the news.



Most Rev. Dr. EUGENE MEDERLET, SDB
Archbishop of Madras (1928–1934)

As a Salesian Msgr. Mathias is immensely happy about this new honour being conferred on the Congregation. But as a Religious Superior, he is worried about

providing the required personnel. Accepting an archdiocese with only three confreres working there causes him nightmares. Kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament he asks himself: "It's all very well, but where to find the personnel for so many new ventures? This is the moment I have to muster all my courage and recall my motto, *Aude et Spera* - Dare and hope. The Madonna and Don Bosco are with me, and there are the superiors in Turin...courage, Monsignor, I am saying to myself, go ahead and everything will turn out well." "The superiors promise us reinforcements, and just in these days Archbishop Perier goes to Shillong for the Priestly Ordination of the first two clerics, Fr. Igino Ricaldone and Fr. Foglia. It is the beginning of that long series Don Bosco has seen in his dreams."[30]

Fr. Mederlet, in his humility, does not have the courage to accept the pectoral Cross. The superiors from Turin ask him to accept *in nomine Domin*" and he does pronounce his *fiat*. He has unbounded confidence in the Sacred Heart of Jesus and in Mary Help of Christians. His Episcopal Ordination is fixed for 28th October.[31]

2.5 Bandel[32]

In September 1927 Msgr. Mathias writes to Msgr. Texeira, Administrator of the diocese of Mylapore, mentioning the fact that in Tanjore the Salesians are leaving a capital worth more than two lakh rupees and asks for some compensation in return. Monsignor knows very well that the Administrator will not be able to give anything. He also remembers what Fr. Ricaldone tells him before leaving for China, not to insist too

[30] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 249.

[31] For more details on the presence of Msgr. Mathias at the Episcopal Ordination of Msgr. Texeira on October 7, Cfr. Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 265f. and at that of Msgr. Mederlet on 28 October, and his unintentional *faux pas* in delivering the official address, cfr. Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 267–269.

On how the archdiocese of Madras is not entrusted by the Holy See to the "Mill Hill Missionary Society" founded by Card. Vaughan, and is eventually entrusted to the Salesians, causing at first some bad blood and on how Msgr. Mederlet's simplicity and goodness overcomes all suspicions, cfr. Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 270–272.

[32] For this account cfr. "*Note Confidenziali su Bandel lasciate da Msgr. Mathias*", in *Archivio Generale*, F. 176. A Xerox-copy of these notes can be found in *Provincial Archives* of Calcutta, File No. C.2. In *Quarant'anni in India* on page 251f. Msgr. Mathias gives only a very summary account of the Bandel acquisition. Fr. Uguet's account in "News letter, Calcutta, No. 3/74, "Know your Province" page 5f (cfr. *Provincial Archives* of Calcutta, B. 10. 4a) is quite different from this account of Msgr. Mathias in his *"Note Confidenziali."*

much on money but to be generous. Our Lady wants to bless the work of the confreres in South India. At the end of his letter Msgr. Mathias says that he is going to Bandel to make his Retreat and that he will pray for him at the feet of Our Lady.

This probably inspires Msgr. Texeira to offer to the Salesians, the Bandel Shrine and all its adjacent property as compensation. Monsignor accepts the offer immediately and writes in his *Memoirs*: "I answer Msgr. Texeira saying that I accept his offer and ask him to give me a written document stating clearly that the donation of Bandel is made as a compensation for Tanjore. Msgr. Texeira complies immediately and by return post I receive the document. There is, however, the following proviso that I do not find satisfactory – "with the proviso that, in the event of the Salesians leaving Bandel, both Bandel and the Monastery should be handed over to the Ordinary of the place" – this is obvious, but I insist that it should be clearly said that the proviso refers *only* to the Shrine and that for the rest of the property we are free to dispose of it as we please."[33]

To avoid surprises later on, Monsignor Mathias immediately writes to the Archbishop of Calcutta, informing him of the offer made to him by the Administrator of Mylapore and asking him if he has any difficulty and whether he intends to get Bandel for the archdiocese.

The Archbishop answers that he would not wish to have Bandel, even if it is given as a gift. He does not know Bandel well at this moment and soon, but too late, he changes his mind.

Probably basing himself on this written, but not official document, in May 1928, Msgr. Mathias sends Fr. Raygasse[34] to take charge of the Shrine. Fr. Raygasse together with Fr. Uguet moves into Bandel on 24th May, Feast of Mary Help of Christians. Fr. Uguet gives us an account of what actually happens on this day: "On the 24th of May 1928, on the Feast of Mary Help of Christians, the Salesians move into Bandel. On our arrival at Bandel, Rev. Fr. Rodriguez, the parish priest, warmly receives us. He shows us around the church and entertains us, but apparently he hasn't the faintest idea about the reason of our coming to Bandel. He

[33] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 251.

[34] Fr. Henry Raygasse: born in France in 1878, comes to India in October 1922. He works in several places: Shillong, Bandel, Saharampur... He dies in New York (USA) on 21 November 1962, aged 84.

remains stunned when we tell him that we are coming to take charge of the Shrine. He has received no information whatsoever from his bishop of Mylapore about the transfer of Bandel property to the Salesians. And so he does not know what to do. After some discussion with Fr Rodriguez, we decide that Fr. Raygasse would stay on in Bandel. In the meantime a letter is sent to the bishop asking him for an official statement and letter. That very evening I come back to Calcutta, while Fr. Raygasse remains at Bandel. He is put up in the so-called 'Bishop's Room' near the Augustinian Hall."[35]

A few days later the reply of the Administrator arrives which makes matters worse. In his letter he states that only the Augustinian Hall and St. John's School[36] are being given to the Salesians and not the Shrine and its property. This is not acceptable to the Salesians and Msgr. Mathias decides to take up the case with the bishop and there follows a lot of correspondence.[37]

From what has gone before, it is clear that the transfer of Bandel to the Salesians does not take place on 24th May 1928, but it will be done only, though not immediately, after the signing of the 'Official Agreement' by the interested parties at San Thome, Mylapore on 3rd November 1928.

In a letter to Fr. Rinaldi, dated 13th November 1928, Msgr. Mathias mentions his trip to Madras in connection with the Episcopal Ordination of Msgr. Mederlet, and also to sort out an important issues relating to Bandel: "A very important matter which I succeed, not without difficulty, to bring to a happy conclusion in Madras, is the final transfer of the Bandel Shrine. The Apostolic Delegate has some misgivings; Msgr. Perier of Calcutta wants to put some conditions. But we are able to finalize everything 'to the satisfaction of every body,' after my going twice to Bangalore to the Apostolic Delegate. This is indeed a providential offering!"[38]

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[35] M. Uguet, "Know Your Province", in News Letter, Calcutta Year I, No. 3-4, 1974, 5f.

[36] The St. John Chrisostom's High School is founded by Fr. A.C. Rodriguez as a Middle English School in 1870. It is opened as a High School in 1920 and receives Government recognition in 1922. Father D. J. Wollaston is the first Salesian headmaster of the school. In 1995 the School celebrates its 125th anniversary of foundation. On this occasion it is graced by the visit of Mother Teresa. For more information about St. John's School, Cfr. Souvenir, 125 years, Bandel, St. John's High School, 1995, in *Provincial Archives* of Calcutta, (Bandel).

[37] Cfr. M, Uguet, "Know Your Province", in News Letter, Year I, No. 4/1974, 5.

[38] Cfr. *Archivio Generale*, F.176.

Taking into account the great historical value of this agreement regarding the transfer of Bandel we shall give below the full text of it. The presence of all the signatories in Madras on 3rd November is easily explained by the fact that they have gathered there for the Episcopal Ordination of Msgr. Mederlet, which had taken place only a few days before on October 28th 1928.[39]

DIOCESE DE S. THOME DE MELIAPORE — ORIGINAL AGREEMENT

With the consent of His Grace the Archbishop of Calcutta we the undersigned Rt. Rev. Dr. Theotonius Manuel Ribeiro Vieira de Castro, bishop of Mylapore, and the Rt. Rev. Msgr. A.M. Texeira bishop of Sinda and coadjutor of Mylapore, on behalf of the diocese of Mylapore and the Portuguese Missions in India, and the Most Rev. Dr. E. Mederlet, Archbishop of Madras, formerly Superior of the Salesian Institute of Tanjore, Mylapore diocese, and the Rt. Rev. Msgr. L. Mathias, Provincial of the Salesian fathers in India on behalf of the Salesian Society, do hereby bind ourselves as well as our Successors in office to the following agreement:

1. The Salesians leave and bequeath entirely free from all encumbrances to the diocese of Mylapore all the land, properties, movable and immovable they left in Tanjore, i.e., the newly built Industrial School, St. Anthony's primary and highschools, and St. Mary's Convent with all their appurtenances, etc.
2. The diocese of Mylapore leaves entirely and gives free of all encumbrances to the Salesian Society as compensation for the above mentioned transfer, the church and Monastery of Bandel (Hooghly) including all its Zemindary land and properties movable and immovable and buildings of the said Sanctuary, such as St. Augustine's hall, St. John's Chrysostom's High School, etc. – with the proviso that in the event of the Salesians leaving Bandel both church and Monastery only (a.n.t.) should be handed over to the Ordinary of the place.

As to our church and houses in Chinsurah near Bandel it is to be handed over to His Grace, the Archbishop of Calcutta, but kept in good repair at the expense of Bandel as heretofore.

[39] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India*, 270–272.

San Thome of Mylapore, 3rd November 1928.

Signed: + F. Perier, S.J., Archbishop of Calcutta
+ Antonio, Bishop of Sinda, ET coadjutor of Mylapore
+ Eugenius, Archbishop of Madras
+ L.Mathias, Provincial of the Salesians.
+ Theotonius, Bishop of Mylapore.[40]

At the end of 1928, Msgr. Mathias goes down to Bangalore, and taking the occasion of the presence of Msgr. Perier, Msgr. De Castro, and Msgr. Texeira at the Apostolic Delegation, a document in four copies is signed by the three above mentioned Monsignors and by Msgr. Mathias (one copy each for the Delegation, for Msgr. Perier, for the bishop of Mylapore and for Msgr. Mathias) by which the Salesians cede to the diocese of Mylapore all the immovable property of Tanjore, and the orphanage of Mylapore, and the diocese of Mylapore cedes to the Salesians the Bandel Shrine with the annexed works and property.[41]

But even after the signing of the agreement and its ratification in Bangalore, Bandel Shrine continues to be administered by Fr. Rodriguez, Prior and parish priest. It remains a mystery as to why the agreement, though signed in November comes into effect only in the following April of 1929. A number of letters of Fr. Raygasse to Msgr. Mathias in 1928 and in the first three months of 1929 clearly show that the authorities in Mylapore develop cold feet towards handing over Bandel to the Salesians, and that they are trying, in the meantime, to remove whatever movable property they can. This last point is also clear both from the account of Fr. Uguet and from the 'Confidential Notes' of Msgr. Mathias himself.

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[40] Cfr *Provincial Archives* of Calcutta, File - BANDEL – Deed of Sale. Two typed copies, of which one authenticated by Msgr. Mathias himself are to be found in the Bandel Archives in the "File of Appointments".

[41] The Bangalore document is not to be found in the *Provincial Archives* of the Calcutta Province. Fr. Candela, Extraordinary Visitor of the North Indian Province in 1937, in his report to the Rector Major on the Bandel Shrine, mentions the Bangalore Document: "At the end of 1928 a Document is drawn up in Bangalore at the Apostolic Delegation (Allegato A) in four copies: one for the Delegation, one for Msgr. Perier, Archbishop of Calcutta, one for the Bishop of Mylapore and one for Msgr. Mathias. The signatories are: Msgr. Perier, Msgr. De Castro, Patriarch of Goa, Msgr. Texeira, Bishop of Mylapore, and Msgr. Mathias. (Cfr. *Archivio Generale* F. 177).

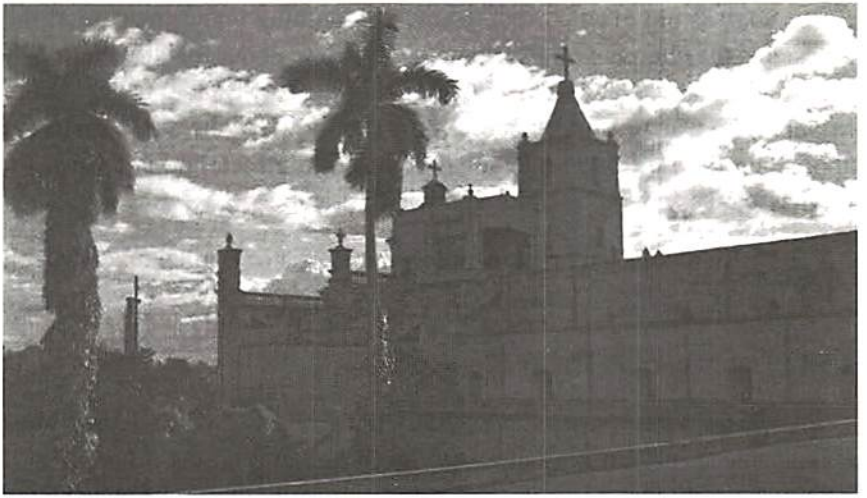
"All the treasure," Monsignor writes, "(not much it seems) and funds have been removed to Mylapore. But the Salesians cannot have any claim over them, because only the immovable property has been exchanged. But, providentially, the fact that in the event of a withdrawal of the Salesians, the Monastery would go to the archdiocese of Calcutta turns out to be in our favour. Archbishop Perier sends down his Vicar, Msgr. J. Fernandes, who brings back part of the treasure, which is a part of the patrimony of the Shrine and which cannot be disposed of without the previous consent of the Archbishop of Calcutta. He also brings back the funds of the arch-confraternity and the Foundation Masses, which the Archbishop keeps in his custody. However, he regularly passes the interests to the ach-confraternity and to the Salesians for the Masses to be celebrated."[42]

It is only on 23rd March 1929 that Msgr. Texeira writes to Msgr. Mathias informing him that he is leaving for Mylapore on the following day and that Fr. Rodriguez would leave after Easter, and that he has given him instructions to hand over everything to Fr. Raygasse, that too by inventory. Other details will be settled at the time of the execution of the new Concordat, which, however, will take a few weeks, if not months. Msgr. Texeira is also leaving a *warrant of appointment* in favour of Fr. Raygasse as parish priest of Bandel, in the hands of Fr. Meneses, Superior of their Mission in Bengal, from whom Fr. Raygasse will take charge of the Shrine on the day Fr. Rodriguez leaves for Goa.

Fr. Rodriguez leaves for Goa on 16th April. On the 17th, Fr. Meneses writes to Fr. Raygasse informing him about his plan to visit Bandel the following week to settle everything and instructing him as to what is to be done.

The actual assuming of office by Fr. Raygasse must have taken place some days before the feast of Our Lady of Happy Voyage in May. In fact, the feast is organized by him, and Msgr. Bars, the acting Provincial, in the absence of Msgr. Mathias, probably presides over it, as it appears from Msgr. Bars' letter of 14th May 1929, in which he thanks Fr. Raygasse for his hospitality and for having given him the great pleasure of taking part in the feast of Our Lady of Bandel. He also congratulates him for the good organization of the feast, the more so, as this is the first one since the Salesians take charge of the Shrine.

[42] Cfr. Mathias, *Note Confidenziali.*



Bandel: The shrine of our Lady of Happy Voyage

The Shrine of Bandel continues to be under the jurisdiction of the diocese of Mylapore. In fact, when on 14th June 1929, Fr. Raygasse asks for the faculties from Msgr. Perier, the Archbishop answers that Bandel is still under Mylapore, that the transfer has not yet been completed and that only when this is done, he will grant the faculties.[43]

The Concordat is signed on 11th April, and ratified on 29th June 1929. It comes into effect only after receipt of the Decree officially executing the Papal Bull.[44]

Archbishop Edward Mooney, Delegate Apostolic, to that effect issues a decree on 12th March 1930, stating that it has to come into effect on 7th April 1930. And it is precisely on 7th April 1930 that Msgr. Perier, Archbishop of Calcutta, assumes jurisdiction over the Bandel Shrine, erects the church of Our Lady of the Rosary into a parochial church and appoints Fr. H. Raygasse of the Salesian Congregation, vicar of the same church. The territory of the newly erected parish extends to the limits of the civil District of Hooghly.[45]

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[43] For all the letters referred to in the text, cfr. *Provincial Archives of Calcutta*, Bandel, Correspondence – I. For the original warrant of appointment of Fr. Raygasse as Prior by Msgr. Texeira, dated 4.4.1929, cfr. File of Appointments in Bandel Archives.

[44] Cfr. Letter of Msgr. Texeira to Fr. Raygasse dated 13.7.1929.

[45] For the decree by Msgr. Mooney, the Delegate Apostolic, and for the decree of erection of the parish by Archbishop Perier, Cfr. File of appointments in Bandel Archives.

So, it is not even correct to say, "By coming under the care of the Salesians, the church would automatically come under the jurisdiction of the archdiocese."[46] The transfer of jurisdiction over Bandel Church from Mylapore to Calcutta archdiocese is done only when the new Concordat abolishing the *Padroado* in Bengal comes into effect, and not when Fr. Raygasse takes charge as Prior and parish priest.

Fr. Ricaldone canonically erects the House of Bandel on 7th March 1933.[47]

2.5.1 The 'Quantin Estate'

This is a kind of 'enclave' within the property. Mrs. Quantin buys a small piece of land very close to the Shrine and builds a house on it where she is living. At her death, she bequeaths the said house to the Orphanage of Boitakhana in Calcutta.

Since the high school of St. John Chrysostom, administered by the Salesians, needs some classrooms, the 'Quantin' house is taken on rent and used as classrooms for the boys of the school. In 1932, in agreement with Msgr. Perier, this property is bought by Msgr. Mathias for a sum of Rs. 2000 and used for the students of theology of the fourth year who are going to Bandel for some months before the end of their course of studies. The solution proves to be advantageous to both parties.[48]

Our account of the history of Bandel, starts in the year of the *Big Leap Forward,* that is, the year 1928, but is protracted almost till the end of 1929. However, the official agreement of transfer of Bandel Shrine to the Salesians is signed on 3rd November 1928, and even its ratification in Bangalore by the parties concerned in the presence of the Delegate Apostolic, is done before the end of 1928, according to Msgr. Mathias. It is, therefore, fitting to close this chapter with the words of Msgr. Mathias himself on 31st December 1928:

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[46] Cf. M. Uguet, "Know your Province", SNC, Year I, No. 3-4/1974,5f

[47] Cfr. File of appointments in Bandel Archives.

[48] For the original deed of CONVEYANCE OF THE MOST REVEREND FERDINAND PERIER & OTHERS, TO THE RIGHT REVEREND LOUIS MATHIAS, Cfr. *Provincial Archives* of Calcutta, Bandel – Deed of Sale.

"Thus ends the year 1928. On the night of 31st December we are in Retreat. In the beautiful Chapel of Our Lady's House we all sing from our hearts and with powerful voices the solemn *Te Deum Laudamus*."[49]

Indeed, during this eventful year 'The Almighty has worked marvels' for the Salesians in India!

3. The Transfer of Cachar and Sylhet Districts (Barak Valley) to Chittagong

In 1927, Msgr. Depailleur, C.S.C., is elected as the first bishop of Chittagong. Msgr. L. Mathias attends his Episcopal ordination, and on this occasion offers him the districts of Cachar and Sylhet. Mizoram and Tripura are already his. Bishop Lepailleur accepts them. The Holy See authorizes the transfer of jurisdiction. The Chronicle of 4th August 1928 records: "The Apostolic Delegate informs us that the two districts of Cachar and Sylhet have been detached from Assam and have been attached to the diocese of Chittagong together with the two missionary centres of Badarpur and Haflong". The Christian communities of Bondashil, Badarpur, Haflong and Sylhet, thus, join the flock of the Canadian Holy Cross fathers.[50]

[49] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India*, 274.
[50] Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands*, 58.

CHAPTER V
JOURNEYS TO AND WITHIN EUROPE 1929–1934

1. Beatification of Don Bosco 2. The XIII General Chapter 3. Other Events in 1929 4. Delhi and Agra (Saharampur) 5. Festivities in Honour of Don Bosco 6. The Reopening of the Mission in Dibrugarh 6.1 We Need your Spirit 7. My Clerics 8. Our Salesian Brothers 9. Still on the Good Press 10. A mixture of Joys and Sorrows 11. Religious Monopoly 12. The First Breach in the Religious Monopoly Wall: Tura 13. The XIV General Chapter 14. The New Province 15. The First Novitiate in South India 16. The Founding of the Tezpur Mission 17. Ten years' work 18. The Jubilee Year 19. A Missionary Convention 20. Home to the Father 21. Don Bosco's Canonization: Five Indians in Rome and Turin 22. Shillong – A Diocese 23. The Death of Msgr. Mederlet.

1929

1. The Beatification of Don Bosco

The year 1929 dawns on all the children of Don Bosco scattered all over the world with an incredible amount of joy and optimism in the air due to an impending event of great significance: the Beatification of their Father and Founder. The Salesians in Assam and in the whole of India are preparing for that happy event with tremendous fervour and enthusiasm.

As Prefect Apostolic and Salesian Provincial, Msgr. Mathias has the double duty of taking part in the solemn celebrations, both in Rome and in Turin. Besides, as the representative of the Salesians in India, he has the duty of attending the General Chapter convoked by the Rector Major, Fr. Philip Rinaldi. Msgr. Mederlet, Archbishop of Madras, and Fr. Hauber, the elected Delegate from India, go with him for the Chapter. During Monsignor's absence, Msgr. Bars, while remaining in Krishnagar, is to be the acting Provincial, and Fr. Ferrando, the Vice-Prefect Apostolic. Fr. Foglia, ordained a priest recently, is the Director of the technical school, and Fr. Bonardi, the Provincial Economer.

Msgr. Mathias spends the time, preceding the solemn festivities in Italy, visiting the families of his missionary confreres, various institutions

and benefactors. While in Rome, where he goes for the beatification of Don Bosco, Msgr. Mathias feels proud of being a son of the Church and a missionary in spreading the Kingdom of Christ. At the same time, he feels proud also of being a son of Don Bosco and a member of the Salesian Family.

He will never forget that solemn occasion on 2nd June, when Pius XI, declares Don Bosco Blessed in St. Peter's Basilica, filled to capacity with Salesians, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Cooperators, young people, friends and admirers of the Salesians and of their works. Their cry, *Long Live Blessed Don Bosco*, fills the vast Basilica. Fr. Rinaldi is visibly moved and fervent ejaculations issue from his heart:

That we may love Jesus as you have loved Him:
Blessed Don Bosco, pray for us.

That we may love Mary Help of Christians as you have loved her:
Blessed Don Bosco, pray for us.

That we may love work as you have loved it:
Blessed Don Bosco, pray for us.

If the festivities in Rome fill Monsignor's heart with immense joy and a holy pride, those in Turin fill him with deep emotion. During those unforgettable days in Turin, the figure of Don Bosco appears in all its greatness and holiness, as well as in his extraordinary impact on all the people. That immense crowd singing hymns during the transfer of Don Bosco's sacred remains from Valsalice to Valdocco, presents a touching scene and many people can hardly restrain their tears.[1]

2. The XIII General Chapter

The General Chapter is held at Valsalice, and is preceded by a spiritual retreat. 'Don Bosco' has left Valsalice, where he lay buried, for a more dignified and glorious abode in the Basilica, which he has erected in honour of Mary Help of Christians. The tomb where his mortal remains have rested for the last 40 years is still kept open. Msgr. Mathias recalls in his memoirs a little anecdote, which serves as a memorable and strong message to him and to his Salesians in India. One day, after the morning instruction, instead of retiring to his room, he chooses to go and pray at

[1] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India*, 275–278.

the empty tomb. Great is his surprise when he sees a young man lying as if dead in the tomb. When he asks him whether he is not afraid to lie in that position in the tomb, the young man answers: "No! No! I'm not afraid... *Io faccio Don Bosco* – I'm acting Don Bosco." "I have to admit," writes Msgr. Mathias, "that that simple and spontaneous answer sets me thinking. That day I do not meditate on the words of the excellent preacher. The words of that young man are insistently coming back to my mind and to my heart: 'To act Don Bosco!' I, then, take a very strong resolution: 'Yes, to do every thing as Don Bosco did so as to transform all my confreres in India into other Don Boscos'."[2]

Monsignor does not mention the various themes discussed during the Chapter, as these are contained in the Acts of the Chapter. He briefly mentions one particular question concerning the Missions, which undergoes heated discussion, that is, the *modus vivendi* or the guidelines for the relation between the Religious Superior and the ecclesiastical authority or Ordinary in the Missions. Fr. Ricaldone, who is in charge of the Missions, after his experience during the extraordinary canonical visitation of the Salesian Missions in Asia in 1927, is convinced of the need for tackling this problem and has prepared a booklet with the various theories and suggestions, which the General Chapter discusses. The Church has not yet given a completely satisfactory solution. Vatican II will treat this question and its doctrine will be embodied in the new edition of Canon Law promulgated by John Paul II on January 25th 1983.

After the Chapter, Monsignor visits France, Belgium, England, and then he goes back again to North Italy where he is invited to preach several *Triduums* in honour of the new *Beatus*. At the beginning of January 1930, he comes back to India to share with all his children his unforgettable experiences and to encourage every one, starting with himself, "To act Don Bosco."[3]

3. Other Events in 1929

Msgr. Mathias mentions only the above two events in his memoirs: the Beatification of Don Bosco, and the General Chapter, and deals with them with the authority of an eyewitness.

[2] Ibid. 278–279.
[3] Ibid. 279–281.

The chronicle mentions some other events of that year like the serious sickness (typhoid) of Fr. Bonardi and Fr. Uguet in Calcutta, the arrival of 4 priests from Italy among whom there is Fr. V. Scuderi, the priestly ordination of Fr. Tonello on 8th December, the arrival of Fr. Comba[4] and Bro. Mantarro on 12th December, and the arrival of 10 novices from Italy on 28th December.

1930

4. Delhi and Agra (Saharampur)

On his return from Don Bosco's Beatification, Fr. Adolfo Torquist,[5] an Argentinean Salesian, whose family has generously contributed to the building of the International Theological Studentate of Torino-Crocetta, accompanies Msgr. Mathias. The superiors have destined him for India. On reaching Bombay, Monsignor decides to visit Agra and Delhi to meet the elderly Archbishop of Agra, Bernacchioni (a Capuchin), who greatly desires to have a Salesian presence in his archdiocese. "I am an old man now," he writes to Msgr. Mathias. "Before dying I greatly desire to see the Salesians in my archdiocese. I love Don Bosco so much!"[6]

Monsignor thinks that the time has come to fulfill his desire. The Archbishop is extremely happy to welcome him and puts his own car at their disposal to visit New Delhi, and in particular, the Taj Mahal at Agra. Msgr. Mathias also visits another marvelous work of religious art, the Basilica of Sardhana, close to the city of Meerut, built in the XIX century

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[4] Fr. Alvin Comba is born on 1.3.1881 at Pinerolo (Italy). When he becomes a Salesian, he is already a qualified professor of classical languages (Italian, Latin, and Greek). He makes his first profession in March 1912 and is ordained a priest in 1920. He reaches Shillong on 12.12.1929. He spends most of his life in India in contact with the students of theology, as a very much-appreciated confessor and spiritual guide, and a professor of Ecclesiastical History and Moral Theology. He accompanies the students of theology in all their peregrinations to Woodcot and Bandel after the 1936 fire, which destroys Our Lady's House, and then to Kotagiri in 1962, when the Chinese threaten to invade the Northeast. During World War II, he is allowed to remain in Shillong. He spends the last years of his life at Sunnyside with the Novices. He dies in Nazareth Hospital on 1.12.1970 of third degree burns he has suffered in his room at about 2.00 a.m. of that same day, aged 89.

[5] Fr. Adolfo Tornquist: born in Buenos Aires (Argentina) on 4.12.1887, makes his first profession on 10.11.1922, is ordained a priest on 24.6.1921, comes to India in 1930, dies at Alta Gracia (Argentina) on 20.4.1971.

[6] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 283.

by the first Catholic Princess of India, a convert from Islam, known as the Princess of Sardhana.[7]

Msgr. Mathias promises the Archbishop that he will do all what he can to fulfill his wish. To open a house in Delhi is a tempting proposition. A possible Salesian house in the Capital of India will be of great benefit to the Congregation, he thinks. It will take a numbers of years before his desire can be realized. For his promise to Archbishop Bernacchioni to be realized, it takes nearly one more year.[8] In fact it is on 2nd March 1932, that Fr. Raygasse leaves Bandel and starts the new centre of Saharampur and Roorkee, as reported in the chronicle of Fr.Bonardi, while Fr. Mazzetti[9] takes his place in Bandel. He is accompanied by the cleric, A. Cocco.[10]

In his report to the Superior Council in 1932, Msgr. Mathias gives the following details about Saharampur:

- Principal Residence: Saharampur.
- Missionary work: at Saharampur - parish, school, chaplaincy for railway workers. About one or two miles from the parish, we have a piece of land with buildings for a technical or agricultural school. Land and buildings belong to the Salesians. It is an independent work.
- Other residences without priest: 1. Roorkee, a centre for civil engineers; 2. Muzzaffarnagar.[11]

5. Festivities in Honour of Don Bosco

The year 1930 witnesses a series of celebrations in honour of the new *Beatus,* both in Shillong and in all the mission centres, in Calcutta, in the Marian Shrine of Bandel, and in the mission of Krishnagar. The confreres in other parts of India too mark the event in a fitting manner.

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[7] Ibid. 283-286.

[8] Ibid. 286.

[9] Fr. John Mazzetti: is born at Casale (Italy) on 2.2.1887, makes his first profession on 29.8.1909, becomes a priest on 29.5.1920, comes to India on 31.10.1922, dies at Ivrea (Italy) on 16.6.1949.

[10] Fr. Andrea Cocco: born at Bosa (Italy) on 20.5.1890, comes to India in 1928, makes his first profession on 19.3.1930, becomes a priest on 29.4.1933, dies at Santulussurgio (Italy) on 20.10.1967. Bro. Cocco is a late vocation. In the world he has a very good position, wealth, honours, but he leaves everything to join the Sons of Don Bosco, who have been his educators for several years.

[11] *Provincial Archives*, F.B.12.

In Shillong, the celebrations are crowned by an exhibition on technical schools. Msgr. Mathias wants to show to the public what these technical schools can achieve, a charism they have received from Don Bosco. The exhibition is a veritable revelation and leaves a deep impression on the local authorities and on all those who visit it. Monsignor himself remains highly impressed by the skill with which it is prepared and by the variety of exhibits on display. The Governor, Sir Laurie Herman, volunteers to come for the inauguration. In his inaugural address he says: "We need in India this kind of educators, who are ready to make any sacrifice for the good of youth. We need workshops; we need technical schools and honest workers. There are even too many people holding Academic University degrees. I am very happy to see that the Catholic Mission knows how to harmonize its initiatives with the true needs of the Country."[12]

This great success serves to deepen even more Monsignor's conviction that the best contribution the Salesian Congregation can give to India, is not that of multiplying schools and Colleges and other purely academic institutions, but that of creating technical schools which will give to India the specialized craftsmen and technicians it needs.[13]

6. The Reopening of the Mission at Dibrugarh: 28 February 1931

During the previous years, Msgr. Mathias is so busy with commitments in various other parts of India that he has little time to visit the mission centres in the Brahmaputra valley. He feels that it is necessary for him to get to know better the vast Brahmaputra valley, its needs and possibilities. And so he decides to make a thorough visit of the valley to see the places where missionary work can be established and expanded. Fr. Leo Piasecki, called 'the lion of the Brahmaputra valley', prepares for him a detailed itinerary. At the end of the rainy season in 1930, Monsignor leaves Shillong and, in the company of Fr. Piasecki, begins his tour starting from Goalpara District at the foot of Bhutan. There he starts visits to the

[12] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 289.
[13] Ibid. 287–292.

tea gardens where many of the Catholics are working. After Goalpara they cross over to Nowgong, pass through Jorhat, and finally reach Dibrugarh. In Dibrugarh there are two residences, one for the fathers and the other for the sisters, which have been opened earlier by the Salvatorian fathers, but closed at the departure of the fathers and have remained so for many years. Monsignor decides to reopen them, because with the increase of the number of Catholics it is not possible to visit them from far away Gauhati. However, the old residence is not apt for a greater development of the work and a larger piece of land is needed for the building of the church and the school. Fr. Piasecki manages to sell that residence and buy a big piece of land on another part of the town far away from the river. Fortunately so, because not much time will pass before the river washes away that land and the houses therein. The Dibrugarh Mission is reopened by Fr. Piasecki on 28th February 1931, at the request of Msgr. Mathias.[14]

When Monsignor is writing his memoirs in 1964, Dibrugarh has a good number of Catholic institutions around the beautiful Cathedral built by Fr. Piasecki in honour of the Sacred Heart of Jesus: the bishop's house, the Don Bosco School,[15] St. Mary's Orphanage of the (then) Diocesan sisters, (Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians), founded by the bishop of Shillong, Msgr. Stephen Ferrando in 1942, the Little Flower Boarding of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and a little away, the St. Joseph's Diocesan Seminary, under construction. In 1951 Dibrugarh is made into a diocese, the second diocese in the region after Shillong, with Msgr. O. Marengo as its first bishop.



Rev. Fr. LEO PIASECKI, SDB (1889–1957)

[14] Cfr. Joby Mattappally, ed. *A Chronicled History of the Houses of the Province of Dimapur* (Dimapur: Provincial House, 2000).

[15] For a complete history of the Don Bosco School, Dibrugarh, Cfr. Ibid. 16–24.

6.1 We need Your Spirit

While in Dibrugarh Monsignor keeps himself busy exercising the sacred ministry and this gives him happiness, because his life spent in travelling does not give him much opportunity for the apostolate properly so called. He has the joy of administering a great number of baptisms, confirmations, distributing Holy Communion, and blessing marriages.

His visit to Dibrugarh results also in the starting of another noble venture. During his stay there, the Authorities of the Civil Hospital, coming to know of the splendid work of the Salesian Sisters in Gauhati Hospital, approach him and insist with him to help in the Dibrugarh Hospital. Since the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians cannot take on themselves that responsibility owing to lack of personnel, the Monsignor approaches the Sisters of Charity, who for many years are working with great zeal in Krishnagar. The sisters oblige and soon with their hard work and charitable ways win over the admiration and affection of all, both doctors and patients. The Chief among the doctors, a Hindu, is particularly happy. A few years later, the Authorities build a new Hospital, which is the present one. The new administration thinks better of not calling for the services of the sisters, as they have now their own trained nurses. The sisters continue to work in the old Hospital. Not more than six months pass, before the Chief doctor of the new Hospital goes to the Superior and tells her: "Mother, I come to invite you to come into my Hospital. We cannot go on like this. There is no order, no discipline, and, what is worse; there is no love for the patients. Mother, *we need your spirit*, please come". The Superior tries to make her excuses saying that the government has not invited them, but the doctor, taking out a sheet of paper, says: "I have settled everything, here is the government's permission." The sisters go to work in the new Hospital. Things change in a short time.

Another noteworthy incident takes place in the hospital there. The Superior is a very hard working person. Besides the direction of the hospital and the care of more than 100 nurses, she takes care of the operation theatre and of the financial administration. The doctor, to make the work of the Superior lighter, gives her a helper, a competent accountant. Not more than a week passes before the new accountant goes to the doctor and says: "I cannot continue to do this work. It is too heavy for me." The Doctor is taken aback. Then rising from his desk tells her: "Come with me", and both go into the office of the Superior. "Mother," he says excitedly, "this lady complains that she has too much work, and she does

not know that this is only a small portion of your work." Then he calms down a little and continues, "Yes, I understand, this nurse lacks one thing: that Crucifix which you have on your person."[16]

7. My Clerics

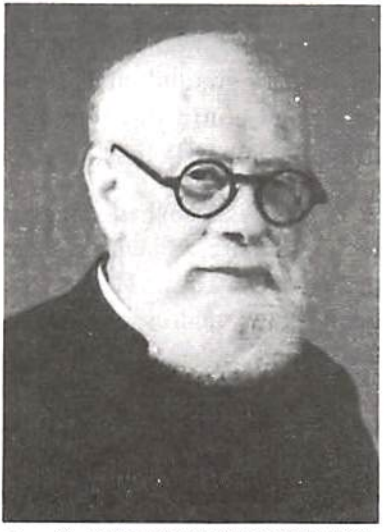
Several times, Msgr. Mathias mentions in his *Memoirs* the novices and the clerics, who truly form 'his joy and his crown'. He wants to shower on them his gratitude and affection. In fact, he declares that if in India the Salesians could develop the Mission so much and establish the Congregation so solidly, in great part it is due to the clerics.

He has seen them coming to the missions very young, still aspirants to Salesian life, and with great joy he has seen them grow in that veritable garden of Our Lady's House as he really wants them to be: cheerful, healthy, open, pious, and especially hard-working. The clerics are ready to do anything. Since the priests are still few, the clerics have to do part of the work and they are doing it very well. One, for instance, has to do the job of the assistant parish priest, and during the protracted absence of the parish priest, out on his apostolic tours, he has to manage and do everything, except, of course, hearing confessions and offering Mass. Another one is acting as Headmaster of St. Antony's School; a third one has to be assistant, catechist, and prefect of studies in the orphanage and in Don Bosco technical school. At this time Msgr. Mathias is the rector of that house and the only Priest with him is Father Farina, the confessor. Often Monsignor has to be absent from Shillong and he practically leaves the house in the hands of the clerics. He has full confidence in them and can say that they have never taken advantage of the confidence placed in them.

The students of theology, besides studies and classes, which are held early morning and late at night, are regular teachers in St. Antony's School and teach also the novices and the students of philosophy. But are they also studying theology, some may ask? Monsignor himself is at times pondering on this question and feels scrupulous about asking too much from them. He has even asked the superiors for permission to shorten the period of practical training. But he is consoled at the thought that Don Bosco has done the same in the first years of the Oratory. He

[16] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 303.

adds, however, that these clerics do well in their studies as well. One of their professors, Fr. Edward Guttierez,[17] who has been a companion of Mgr. Mathias at Foglizzo, recalling those first years in Shillong, has this to say: "At that time the students were studying and studying very hard!"



Rev. Fr. EDWARD GUTTIEREZ, SDB (1886-1976)

On Sundays all the clerics become directors of the Festive Oratories in the various villages around Shillong. During the holidays the clerics are accompanying Monsignor or other missionaries in their apostolic journeys. They are particularly ingenious in improvising academies or playlets. The entertainments in Our Lady's House become well known in the whole city. The choir in four voices gains extraordinary reputation, and it is not afraid of performing even classical pieces, such as the *Mass* of Pope Marcellus by Palestrina, the *Martyrs of the Arena* by Rillet, the *Super flumina Babilonis* by Gounod. The Liturgical services, the ceremonies, the Gregorian chant and polyphonic music are performed to perfection. Msgr. Mathias, himself a good musician, is keen on this.

[17] Fr. Edward Guttierez is born on 31.12.1886 at Caceros (Spain), makes his first profession on 8.12.1906 and is ordained a priest on 20.7.1913. For a number of years he is an esteemed professor of theology in Spain. He comes to India in 1929 and spends most of his missionary life in Shillong working for the students of theology, as an outstanding educator and professor of theology (Moral Theology, Scripture, Canon Law, and Liturgy). Through the years he also plays different roles as catechist, Rector, a sought after spiritual guide and adviser, and a member of the Provincial Council. When the Italian confreres are taken to the Concentration Camp, he is temporarily assistant parish priest to Fr. Dal Broi at Tezpur. Then he is Novice Master at Tirupattur, Dibrugarh and Mawlai. He is very much remembered for his exemplary life, regularity, sense of justice, and depth of knowledge, especially in Moral Theology, where he is a specialist. Towards the end of his life he is confessor to the Novices at Sunnyside. He dies, aged 89, on 8.10.1976.

There exists a deep spirit of piety among the clerics. It is consoling to see them praying and singing the Sunday Vespers late in the evening, when they return from the Festive Oratories, tired and hungry. Their prayer life and their devout deportment are already a great means of apostolate.

8. Our Salesian Brothers

Several times Msgr. Mathias mentions in his *Memoirs* some Brother or another, who is of great help in those first years, especially in establishing the technical school in Shillong. He likes to mention some of them in particular:

- *Bro. Laureano Santana*, a Spaniard, a tailor by training, starts the tailoring department. He is already somewhat advanced in years, but ready to do anything and always with a smile on his lips. He is also a barber and Monsignor is happy to receive a haircut from him, because while doing this service he is telling some of his adventures in Spain, and also occasionally gives him some pieces of advice. "I'm convinced," says Msgr. Mathias, "that when stitching the cassocks for the clerics, the good Brother Santana is saying ejaculations that the Lord bless those who have to wear them."[18] The pupils have a true veneration for him. His goodness and his exemplary life have a tremendous impact on them. He is one of those who go to open the house in Bombay, and there he dies after some years a holy death in 1943, at the age of 71.[19]

- *Bro. Cid Gumersindo*,[20] one of the first group of Salesians to come to Assam, is affectionately called *El Cid Campeador*. He will remain all his life in Shillong, except for a short period at Saharampur. Brother Cid starts the shoe-making department, which soon becomes famous in the whole of Assam. All the Europeans in Shillong and in the tea gardens are proud of wearing shoes manufactured at Don Bosco Technical School. They consider the shoes from Don Bosco School as the best in the world. His pupils are proud of him and obey him

[18] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 312.

[19] Bro. Laureano Santana: born at Orense (Spain) on 17.11.1871, makes his first profession on 6.9.1902, comes to India in January 1922, dies at Bombay on 1.1.1943.

[20] Bro. Cid Gumersindo: born at Orense (Spain) on 15.8.1893, makes his first profession on 4.9.1913, comes to India in January 1922, dies at Shillong on 22.9.1976.

blindly. When, in later years, the department will be closed down, Bro. Cid will be a very caring nurse by the bedside of the sick boys. He dies in Shillong on 22nd September 1976, at the age of 83.

- *Bro. Casagrande*, who, together with Bro. Roncoroni, gives a great push to the mechanics department, hails from the Venetian Province and becomes a Salesian as a late vocation. He never succeeds in learning English or Khasi, but just with his gestures he manages to make himself understood by all. The mechanics section also becomes well known and he has always plenty of work to which he gives all his time, even part of his rest and recreation. He has the simplicity and candour of a child. After 40 years he goes back to Italy and there he dies in an accident. He forgets that in Italy, while driving, one has to keep to his right and not to the left as in India. He dies in Trento on 24th October 1949, at the age of 67.[21]

- Two more brothers whom Assam cannot forget are Bro. Ferraris and Bro. Mantarro; one hailing from Piedmont and the other from Sicily.

- *Bro. Ernesto Ferraris,* born in Italy on 12th December 1898, makes his first profession on 4th December 1921, comes to India in the year 1923 and transforms the little carpentry-shed of the Salvatorian fathers into an efficient and up-to-date workshop. In the first years, he is also an efficient drillmaster, as he has been an army man. He will work mostly in Shillong, with a short stint in Krishnagar. Affected by TB he spends some years in Sonada. There he produces veritable works of art for the church, such as the artistic main altar, which has to be dismantled when the new church is built, two side altars, doors, and the pews, which are still used in the new church. Back to Shillong, he spends the last years in Cherrapunjee training his young men. He dies in Shillong on 30th December 1993 at the age of 95.

- *Bro. Santi Mantarro*[22], hailing from Sicily, comes to India in 1925. His name will go down in the annals of the Assam Mission as the

[21] Bro. Giuseppe Casagrande: born at Trento (Italy) on 20.9.1882, makes his first profession on 21.7.1922, comes to India in 1925, dies at Trento on 24.10.1949.

[22] Bro. Santi Mantarro: born at Messina (Italy) on 15.3.1890, makes his profession on 28.4.1920, comes to India in 1925, dies at Shillong on 30.7.1971.

builder of churches. Even when quite advanced in years and deprived of one lung, he supervises the numerous constructions in the diocese of Shillong. It is not easy to count the churches, schools, and mission centres built by him or under his direction. The imposing Shillong Cathedral is the fruit of 20 years of his work, very painstaking and difficult task, especially during the War. The first church in ferroconcrete is that of St. Therese of the Child Jesus in Jowai built in 1927. At this time there is no bus service to Jowai. One has to go on foot all the way. The materials for construction have to be carried on men's shoulders. And yet, Bro. Mantarro always serene and peaceful shuttles between Shillong and Jowai several times a week to make sure that all the building material is dispatched and to supervise the porters along the way. But more than being a builder Bro. Mantarro is remembered by Msgr. Mathias as the Director of the Festive Oratory at Shillong. The Oratory is his passion till the end of his life. He is a very good band player, and has a brand-new band, which in a short time, he brings up to such perfection that it can exhibit itself at the *Scala of Milan*! More than 40 band players, in their brilliant uniform, enliven feasts and processions. Bro. Mantarro is particularly happy when, sitting at the harmonium, he can intone a beautiful hymn that his numerous Oratory boys sing to perfection. He dies in Shillong on 30th July 1971, aged 81.

- Msgr. Mathias cannot close this brief review of Salesian brothers without mentioning Brother *Xavier Saverimuthu*, the first Indian Brother, born on 28th May 1887. He has known the Salesians at Tanjore and is happy when he comes to know that he too can become a Salesian. He makes his profession in 1925. All his life he works as procurator and overseer of the North Arcot mission centres, and for a long time in the Seminary of Poonamallee. By his great care in seeing that the material needs of the Seminarians are duly taken care of, he greatly contributes to the discipline and good spirit then reigning in the Seminary. He dies on 28th October 1967, aged 80 years.

9. Still on the Good Press

When Msgr. Mathias is back from his missionary tour, the idea dawns on him that, since it is impossible for the missionaries, to contact

directly a great number of people, due to the shortage of personnel, it is possible to do so through the written word. While reading the life of St. Francis de Sales, he is struck by the fact that this great Apostle understands already in his times that the apostolate of the press, in certain cases, can be even more effective than personal contact. In Assam, the Salesians find themselves in a region not very different from the *Savoy* of St. Francis de Sales, both geographically and with regard to the presence of some non-Catholic denominations.

This explains why the Salesians soon dedicate themselves to the apostolate of the written word. As soon as the little press started by the Salvatorians is re-activated, they start once again the publication Ka *Iing Kristan*, whose main objective is the Christian formation of the family. Good writers, such as, Fr. Bacchiarello, Fr. Mlekus, and Fr. Igino Ricaldone contribute regularly.

It is also necessary to answer the false accusations and the calumnies directed against the Catholic Religion. This is done through a handbill, *U Symbai* (The Seed), which becomes popular. Many protest letters arrive which is a good sign since it means that it is right on target. But it is also a source of comfort and encouragement due to the fact that many Protestants, struck by the soundness of the answers, ask for more information and clarifications. Not a few, especially after the arrival of the intrepid Fr. Vendrame, abandon Protestantism and embrace the Catholic Faith.

A Good Press is also needed in the plains. Fr. Piasecki sets himself to this task, first by simple handbills and soon with a monthly in Hindi, called *Salesian Khabaren*. Soon it is known through the whole Salesian world as the Salesian Bulletin in Hindi.

Soon numerous other publications emerge to meet the requirements of the tribes: catechism books, Bible History and Church History books, lives of Saints in a number of tribal languages. The lives of St. Dominic Savio and Mickey Magone are well appreciated by the youth, and when Mgr. Mathias is writing his *Memoirs* there already exist a series of publications in Khasi, Garo, Mikir, Hindi, Lotha, Angami, Manipuri, Lalung, etc.

In Calcutta there starts the monthly, *Don Bosco in India.* Even the famous English writer, Fr. Martindale, S.J., is one of its regular contributors. Fr. A. Anderson, basing himself on the two volumes of Fr. Lemoyne, produces a valuable life of Don Bosco. When the Salesians are permanently settled in Bandel, sometime during the year 1930, there starts the publication of the monthly, *Our Lady of Bandel*, which has done so much good and is still doing by spreading devotion to Our Lady in Bengal and outside. Later in Bombay, the indefatigable Fr. Maschio will launch a very popular magazine, *Don Bosco's Madonna.*

1931

10. A Mixture of Joys and Sorrows

With the expansion of the mission work, trials and tribulations too increase. One such trial is confreres leaving the mission suddenly for various reasons, in spite of the pressing need for personnel due to an increase in establishing new foundations. It is true that every army has to experience occasional defeats and even defections. But the wound is deeper and more painful when it is the case of confreres on whom Msgr. Mathias has put all his hopes and with whom he has shared many years of labour together. He is able to understand better the suffering Don Bosco himself undergoes when his close collaborators abandon him. On 25th March 1930, when Fr. Bonardi, who is his right hand man and whose gifted pen makes the Assam Mission known and loved leaves India to enter a Trappist Monastery in Rome, Msgr. Mathias is deeply pained.[23] This sudden departure causes much suffering to every one, as reported in the chronicle of the Province, which we have come to know as Fr. Bonardi's chronicle: "Fr. Bonardi leaves India and goes to join the Trappists! Fr. Bonardi, who has been miraculously cured by Don Bosco, leaves the Congregation? Oh! how much suffering does this news cause to every one!"

It is also about this time that the life of Msgr. Bars, the Apostolic Administrator of Krishnagar, is in serious danger owing to snakebite he receives. Many in India are the victims of attack by wild animals and, in particular, of poisonous snakes. Msgr. Mathias, after 40 years, can write in his *Memoirs* that none of the missionaries dies a violent death. Though

[23] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 325f.

on 18th June 1963 Fr. Felix Matta is washed away while crossing river Myntang,[24] none dies a victim of wild beasts or snakes.[25]

In the year 1931, the technical school in Shillong runs the risk of being closed down. A typhoid epidemic breaks out among the boarders. Four boys die in succession, causing great panic among their companions and great sorrow to the superiors. In great haste that community of numerous confreres and boys is shifted to the house at Laitkynsew, where it remains for some months till the danger passes away.

The financial situation too causes a lot of worry. It is the time of the great depression and offerings become scarce, just when new projects are being started everywhere and the number of young clerics and novices who need financial support notably increases.

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[24] Fr. Felix Matta is born at Buttigliera d'Asti (Italy) on 26.9.1910. At the age of 22 he is an aspirant at Ivrea (Italy). He makes his novitiate at Sonada and his first profession on 22.12.1939. He is ordained a priest on 7.8.1949. He is always a missionary of the jungle at Pynursla, Marbisu, and Raliang. Pious, observant of the 'Rule', no danger or sacrifice frightens him. He sees only souls to be saved. At Raliang he makes a number of converts from paganism. The old Catholics, instead, are his painful thorns, because of their indifference and ingratitude. "I have to sacrifice myself for them," he tells his Provincial, Fr. A. Alessi. That very evening he makes the Way of the Cross and offers his life for their conversion. The next morning, all excited and trembling, he tells the Provincial that Jesus is accepting his offering. He has seen what is waiting for him, but he is afraid not to be generous enough. In the evening, calm and smilingly, he tells the Provincial that Our Lady will be at his side and everything will be OK. The Provincial does not ask for any details. But he knows that he has much to suffer for. A girl, whom he is following spiritually and who he hopes would be a good sister, elopes with a pagan boy. Two of his boys, whom he has helped very much, become his bitter opponents. His Church is burned down. Probably the culprits are the same Christians who are opposing him.

He writes to the Provincial to call him to Shillong. He is asked to go immediately. It is a Saturday and the parish priest asks him to wait one more day and say Mass next day in a close by village. But, as always, he obeys! When he returns on Monday morning, he finds the river Myntang in spate, but he does not give in. The boatman pushes forward the raft with a long pole. Suddenly the pole breaks, the boatman tries to guide the raft swimming at its side, but the violence of the current carries him away. A boy who has accompanied him up to the bank, sees Fr. Matta, standing with his Rosary in his hand, disappear at a bent of the river. After six days his body is recovered 20 kms. away from the place of the disaster. He is recognized by a piece of cassock and the scapular of Our Lady around his neck. He disappears in the waters of the Myntang exactly one year, the same day and the same evening, after he tells the Provincial that Jesus has accepted his offering to die for the sins of his Christians. Cfr. Alessi, *Una vita per l'India*, 229–231.

[25] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India*, 325.

Msgr. Mathias, finally, suffers greatly on seeing the mission centres and other works depleted of personnel, due to sickness or defections. At times he feels as if they are regressing instead of going forward, while the Protestants are taking great strides.

11. Religious Monopoly[26]

The Assam government assigns one tribe or more to each of the major Protestant Denominations operating in the Province. Each is expected to limit itself to the tribe or tribes allotted to it. Others are not allowed to step in. Thus, the Garos, Mizos, Lushais, Mikirs, the numerous Naga tribes, the regions of Manipur, and NEFA (North Eastern Frontier Agency), now Arunachal Pradesh, are out of bounds for Catholics. This state of affairs is clipping the Salesians' wings. Shillong, however, the Capital since 1870 and the non-tribal plains are not subject to such restriction. The Protestants, who enter Assam much earlier, both the American Baptists and the Welsh Methodists (now called Presbyterians) divide the cake between themselves and the Catholics are left with the crumbs. They are also entrusted with the task of education and overall development, with the help of the government. The Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide while entrusting Assam Mission to the Salesians hopes that through educational involvement a break through could be made in these forbidden zones.

However, for the sake of truth, those first Christian pioneers, must be offered due credit for making Christ known, pacifying and uniting the tribes, spreading literacy, translating the Bible, offering medical facilities, introducing the Roman script, etc. All this is a help to the Catholics too.

In Shillong itself the small Catholic community is hemmed in at Laitumkhrah, while the Protestants are dominating all over the rest of the city. As years go by, and especially after the arrival of Fr. Vendrame, the church is able to break out in all directions and make its presence felt, especially through schools. The visit of Fr. Ricaldone and the celebrations in honour of Blessed John Bosco put the Church on the map of the Northeast. Years later, on the eve of Msgr. Mathias' departure for Madras, the use of a phrase is heard among the Protestants: "The Romans, i.e. the Catholics, have won!" All this gives the Catholics a feeling of self-confidence and self-assertion.

[26] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India*, 329f; Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands*, 65–68.

Until the beginning of 1930s, in the Brahmaputra valley, the missionary activity is mainly among the Adivasis. On their arrival, Fr. Scuderi, Fr. Pianazzi, Fr. Alessi, and others turn also to the tribes of the plains like Boros, Mikirs, etc.

12. The First Breach in the Religious Monopoly Wall: Tura

"It is Fr. Rudolph Fontaine SDS, who in 1913 first undertakes a journey among the Garos. He finds them responsive to Catholicism. Garos from the southern slopes migrate to the plains of Mymensing. The American Holy Cross fathers from Dhaka evangelize them and start the first Garo Communities in 1922. In 1923 and 1924, Fr. Gil, from Gauhati visits two small Garo Communities in the south of Garoland. In 1924 he goes to Laskarpara and Chotcholia, where there are some 50 Catholics converted by the zealous catechist, Pitor Shem. Pitor Shem Momin is a convert who becomes an excellent catechist, zealous and enterprising."[27]

In his apostolic journeys, Msgr. Mathias often meets some Garos. He is aware that the American Baptists, for a long time, are working among them and are making numerous conversions. Monsignor decides to enter sooner or later among the Garos, but waits for a favourable opportunity.

In the year 1931, he studies the possibility of establishing a temporary residence in Dhubri, in Goalpara District, then the door to Garo Hills across the Brahmaputra. His plan is to put there two missionaries who would visit the Garo villages as tourists, something which is allowed, and then Providence would do the rest.

Msgr. Mathias goes to Dhubri with Fr. Scuderi and Fr. Pianazzi. The latter has been his secretary for some time in Shillong. But the life of the secretary is not meant for him. Bubbling over with zeal, he dreams of forests, missionary tours, and conversions. One day, in quite a serious tone, he asks Monsignor to join him in a novena he wants to make to obtain an important grace. Monsignor, who is already suspecting his real motivation, before the end of the novena gives him the obedience to go down to Gauhati and study the Garo language, which he learns to perfection. Early enough he begins to prepare Catholic reading materials: a catechism, a Bible History, pamphlets to answer objections to the Catholic Faith, the monthly *Seng baa* (Dawn), etc.

[27] Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands*, 68.

From Dhubri they cross over the Brahmaputra and reach Tura, the capital of the Garo Hills, for a short visit. Earlier, with the permission of the Prefect Apostolic, the catechist Peter Shem Momin builds a Chapel in the village of Chotcholia. This is the first Catholic church in the Garo Hills. Reaction to it surfaces immediately. The Deputy Commissioner of Garo Hills, Mr. Walker, orders it to be destroyed. The Prefect Apostolic lodges a protest with the Governor. The officer is transferred to another District. The law of the land forbids one to destroy a sacred edifice.

After this event, Monsignor thinks of a stratagem, which proves to be successful. He buys in Tura a house, which he names *Rest House*. The missionaries, Fr. Pianazzi and Fr. Rocca, can make use of it after their apostolic tours among the Garo villages. In the meantime the number of Catholics is steadily increasing. It is at this moment that Monsignor makes an official request to the Governor to allow the missionaries to settle down definitively in Tura to take care of the already numerous Catholics. Fortunately, the new Assam Governor is a Catholic who easily grants permission. The chronicle, on 17th March 1933, reports that Fr. Pianazzi and Fr. Rocca,[28] notwithstanding the opposition of the Baptists, for two months have succeeded in establishing themselves permanently in Tura in the Garo Hills.[29]

A hill, a mile away from the Baptist Centre, is bought in Tura and on it will in time be established the various institutions: the residence of the fathers, the school for the boys and a beautiful church dedicated to Mary Help of Christians. Later, the Missionary Sisters of Christ the King will come, and mission centres will increase. Today Tura is a diocese. On this hill now stand the bishop's house, the cathedral, the catechetical centre, the press, the minor seminary, Don Bosco School, and Don Bosco College.[30]

Tura is made into a diocese on 7th April 1973. Msgr. O. Marengo is appointed Apostolic Administrator. On 8th February 1979, Fr. George Mamalassery is appointed bishop of Tura.[31]

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[28] Fr. Luigi Rocca: born at Imola (Italy) on 13.6.1900, comes to India in 1926, makes his first profession on 6.1.1927, becomes a priest on 31.3.1932, dies at Terracina (Italy) on 14.8.1956, aged 56.

[29] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India*, 329–333.

[30] Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands*, 68. Cfr. *History of Salesian Centres*, Vol. VIII (Gauhati: Archival Publications, 1986) for more details on the Pre-Novitiate of the ING (p.139), Don Bosco School (p.146), and Don Bosco College (p.144).

[31] *History of Salesian Centres*, 129.

1932

13. The XIV General Chapter

On 5th December 1931, Fr. Philip Rinaldi dies and a new General Chapter is convoked by the Prefect General, Fr. Ricaldone, to be held in the month of April 1932. Msgr. Mathias goes to the Chapter together with the elected Delegate, Fr. Hauber. At this Chapter Fr. Peter Ricaldone is unanimously elected Rector Major. Indeed a very worthy person, who will leave a mark on the Congregation. Msgr. Mathias is particularly happy, because as a Visitor in 1927, Fr. Ricaldone knows very well the possibilities and the needs of Salesian India.

14. The New Province

On his return to India, Msgr. Mathias receives persistent requests for more personnel from all parts of India, and the need is great. All are keen to consolidate and expand further their field of action. But it is not an easy matter for Msgr. Mathias to satisfy all these appeals, as, with the little personnel now available, he has to give life to the various works already in existence: 1. The Prefecture Apostolic of Assam, Manipur, and Bhutan; 2. The diocese of Krishnagar; 3. The Archdiocese of Madras; 4. Various Institutions scattered in the Archdioceses of Calcutta and Bombay, and Saharampur, in the Archdiocesse of Agra and Delhi.

Some missionaries are hindered by illness; others are alone in their mission centres. This is particularly worrying Msgr. Mathias, as he holds that priests should live in communities of three or four, or at least a minimum



V. Rev. Fr. PETER RICALDONE,SDB
Rector Major (1932–1951)

Fr. Peter Ricaldone is born on 27th July 1870. He makes his *aspirantate* and novitiate from 1889 to 1990 at Valsalice. In 1890, still a cleric, he leaves for Spain and, while a student of theology, he becomes the soul of the festive Oratory of Siviglia. He is ordained a priest on 29th May 1893.

In 1901, Fr. Michael Rua entrusts the Betica Province to the young Fr. Peter Ricaldone, who puts his heart and soul into its marvelous development.

of two or three, within a large district parcelled out among themselves. Back from tours, they would find a home and companionship.

The shortage of personnel is especially felt in the archdiocese of Madras. On coming to know that in Shillong there is the ordination of some new priests, the confreres of the South clamour to have their share. Msgr. Mathias on his part is of the opinion that the few new priests have to be reserved for Assam, which has made so many sacrifices for their formation. Besides, they have learnt some tribal languages of Assam, and so it is more than natural that they should work among the tribes of Assam.

This way of reasoning, very logical for Monsignor, is not shared among the missionaries in other parts of the country. Hence, a kind of dissatisfaction surfaces among the confreres and some of them start voicing a desire for a division of the Province, in the hope that they will in the course of time have their own personnel formed locally. This idea, which is also shared by the Monsignor, convinces him to write to the superiors with the proposal for the erection of a new Indian Province. He suggests that the new Province be dedicated to St. Thomas the Apostle, while the Assam Mission, whose initials MA (*Missioni Assam),* are recalling *Maria Ausiliatrice*, be dedicated to Mary Help of Christians.

In 1911 he is made Councillor for professional and agricultural schools. He is a specialist in this field. During his eleven years stint he raises the professional and agricultural schools to a very high standard of excellence clearly shown in national and international exhibitions.

Elected Prefect General in 1922, he is the right hand man of the new Rector Major, Fr. Philip Rinaldi. His personal contribution, however, is also much evident in the launching of the 'missionary crusade', in the organization of the Salesian Cooperators, and in the grandiose festivities on the occasion of Don Bosco's Beatification.

The 'missionary crusade' gives rise to a number of initiatives, in particular, the preparation and formation of personnel for the Missions through missionary *aspirantate*s, such as, the Institute Card. Cagliero at Ivrea (Piedmont), the missionary *aspirantate* for lay brothers and for the formation of the Salesian brothers at Cumiana (agricultural school), the Institute 'Conti Rebaudengo' (Turin), the Institute 'Bernardi Semeria' for printers at Colle Don Bosco (Becchi). For the Missions proper, he gives his great contribution by the organization of the various missionary expeditions, and by visiting the Missions.

As Prefect General of the Congregation, in 1927 he makes the extraordinary Visitation of the Far East. From January to the middle of April, he visits India starting from Madras, and then Calcutta and Assam. From Calcutta he travels to Bombay, where he sets sail for Italy and is back in Turin on 9th December 1927. As Visitor, with his wise decisions and guidance, he renders tremendous services to the Salesians in India and puts the basis for the great leap-forward for the fledgling Indian

Fr. Ricaldone, who as Visitor has come to know persons, distances and the great possibilities of this immense Country, promptly answers in the affirmative. Not much later, he sends the Decree of Erection of the New Province with Madras as its headquarters. On 3rd March 1933, a telegram from Fr. Ricaldone announces the nomination of Fr. Eligius Cinato,[32] the director of the agricultural school at Raliang, as the Provincial of the South Indian Province.[33] The new Province, dedicated to St. Thomas the Apostle, comes officially into existence on 24th January 1934.

15. The First Novitiate in South India

With the erection of the new Province, there arises also the need for a second novitiate house in India. The positive experience of bringing young people from Europe to make their novitiate in their future field of apostolate convinces the superiors to follow the same system also in the South. Even before the Province is formally set up, Madras opens its own novitiate in Tirupattur. Superiors start sending them some 10 novices a year from the *aspirantate* at Ivrea.

Province in 1928. In 1932 he succeeds Fr. Philip Rinaldi as Rector Major.

The exceptional difficulties of his rectorship only manifest his extraordinary qualities. He gives great impetus to the Festive and Daily Oratories, to the organization of the Past Pupils, to the catechetical crusade to update religious instruction among the people. As a service to the Congregation and the dioceses he creates the Central Salesian Catechetical Office and the LDC *(Libreria Dottrina Cristiana*- Library of Christian Doctrine) at Colle Don Bosco (Becchi). He gives a very particular attention to the intellectual preparation of the Salesians for their apostolate by obtaining pontifical approval for the creation of the PAS (Salesian Pontifical Athenaeum), which Paul VI will upgrade to the status of a University, the Pontifical Salesian University (UPS).

The Canonization of Don Bosco and the Beatification of Mother Mazzarello inspire him to enlarge and beautify the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians. He works hard also for the Salesian and religious formation of the Salesians with his circular letters and commentaries on the yearly *Strenna*, and by writing extensive guidelines for the various stages of formation, and with his collection of ascetical works.

He dies on 25th November 1951, at the age of 81, after being 61 years a Salesian, 58 years a priest, Provincial for 10 years, Councillor for professional and agricultural schools for 11 years, Prefect General for 9 years, and Rector Major of the Salesian Society for 19 years.

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[32] Fr. Eligio Cinato is born on 22.7.1898 at Susa (Italy), comes to India to make his novitiate in 1923, makes his first profession on 21.1.1925, is ordained a priest on 20.1.1930. He dies at Cherrapunjee on 14.1.1964.

[33] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 339.

Msgr. Mathias sends down as novice master a young priest who reaches Shillong at the beginning of 1932, Fr. Joseph Careño,[34] a Basque, an intelligent, jovial and a pleasant young man. He is dreaming of the Assam 'forests' and of 'xaverian' conversions. But when he is told that Providence wants him to be the apostle of apostles, he smiles, takes with him the few books he has, his accordion, and all his enthusiasm and leaves for Madras.

16. The Founding of the Tezpur Mission: 1 June 1932[35]

The Salesian Mission in the Brahmaputra valley makes a leap forward with the arrival of three new priests: Fr. A. Pianazzi, Fr. V. Scuderi, and Fr. A. Alessi. They are sent to substitute for Fr. Piasecki and Fr. Marmol, who are sent to Dibrugarh to open a new mission centre. The spring-board for their apostolic enterprises is the Salesian house at Gauhati, which comprises a parish, a high school, a technical school and the house of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

"As good brothers," writes Fr. Alessi, "we have a council of war. With a map of Assam in front of us, we divide the whole region in three parts: the Garo Hills are entrusted to Fr. Pianazzi; Fr. Scuderi, rector of the house and of the schools, takes charge of the territory around Gauhati; the third portion, comprising the central districts of Darrang and Nowgong in the lower Brahmaputra valley, is allotted to me. It is 30th June 1931."[36]

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[34] Fr. Joseph Careño: born at Bilbao (Spain) on 23.10.1905, makes his first profession on 25.7.1922, becomes a priest on 21.5.1932, comes to India in 1932, goes down to Tirupattur as Novice Master in 1932. At the end of 1942 he becomes the acting provincial and later the Provincial, as successor to Fr. Cinato who is interned in Deoli and Dehra Dun. Msgr. Mathias makes him also his Vicar General. In August 1951 he is called to Europe to organize the Salesian Cooperators. From 1952 to 1962 he works in Goa. From 1962 to 1967 he is rector and Novice Master in Conlubang (Philippines). In 1962 he is called back to Europe and works at the Salesian Catechetical Centre of Madrid, and then at the Salesian Missionary Procure of New Rochelle in USA and in that of Madreid. Fr.Careño is a great son of Don Bosco, a great devotee of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a great formator of Salesians and a great writer. He is considered to be the greatest scientific popularizer in Spain of the Holy Shroud of Turin, five books one better than the other. He dies at Pamplona, Spain on 29.5.1986, aged 81, 9 years the Provincial of the Madras Province. Cfr. Obituary letter in Spanish.

[35] Cfr. Alessi, *Una vita per l'India,* 57ff. For all the missionary activity of Fr. Alessi in Tezpur, cfr. 57–117.

[36] Ibid. 57f.

"After 10 days," continues Fr. Alessi, "with the addresses of the small Christian communities in the region and a few Hindi questions in my pocket as a help to hear confessions, and with great enthusiasm, I start off for my first missionary tour to visit about a thousand Catholics spread out in the tea-gardens, in the district of Nowgong. A journey made on foot, for hundreds of kilometers, but very rich in consoling fruits: hundreds of confessions, 25 baptisms and the blessing of three marriages. I come back to Gauhati dead tired, but with so many adventures, not all very pleasant, to share, and plenty of enthusiasm and joy for the good done and especially for meeting with my Christians, whom I feel I love already so much. A very beautiful apostolate is opening before me."[37]

On 2nd April 1932 the first batch of novices hailing from Italy in 1923 is ordained priests. Three of them are sent to Gauhati to help out the three missionaries to establish permanent residences in their zone of apostolate: Fr. Louis Rocca goes with Fr. Pianazzi, Fr. O. Marengo, is given to Fr. Scuderi, and Fr. Louis Ravalico is assigned to Fr. Alessi.

"Fr. Ravalico,"[38] says Fr. Alessi, "is a wonderful missionary, hailing from Trieste, a man afire with zeal, a dreamer, a poet, an indefatigable worker, and a good writer. 'The salvation of souls is the supreme law' for him."[39]

During his tours, Fr. Alessi chooses Tezpur, then a small town with 12,000 inhabitants, as the most convenient place for the new residence. Msgr. Mathias, on his invitation, visits the place, accepts his proposal and rents a small house. He has done the same for the residence among the Garos and, returning to Gauhati, he orders that the two permanent residences be opened on 1st June 1932.

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[37] Ibid. 57.

[38] Fr. Louis Ravalico is born in 1906 at Trieste (Italy) reaches Shillong, already a Salesian cleric, together with Fr.C.Vendrame, on 23.12.1924, and is ordained a priest on 2.4.1932. His first assignment is to be assistant to Fr. A. Alessi when they open the Tezpur Mission on 1.6.1932. In 1935 Louis succeeds Fr. Alessi as head of the Mission, till the end of 1938, when he is called down by the Provincial to Liluah to take charge of the "Don Bosco in India", of the mission office and of the correspondence with the benefactors. On 11.6.1940, together with other Italians he is interned in 'Fort William' (Calcutta), Ahmednagar, Deolali and Dehra Dun. In September 1946 he is allowed to go to Goa. After Independence he succeeds to enter India, first to Madras and then to Assam. In 1956, together with Fr. Peter Bianchi, he founds the Manipur Mission. He dies in the Shillong on 17.12.1967. Cfr. Alessi, *Una vita per l'India*, 226–229.

[39] Ibid.

The only way to reach Tezpur at this time is by steamer on the Brahmaputra. The two missionaries reach Tezpur, at one time the glorious capital of the Ahoms, on 1st June 1932. They take with them the two boxes with the sacred vestments and church linen, some plates, one pot, their books, their scanty clothes, and settle down in the rented house. They turn a small room into a Chapel and offer their first Mass in their new field of apostolate.

In the evening of the following day, over 200 Christians working in the tea-gardens close by, on coming to know of their arrival, come to give their missionaries a joyous welcome, a spontaneous manifestation of affection that deeply touches our two missionaries. They remain there the whole night, sleeping on mats. Next morning they have a sung High Mass and general Holy Communion. The missionaries cannot imagine a more promising beginning!

The new residence is placed under the protection of Don Bosco. The two great friends, strengthened by their youthful years and common apostolic ideals, begin at once with great enthusiasm cultivation of the large vineyard of the Lord entrusted to their care.

Fr. Alessi and Fr. Ravalico divide their territory into various zones and start touring. When one returns to the centre, the other leaves for further tours. Often both of them are out touring at the same time for several weeks. Their work consists in visiting the various communities, founding new ones, erecting chapels and schools, looking for and preparing catechists for the new centres, and, not the least headache, looking for financial means to keep their work going.

"They are always on the move even during the rainy season, from village to village, from tea-garden to tea-garden, along dusty or slushy roads, across paddy fields, and through forests, ever harassed by malaria and tormented by leeches and mosquitoes, by heat, cold and dampness, by hunger and thirst, and not rarely, threatened by greater dangers to their lives: wild animals, cholera, beriberi, Kala-azar, etc."

They go to Ranchi to learn from the Jesuit fathers the way they organize their Christian Adivasis. Back from Ranchi, they set up a pyramid system in the organization of their 'catechists', with catechists and head-catechists. Then they start the 'Chotanagpur Bank' to help the Adivasis to buy land and settle down in villages.

There is urgent need for a church and a boarding school in Tezpur. In 1934 the opportunity presents itself: the Planters' Residential Club of

Darrang is on sale. With the help of the Prefect Apostolic they buy it. On the new plot of land they build the church– now a cathedral – and the boarding school.[40] Today there is a big complex there: the bishop's House, two high schools, a convent and a girls' high school.[41]

"It is something unheard of," writes Msgr. Mathias, "that these two missionaries continue their tours and apostolic journeys even during the rainy season, when the plains become an immense quagmire and travelling becomes dangerous and extremely enervating."[42]

"During the first year," writes Fr. Alessi in the house chronicle, "I have been out up to 221 days and Fr. Ravalico just as many days...it is sheer madness," Fr. Alessi himself admits, "but our love for God and for his children supports us and repays for any sacrifice."[43]

Fr. Alessi and Fr. Ravalico give themselves totally to the mission: their untiring work, their health, their time, their prayers, and especially their numerous sacrifices and their sufferings. God blesses their work abundantly. At the end of their first year of apostolic labours, in their territory there are 48 small communities, 33 of them having a chapel, which during the day is used as a school; 16 have a permanent catechist, and 17, a man in charge for leading the singing and the prayers during the Sunday gatherings.

In 1934–35, important changes of personnel take place that affect also the Tezpur mission. In October 1934, Fr. Scuderi, the rector of Don Bosco Gauhati, becomes the new Provincial and Fr. Marengo takes his place as rector. In 1935, Fr. Marengo is sent to start a new mission centre.

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[40] Fr. Ravalico can only bless the foundation stone of the Church before he leaves for Calcutta. Fr. Dal Broi carries on the work in dead earnest, but it cannot be completed. During the War the British requisition it as a military food godown. It is completed and blessed after the War. The dynamic Fr. Bonomi [born at Brescia, Italy, comes to India in 1927, professes on 6.1.1929, becomes a priest on 28.6.1935, goes back to Italy in 1950], assistant to Fr. Dal Broi, in a village 8 kms away from Tezpur, starts the boarding school. Huts are raised and the school starts functioning under the supervision of reliable teachers. After 3 years a hurricane destroys the huts, and the school is rebuilt at Tezpur. Fr. Thomas Lopez prepares the plan for a single storey building made of bricks at the Mission compound. One wing serves as dormitory and the other for classrooms. Cfr. J. Dal Broi, "Reminiscences", two hand written copybooks. For the Church, cfr. 2nd copybook, under "Tezpur again"; for the boarding school, 2nd copybook, under "the story of a boarding".

[41] Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands*, 69.

[42] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India*, 363.

[43] Alessi Jr., *Una vita per l'India*, 65.

In his place Fr. Alessi is called to be the rector. It costs him a great deal to leave a place where he has worked so hard and suffered even more. But he has also experienced so many consolations. When in June 1931, he is entrusted with this district, he finds in it only about 3000 Catholics. When, after four years, he is asked to leave it, there are 18,000 baptized Catholics and catechumens. The Lord gives him also another great consolation some years later. "On 31st January 1981," he writes, "Msgr. Robert Kerketta enters as bishop into 'his' and 'my' Tezpur. Exactly 50 years before I succeed to reach a village of that zone. Towards the end of 1932, a baby boy is born to a family of that village, whom I baptize with the name Robert."[44] When in 1952 Fr. Alessi takes charge of the Northern Province, he finds Robert a cleric in the Salesian College, Sonada. After practical training, he sends him for theology to the International Theological College of Crocetta in Turin. The young Robert is ordained a priest in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in 1963, and now he becomes the bishop.

Fr. Ravalico succeeds Fr. Alessi as head of the Tezpur mission, but only for a short time. Towards the end of 1938, Msgr. Scuderi calls him to the Provincial house at Liluah to take charge of *Don Bosco in India* at the mission office and correspondence with the benefactors of the Province. Fr. Joseph Dal Broi takes his place.[45]

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[44] Ibid. 116.

[45] Fr. Joseph Dal Broi is born at Possagno (Italy) on 19.7.1909. For three years he is a pupil of the 'Cavanis fathers'. In mid-October 1925 he leaves home for Ivrea, where he completes his High School and in mid-October 1926 he leaves for Assam. He enters the Novitiate in the first week of November 1926, but makes his first profession only on 21.1.1928. He makes the perpetual profession on 29.1.1933. He is ordained a Priest on 22.6.1936 in Kurseong by Bishop Ferrando, his Novice Master and Rector in our Lady's House. His first assignment is that of Asst. parish priest to Fr. Ravalico in Tezpur. In 1938 for a few months he is in Tura (Garo Hills), where he gets very sick with malaria. In January 1939 he is back again in Tezpur to succeed Fr. Ravalico as head of the Mission till 1951, when he is called to Shillong to be Novice Master of two batches of Novices. In 1953 he comes to Calcutta as Secretary to the Provincial, first at C.O.P. (1953–1957), then at DBPC (1958–1959). From 1959 to 1967 he is at Mawlai, as Economer of the Theologate and as Rector at Savio Juniorate (1962–1967). In 1967 he comes down to Gauhati. In 1968 he is appointed parish priest of the Cathedral at C.O.P. From 1971 to 1983 he is Prior at Bandel Church. In 1976 he is transferred from the Gauhati Province to the Calcutta Province. In 1983 he is at Don Bosco Seminary, Bandel, as confessor. In 1998 he enters the Woodlands hospital (Calcutta) for a short time and when he is discharged, he remains attached to the Provincial community at Calcutta. On 13.2.2000 he has a fall. After a successful operation, a number of other complications cause his death on 10.3.2000 at the age of 90 and 8 months. He is laid to rest in the Salesian cemetery at Bandel. He is a great Salesian Missionary Priest, a man of prayer, a fervent devotee of Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco, and a convinced religious.

In 1964, Tezpur is erected into a diocese and Msgr. Marengo, transferred from Dibrugarh, is its first bishop.

17. Ten Years' Work

The year 1932 marks the completion of the first decade of Salesian presence in the Northeast. The greatest joy for Msgr. Mathias is the priestly ordination of five Salesians who have completed all their studies in the Studentate of Shillong: Fr. Bacchiarello, Fr. Marengo, Fr. Ravalico, Fr. Rocca, and Fr. Anderson. Fr. Bacchiarello and Fr. Marengo belong to the first batch of novices who reach Assam in December 1923. These young priests, having been formed in the place, know the languages and customs of the people. They can be sent immediately to the field of their apostolate. It is in fact this year, that Msgr. Mathias opens two new mission centres, that of Dhubri for the Garo Hills, with Fr. Pianazzi and Fr. Rocca, and that of Tezpur for Darrang and Nowgong, with Fr. Alessi and Fr. Ravalico.

"Someone" writes Msgr. Mathias, "may consider very risky to send young priests, almost all of them not more than 25 or 26 years old, to open new fields of apostolate so far from the centre in Shillong. But I know my *chicks*. I follow them very closely; I see their youthful enthusiasm, their capabilities, and their potentialities. I am cherishing a great plan: to open two new centres every year, to occupy the most strategic places in Assam, first in the Assam plains, then in the Hills. Many tribes are waiting for us in the Hills, such as the Garos, the Mikirs, the Lalungs, the Boros, the Nagas, not to mention the numerous tribes of Manipur, of NEFA, and of Bhutan."[46]

In Shillong the celebrations to mark the first decade are solemnized with a Congress of Khasi Catholics, and of youth in particular. A solemn Eucharistic Procession and the consecration of the whole Mission to Mary Help of Christians close the festivities.[47]

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[46] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 347.
[47] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 348f.

1933[48]

18. The Jubilee Year

In the year of Our Lord, 1933, there occurs the 1900 anniversary of Our Redemption. Pope Pius XI proclaims a Holy Year. During the Holy Year, Msgr. Mathias raises a monument to Christ as a memorial of this event. It rises at the oval facing the Cathedral. It consists of a huge Crucifix, with the statues of Our Lady, St. John and Mary Magdalene. These are life-size and in bronze, a gift of the French benefactors of Msgr. Mathias. Around the semi-circle he erects also the 14 Stations of the Cross, the work of Mr. Nardini, an artist from Milan.

This leads to another change. Opposite the semi-circle across the Laitumkhrah road, there is a flight of a hundred steps leading to the Cathedral. Msgr. Mathias wants to build there the replica of the Grotto of Lourdes. He begins the work. At his transfer, his successor, Msgr. Ferrando, completes it. It is now a fine site: to the South of the Laitumkhrah Road there is a semi-circle with the monument to the Redeemer, and to the North of it, there is the other semi-circle with Our Lady of Lourdes' Grotto-Shrine and two beautiful winding staircases with ramp and two smooth ascending paths on either side of the Grotto, all leading up to the Cathedral on top of Mary's Hill. This great amphitheatre is the undertaking of Bro. Mantarro who labours at it with exceptional devotion."[49]

19. A Missionary Convention

From the first years of the Mission, soon after the annual retreats in Shillong, it is now customary to hold meetings of all the missionaries to discuss the various problems in the apostolate. This is in answer to a great desire of Msgr. Mathias to keep ever more alive in his missionaries their missionary enthusiasm, and to deepen it and make it effective and lasting. From 1933' these meetings become seminars, because of the increased number of the missionaries and the special problems that crop up due to the growth.

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[48] For the years 1933–1934, I'm following, almost *verbatim,* most of the account – also this based on Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India* - in Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands*; and the Chronicle of the Province (1934–1937), *Provincial Archives*, F. + B.10.1.

[49] Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands,* 72.

The one of 1933 is introduced by the Prefect Apostolic himself with a conference on the XIX Centenary of the Redemption of mankind, followed by a discussion on how best to celebrate the Jubilee Year Redemption and Holy Year. Then papers are read on various themes: Fr. C. Vendrame prepares a paper on "The role of the schools in the Mission." He deals with the where and how of starting a school and the manner of running it. Finally, he proposes setting up a Diocesan Central Office for schools. Fr. Pianazzi prepares a paper on "Missionary Thrust and on how to overcome Obstacles and shun Polemics." Fr. Guttierez speaks on "The New Indulgences." Various other topics are taken up for discussion, such as: the Exercise for a Happy Death, the monthly Moral Case, Spiritual Retreats for youth, for catechists and for the people; precautions to be taken in the apostolic tours, uniformity in keeping the parish registers, translations of the Gospels and of the catechism in the various languages.

The Convention takes place on 26th, 27th, and 28th April. The missionaries present are 20, including Msgr. Mathias. There are five sessions lasting for two or three hours. The discussions are held in an atmosphere of cordiality and brotherly charity. Monsignor is keen that all should express their own point of view and bring out the fruit of their own experience. It is really inspiring to take part in these sessions and to be able to listen to the opinions of the various missionaries.

20. Home to the Father

Mr. Delanaugerede, the oldest and the most generous benefactor of the Assam Mission, dies a holy death on 10th January 1933. He has come to India from France in 1860. He first settles in Gauhati and while there, he helps Fr. I. Broy, PIME, during the priest's 18 years in Gauhati. In Shillong he co-operates with the Salvatorian fathers from 1890 and helps them buy the present land of the Catholic Mission at Laitumkhrah. He serves the church in many ways. His children are excellent Catholics and work for the Mission. All the Catholic institutions of Shillong, most resident Europeans, and the Governor himself attend his funeral.

Joseph Negro, a novice, dies after a short illness on Palm Sunday, 9th April 1933. He has been only a few months in India. Jovial and of exceptional intelligence, he is a very promising student. Before dying, he makes his religious profession. In his remembrance, his brother, many years later, gives all that his brother owns to finance the building of the St. Joseph's Technical School at Kurla in Bombay.

Fr. Charles Mlekus[50] is a young missionary, serving as parish priest of the Laitkynsew parish. Much is expected of him. He is strong, healthy, resolute, and a tireless worker. He dies on 4th November 1933, on his name feast. He makes the noviciate at Klecza Dolna, Poland, completes his philosophy course at Valsalice, where he opts for the Missions. He serves in St. Antony's orphanage, where to everyone's surprise, he learns the Khasi language so well that he becomes an experts in it, as the Khasis themselves admit. For several years he is the editor of the *Ka Iing Kristan*, and supervises the publication of a number of textbooks, still in use today. Ordained a priest in 1930, he is appointed assistant parish priest of the Shillong Cathedral. With his knapsack strapped on his back, he makes long tours in the Bhoi country. On being appointed to Laitkynsew with Fr. Maschio, he says, "We leave and will not stop until our superiors stop us." He has never been ill before. Yet typhoid strikes him down. Fr. Maschio, his assistant, succeeds him, but merges the Laitkynsew parish with that of Cherrapunjee,[51] where he settles until 1936, when he is assigned to Bombay, where he does incredible good to the poor and needy, lepers included.[52]

In the early 1930s, there brakes out an epidemic of beriberi in the East. Shillong too is affected and several confreres suffer from it,

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[50] Fr. Charles Mlekus: born at Gorizia (Italy) on 21.1.1902, makes his first profession on 29.8.1922, becomes a priest on 8.11.1930, dies on 4.11.1933, aged 31.

[51] Cherrapunjee parish has a history that dates back to the last century. Fr. Corbinian Bonheim SDS starts this parish centre on 5 March 1897, with the consent of the *Syiem* (ruler) Hajon Manik of Sohra. The great earthquake of 12 June 1897, which causes great destruction all over the Northeast, also causes great damages in Cherra and in Shella. It is around this time that the missionaries residing in Shella come to start the centre at Laitkynsew. After the earthquake, the new church in honour of the Sacred Heart is built at Cherra in 1905. In 1914, when the World War I begins, the missionaries have to leave Assam. Till the arrival of the Salesians on 13 January 1922, the Assam Mission is entrusted to the care of the Jesuits of Calcutta. Fr. Joseph Hauber is the first Salesian Priest to arrive at Sohra. It is Fr. Aurelius Maschio who starts the construction of the present Church in honour of St. John Bosco. Fr. Peter Tonello completes the building, and Bishop Stephen Ferrando blesses it on 26 January 1952. In 1988 during the centenary celebrations, the church is raised to the status of a shrine. Cfr. *History of Salesian Centres*, 57.

[52] Fr. Aurelius Maschio is born in February 1909 at Vazzola (Treviso), Italy. In November 1924 he is in Shillong to begin his novitiate. He makes the first profession on Christmas night 1925. He learns Khasi fast and well and is entrusted with the editing of the *Ka Iing Kristan*. He begins the study of theology in 1930 and is ordained a priest on 29.4.1933. After the ordination he begins his missionary activity at Cherrapunjee with Fr. Mlekus. This mission has been vacant for 20 years; the residence is in ruins, the area hilly, full of

particularly Bro. Pacificus Muscat[53], Cl. Aegidius Sola and Cl. Marius Bianchi. They are taken to the P. G. Hospital in Calcutta. The clerics recover, though not completely. But Bro. P. Muscat, after prolonged suffering, succumbs to the disease at the young age of 27 on 6th August 1935. He has been the head of the tailoring department at Don Bosco Shillong. He is the uncle of Bro. Carmel Muscat.[54]

1934

21. Don Bosco's Canonization: Five Indians in Rome and Turin

Don Bosco's Canonization is due on Easter Sunday, 1st April 1934. Msgr. Mathias, leaving for Rome to attend the celebrations, takes with him a Khasi cleric (Francis Diengdoh), an aspirant (James Mondol), an orphan (Emil Kachua,), an artisan (Bah Leviticus), and a past pupil (Bah Shon Eugenius), all young and smart, who know how to behave pleasantly and feel at home anywhere. Each is dressed in his own traditional attire.

In Rome they draw everybody's attention. In St. Peter's they are given a special place. In Turin they attend the various celebrations in honour of St. John Bosco. Then for four months they are the welcome guests of several Salesian houses of Northern Italy. They are liked by one and all.

22. Shillong, A Diocese: 1934

In 1933, a report is prepared and sent to Rome on the 10 years missionary activity (1922–1932) in the Prefecture Apostolic of Assam,

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rivers and without roads. When Fr. Mlekus dies of sheer exhaustion, Fr. Aurelius is given the responsibility of the Mission. Without slowing down his tours, he buys a plot of land, rebuilds the residence, buys another plot of land for the Salesian Sisters and begins setting up village chapels. He starts building a Church in honour of Don Bosco, which he cannot complete, as he is called to Bombay to head the Salesian work there on February 1937. Evicted from the building used by the Mary Immaculate Institute at Tardeo, he temporarily rents a building and buys a plot of land at Matunga, a marshy, uneven ground. He levels it with the debris brought in after the explosion at the Bombay Harbour. For the marvellous works he does in Bombay we refer the reader to the brochure brought out by the Bombay Province, "The Memory of the Salesian Province of Bombay 1928–1988." Fr. Aurelius dies a victim of the dreaded Parkinson's syndrome on 9.9.1996.

[53] Bro. Pacificus Muscat: born in Malta on 12.2.1908, makes his first profession on 15.9.1929, dies at Calcutta on 6.8.1935, aged 27.

[54] Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands*, 73–74.

Bhutan and Manipur. Here are a few comparative data found in the report:

	1922	1932
Catholics	5,844	18.000
Clerics	0	80
Catechists	48	160
Priests	6	62
Christian Communities	93	298
Chapels	26	139
Primary Schools	31	160

The Holy See studies the report and decides that the time has come to make the Prefecture into a diocese.

On 9th July 1934, Msgr. Louis Mathias is appointed bishop of Shillong for the whole North Eastern Region. There is great joy throughout the Mission of Assam. The ordination of the bishop and other events are to take place from 9th to the 11th November 1934. The Ordination of Msgr. Stephen Ferrando, bishop-elect of Krishnagar, and the feast of St. John Bosco, who is canonized on first April that year, are also due on those days.

On 11th October 1934, Msgr. Mathias reaches Shillong, from Italy. He receives a tumultuous welcome. In his reply, after thanking every one for the hearty welcome afforded him, he announces that Fr. V. Scuderi is the new Provincial and that he would have his office in Don Bosco School.

October 13th is the name feast of Fr. E. Guttierez, the catechist of Salesian College (Our Lady's House). At 1.00 p.m. Fr. V. Scuderi, the new Provincial arrives, welcomed by the band of Don Bosco School and by the enthusiasm and joy of the confreres and boys. Msgr. Mathias invites all to enter the Chapel of Salesian College, where amidst the curiosity and general excitement he reads the letter of appointment of Fr. Scuderi as Provincial, and communicates also other new obediences: Fr. E. Guttierez as rector of Salesian College; Fr. J. Bacchiarello[55] as rector

[55] Fr. Joseph Bacchiarello: born in 1907, comes to India to make his novitiate with the first batch of Novices in 1923, makes his first profession on 21.1.1925, is ordained a priest on 2.4.1932, dies at Shillong on 9.5.1985, aged 78. He has been Rector of formation houses (Bandel, Sonada), of Liluah, Novice Master at Sunnyside, and a well appreciated spiritual guide and confessor, a great lover of Don Bosco and of St. Francis de Sales.

of Don Bosco's Technical School, Fr. Foglia[56] as novice master; and Fr. Igino Ricaldone[57] as headmaster of St. Antony's High School, in the place of Fr. Bacchiarello.

Great is the joy of everyone that explodes as they all come out of the Chapel. In the refectory of the Salesian College there is a small entertainment in honour of the new Provincial and of Fr. Guttierez, Fr. Foglia, Fr. Bacchiarello and Fr. Igino Ricaldone. On October 15th, the new Provincial, Fr. Foglia and Fr. Bacchiarello take charge of their respective offices. At 6.00 p.m. of the same day Fr. Scuderi gives his first conference to the clerics in their Chapel. He develops three themes: spirit of fervent prayer, enthusiasm and optimism ("discouraged people have no place in the Province," "holiness cannot be found where there is sadness"), and spirit of fraternal charity. On 24th October, the Provincial sends out his first circular letter to the confreres, where he thanks everyone for their welcome, thanks very particularly Msgr. Mathias as the great Founder of the Province and Father of all the confreres, and announces the dates of the coming festivities for the Ordination of the new bishops and of the celebrations in honour of Don Bosco. He also announces the dates of the next Spiritual Retreat for the clerics.

The preparations for the double Episcopal consecration and the feast of Don Bosco are worked out to perfection. All, especially the clerics of our Lady's House, namely novices and students of Philosophy and Theology, work day and night with great zest to set up arches, flags, multi-coloured bunting and posters all over the town. A big dais and altar are raised at the amphitheatre below the Cathedral for the consecration Mass and for the starting and arrival of the great Eucharistic Procession. Displayed are the coat of arms of the bishops-elect: *Aude et Spera* – 'Dare and Hope' of bishop Mathias, and *Apostolus Christi* – 'Apostle of Christ' of Bishop Ferrando. Also the liturgy, ceremonies and music are carefully prepared by the clerics.

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[56] Fr. Joseph Foglia: born at Alba (Italy) on 19.7.1900, makes his first profession on 17.10.1921, comes to India on 22.12.1923, is ordained a priest on 22.7.1928, dies at Goa on 25.9.1970, aged 70.

[57] Fr. Igino Ricaldone: born on 12.1.1903 at Casale (Italy), makes his first profession on 17.10.1921, comes to India in 1925, is ordained a priest on 22.7.1928 dies in Turin on 31.8.1963. aged 60.

On the eve of the festivities some 15,000 Catholics arrive, group after group, with flags, from all mission centres of the Northeast, led by their priests. Some walk for hours, others even for days. A group of Garos travels 8 days through forests and often across rivers. They arrive exhausted but happy. Some three hundred come from Tezpur with their huge drums. The Mission compound looks like an encampment where a dozen languages are spoken; straw houses and kitchens rise everywhere. For the first time, powerful loudspeakers are used in Shillong. Clerics and young men supervise the life of the vast camp. There arrives also a group of Christians from Krishnagar to attend the ordination of their new bishop, Msgr. S. Ferrando.

In the twilight of 8th November, the two bishops-elect arrive from Gauhati. With them come Archbishop Mederlet, S.D.B. of Madras, Archbishop F.Perier, S.J. of Calcutta, the bishops of Ranchi, Dhaka, Dinajpur, Chittagong and Patna, and the Prefect Apostolic of Sikkim. The reception is spectacular, the people flock to the G.S. Road at the entry point to Shillong city, and form a procession towards the Cathedral with three bands in attendance. The Cathedral bells peal in welcome. There is a phantasmagoria of lights and colour, and the joyous shouts of the people, and the fire-works at the oval of the Cathedral complete the beautiful scene.

The first event follows: the unveiling and the blessing, by the Archbishop of Calcutta, of the artistic life-size Calvary bronze monument to commemorate the 19th centenary of our Redemption.



Shillong: The Calvary at the oval facing the Cathedral (1934)



Shillong: The Calvary remodelled in the year 2000

In the morning of 9th November, thousands gather in Don Bosco's square and sing hymns in honour of Don Bosco, each group in its own language, but to the same tune. At 10.00 a.m. the Governor, Sir Michael Keane, arrives and unveils the bronze monument to Don Bosco, Educator and friend of youth, the work of the artist Cellini. Msgr. Mathias then delivers a beautiful speech in honour of St. John Bosco. All the people applaud lustily.

There follows the opening of the technical exhibition put up by the boys and brothers of Don Bosco's School. Authorities and the public visit it expressing great amazement at the skill of the boys.



Shillong: Don Bosco's Monument

In the afternoon there is the inauguration of the new Don Bosco Hall. There Msgr. Ferrando speaks, as he only can, of Don Bosco to the outstanding people of the City.

On 10th November, at the foot of the Cathedral Hill, on the dais, Archbishop F. Perier, assisted by the bishops of Chittagong and Dinajpur, consecrates the two bishops.

In the afternoon all converge on the Cricket Ground for the gymnastics and athletic display by the Don Bosco boys. A much-appreciated item is the drill display with flags by 500 children, led by Fr. Vendrame. It is an unforgettable afternoon. As the darkness of the evening falls, a procession of over 10,000 people winds its way towards Don Bosco Square, followed by the Statue of Don Bosco in a flower-decked car, and surrounded by a thousand youths with torches. Then follows an entertainment in honour of the bishops.

On Sunday 11th November, there is a solemn Pontifical Mass, a sung Mass composed by Msgr. Mathias himself.



Bishop S. FERRANDO, Bishop L. MATHIAS, and the new Provincial, Fr. V. SCUDERI.

In the afternoon, at 3.00 p.m., there is the annual Eucharistic Procession. It makes its way along the Jowai Road and halts for the first Benediction at the Maidan Jewrynghep. Then it proceeds along the Laitumkhrah Road, festooned with arches, flowers, flags, little altars before Catholic homes, bunting, etc., back to the oval, flood-lit by 500 bulbs, where the final Benediction is given."[58]

On 11th November, at 6.00 p.m. the enthronement of Msgr. Mathias as bishop of Shillong takes place. Msgr. Bars, whom he makes his Vicar General on 28th August, receives him into the Cathedral. All the priests pay their respects to the bishop, the new Provincial being the first among them. The clerics who take part in the service sing in Gregorian chant.

On 14th November, the community of the Salesian College organizes a feast in honour of their old rector and novice master, Msgr. Ferrando. He has his first Pontifical Mass in the Chapel of our Lady's House. In the evening there is an academy cum entertainment in his honour.

The Provincial recalls the great amount of good Msgr. Ferrando has done to the Province in his ten years as rector of the Studentate and as novice master. Monsignor thanks everyone and assures all that he would always be the bishop of the Province of St. John Bosco.

[58] Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands*, 77–80.

On 21st November Msgr. Ferrando leaves Shillong for Krishnagar. He takes possession of his diocese on 25th November. Mgr. Mathias accompanies him. On 25th, the new bishop receives the first welcome by the priests, catechists and people at the station of Ranaghat. From the station a procession is formed to the Mission. The band of the Catholic youth Association of Shillong, which has come expressly from Shillong, is in attendance.

A great reception is accorded to the new bishop in the city of Krishnagar. At the foot of the flight of steps leading to the municipality hall, the Chairman and all the Municipal Board, (all non-Christians or Protestants), are waiting for the new bishop. The Chairman speaks on behalf of all the people and not merely on behalf of the Catholics, and declares that he is seeing in the Catholic bishop the first Authority of the City. He also thanks the bishop for the humanitarian work the missionaries are doing in Krishnagar and in the mission centres. Archbishop Perier answers by thanking the Municipal Authorities for their welcome to the new bishop and for their appreciation of the work of the missionaries.

The rite of taking possession of the diocese is followed in all its



Rt. Rev. Bishop STEPHEN FERRANDO, SDB
Bishop of Krishnagar (1934–1935)
Bishop of Shillong, (1935–1969)

Msgr. Stephen Ferrando is born at Rossiglione (Genova, Italy) on 29.9.1895. He makes his first profession on 15.9.1912, at the age of 17. When Italy joins World War I, the young Stephen is called out to join the army. When the War ends he returns to the Seminary and is ordained a Priest on 18.3.1922.

On 23rd December 1923 he reaches Shillong. On 25th January 1924, Fr. Stephen Ferrando is appointed *Socius* (Assistant) to the novice master, Fr. John Deponti, and after a few months, when Fr. Deponti returns to Italy due to sickness, Fr. Ferrando succeeds him as novice master and rector of the House.

On 9th July 1934 he is nominated bishop of Krishnagar and is consecrated on 10th November 1934, together with bishop Mathias, the first bishop of

details. The Papal Bull nominating Msgr. Ferrando bishop of Krishnagar is read first in Latin and then in Bengali. The bishops embrace the *Bonus Pastor* - the Good Shepherd The priests pay their respects to their bishop. Then follow the *Te Deum* and the benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, which brings the welcoming function to a close.

The festivities in honour of the new bishop continue the next day, 26th November. There is a solemn sung Mass, sung by all the people, except for the variable parts which are sung by the Salesian clerics who have come from Shillong for the purpose. After the Gospel the new bishop preaches the homily in Bengali. In the afternoon there is a Eucharistic procession in which all the institutions take part. The Archbishop of Calcutta, Msgr. Perier, carries the Blessed Sacrament.

When Bishop Ferrando begins his Administration there are only three mission centres in the diocese with resident priests: Krishnagar, Bhoborpara, and Shimulia. In 1935 he opens a fourth centre in Jessore with Fr. Umberto Bianchi[59] in residence. The centre then includes Jessore Shillong. His Motto, which will inspire him all his life, is *Apostolus Christi.*

When Bishop Mathias is appointed Archbishop of Madras, Bishop Ferrando is transferred to the See of Shillong on 26th November 1935, and takes charge of the Shillong diocese on 14th March 1936.

On 10th April 1936, a fire destroys the church, the bishop's house, the parish house, and Our Lady's House. The outbreak of the World War II is another great blow to his many missionary projects.

In October 1942, after much prayer, consultations, and prolonged thought, he founds the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians.

The central nave of the new Cathedral is blessed on 16th November 1947. He opens St. Paul's Minor Seminary, Nazareth Hospital, and a leper Asylum at Nongpoh. He obtains from Archbishop Mathias the first batch of Diocesan priests (in 1954), and prepares the diocese for its division and erection of two new dioceses: Dibrugarh (1951) and Tezpur (1964).

In 1969 he gives his resignation and leaves Shillong for Italy. He chooses as his residence the Salesian House of *Quarto dei Mille (Genova)* where he dies on 20th June 1978, aged 82, after being 65 years a faithful and zealous Salesian, 55 years a Priest, 1 year bishop of Krishnagar, 34 years bishop of Shillong, and 9 years titular Archbishop of Troina. His mortal remains are brought back to Shillong on 3rd October 1998, and on 3rd April 1999 Archbishop T. Resto of Shillong announces the introduction of the cause of Beatification and Canonization.

[59] Fr. Umberto Bianchi: born at Milan (Italy) on 13.10.1902, comes to India in 1926, makes his first profession on 21.1.1928, is ordained a priest on 7.7.1934, dies at Chiari (Italy) on 19.11.1958, aged 56.

itself, Khulna, the Sunderbans, and Faridpur. The new bishop finds in the diocese 9 priests, 5 clerics, the Sisters of Charity, and the Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate. Bishop Ferrando begins his pastoral activity with a pastoral visit of 61 mission centres.

Bishop Ferrando is not spared trials and sorrows during his short stint as bishop of Krishnagar. One such is the acute scarcity of food in the villages owing to failure of crops, caused by drought in certain areas and by floods in other areas. In 1935 the floodwaters reach up to the buildings of Don Bosco School. Another great sorrow is the death of Bro. A. Cesarin[60] by drowning when his boat capsizes at Phulbari.

But his presence in Krishnagar is of a very short duration. After the departure of Bishop Mathias for Madras, Msgr. Ferrando is called back to Shillong as his successor.

Before leaving Krishnagar he is able to send a consoling report to the rector Major: 6,117 Catholics; 766 baptisms in the previous year, of whom 110 adults; 4 dispensaries caring for 85,700 sick people; 39 schools with 1,384 pupils; and three trade schools. The missionary personnel consists of 10 priests, 6 clerics, 40 sisters, and 7 members of the Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate.[61]

23. The Death of Msgr. Mederlet

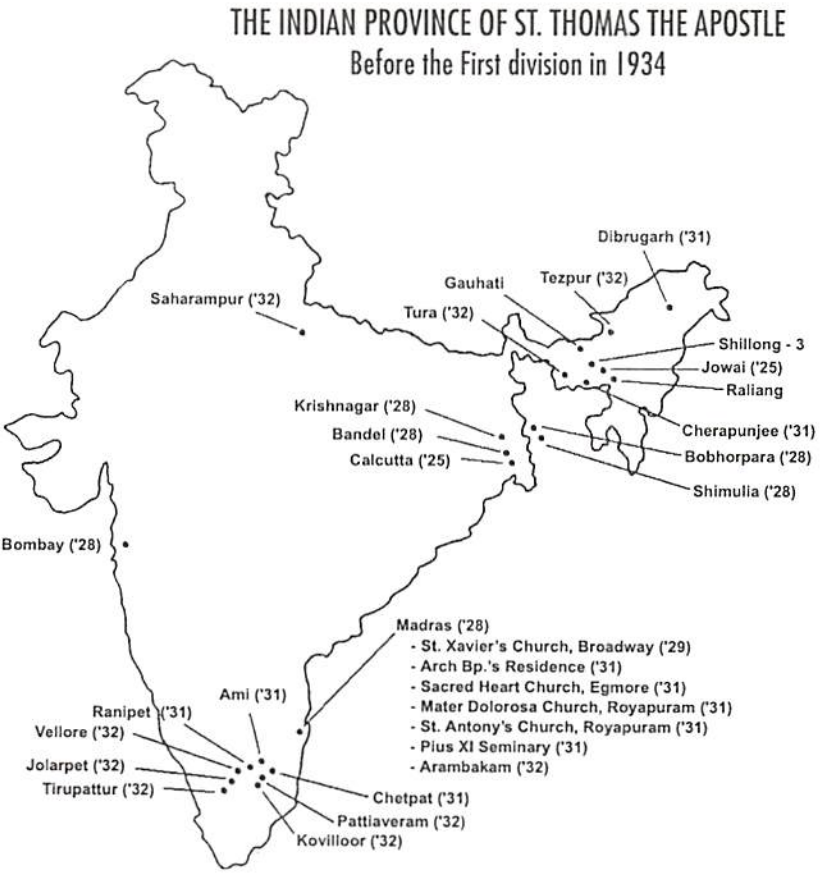
The end of 1934, on 12th December to be precise, brings to the Salesians in India the painful news of the death of Msgr. Mederlet during his pastoral visit to the North Arcot Missions. He dies after suffering a massive heart attack though doctors earlier had advised him to take rest. But the zealous Pastor wishes to visit his people still once more, and, in the company of the Provincial, Fr. Cinato, leaves Madras in his car on the way to North Arcot. After visiting the mission centres of Ranipet, Arconam and Vellore, he reaches Pallikonda, where the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians run an orphanage for boys, which is very dear to the Archbishop. In the evening he is invited by the sisters to hear their confession, something that he willingly accepts to do notwithstanding his tiredness and poor health. The Superior is the last one to make her confession and she is the one who sees him falling lifeless on the chair, just when he raises his hand

[60] Bro. Aloysius Cesarin is born at Concordia (Italy) on 29.8.1912, comes to India in 1929, makes his profession on 6.12.1931, dies at Fulbari on 5.6.1935, aged 23.

[61] Cfr. *Bollettino Salesiano* (December 1935), 354, in Alessi, *Pionieri nel Cuore dell' India,* 50-51; and Narayan, *The Heart of Bengal,* 82-83.

to impart the absolution. The *Good Shepherd* has just passed away in the very act of performing this act of mercy.

That very evening his body is brought back to Madras and lies in state at St. Mary's Co-cathedral for the public to pay their homage. Many weep at the sudden loss of their Father and Friend. After a solemn funeral service his body is laid to rest. Due to the distance and the lack of air services at the time, Msgr. Mathias is unable to be present at the funeral, but he goes down to Madras for the month's mind, and on this occasion gives the farewell address commenting on the biblical verse: *In quo non est dolus*- "in whom there is no guile."[62]



[62] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India*, 386–387.

PART II

The North Indian Province 1935–1959

CHAPTER VI
JOYS AND SORROWS
1935-1939[1]

1. Solemn Festivities in Honour of St. John Bosco at Calcutta 2. The New Archbishop of Madras 3. The Sacred Heart Shrine at Mawlai 4. Catholic University Colleges: 4.1 St. Antony's College 4.2 Salesian College, Shillong 5. Bishop Ferrando, the second bishop of Shillong 6. Fr. Vincent Scuderi, Administrator Apostolic of Krishnagar 7. Through the Storm: the Fire 8. Other Events in 1936 9. The Second Extraordinary Canonical Visitation 10. The Migrating *Studentates* of Philosophy and Theology and of the Novitiate 11. 'Salesian College' at the Ghorabari Brewery 12. Liluah: Blessing of the church and of Don Bosco Technical School 12.1 Eighth December 1937 12.2 The Church 13. Don Bosco in Burma: 13.1 Don Bosco and Burma 13.2 The New Mission 13.3 Initial Difficulties.

1935

1. Solemn Festivities in Honour of St. John Bosco at Calcutta

It is only right that Calcutta, the 'City of the Dream', should celebrate in a public and solemn way the canonization of St. John. Bosco. It is on 9th April 1886 that Don Bosco dreams of 'Calcutta' and in the dream he hears thousands of young people shouting, "We have been waiting for you for so long, now we will not allow you to leave again."

The festivities in honour of Don Bosco are scheduled to be held from 4th to the 6th of January 1935. A circular letter from the Archbishop's Curia invites all the people to take part in these festivities.

The Herald publishes a *Special Supplement* on Don Bosco in eight pages with photos and articles giving much information on Don Bosco and his works.[2] The *Herald* of 13th January 1935 publishes a detailed

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[1] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India*, 389–391.

[2] Here are the headings of the main articles: 1. Don Bosco, the Miracle of the XIX Century (the peasant, the teacher, the Priest, the Saint); 2. St. John Bosco, a Hero of Education; 3. The world wide Activities of Don Bosco (Workshops and Schools throughout the five continents); 4. The Salesians in Northern India; 5. Don Bosco and the Catholic Press; 6. The Dream at the age of nine; 7. Salesian Co-operators and Catholic Action. Cfr. Chronicle of the Province, 1934–1937, B. 10.1

account of the celebrations in Calcutta. *The Statesman* of Calcutta publishes a detailed article on Don Bosco and the technical schools, and in particular, on the one at Liluah.

The bishops take turns to preside over the celebrations on each day in which each one gives a fitting discourse, followed by a procession around the Cathedral with the relic of the Saint. Particularly solemn is the celebration on the eve of the feast, presided over by Msgr. Ferrando, bishop of Krishnagar. He delivers a touching homily on the life of Don Bosco, underscoring Don Bosco's confidence: in God, in men, and in his sons.

The celebrations reach their climax on 6th January 1935, with the solemn Pontifical Mass presided over by the Archbishop of Calcutta, Msgr. Perier, and assisted by four bishops. The choir from Shillong sings to perfection the Mass by Griesbacker. In the afternoon, there is a grand entertainment in the playground in front of the Cathedral. The expected 1500 participants swell up to 3000. Extra benches and chairs are taken out from the church, but many have to be reconciled to remain standing. In the opinion of many, it is an unprecedented gathering of Catholics in Calcutta. When the Prelates, together with all the parish priests of the city enter, the choir sings Pagella's *United in Faith.*

Msgr. Mathias delivers the key-note address, not so much on Don Bosco's life and work, a theme already highlighted in a masterly fashion by Msgr. Fernandes, the Vicar General, and by Msgr. Ferrando, but on Don Bosco's Spirit, especially on his love towards poor and abandoned youth, and the urgent need to take care of Calcutta's poor youth, who remind him of the youth of Turin at the time of Don Bosco. The only solution to the problem is to give these poor youth a good technical education. This is the reason why the Salesians want to have at Liluah an up-to-date technical school.

Msgr. Anselmo, bishop of Dinajpur, speaks in Bengali, highlighting Don Bosco's virtues and pointing out how Don Bosco's Spirit can be adapted to all peoples and to all situations.

The Salesian choir sings the *Toreador* from the opera *Carmen* and Fr. Pagella's *Easter Bells.* Fr. Righetto, with his powerful voice renders beautifully H. Boito's *Giunto sul passo estremo.* It is followed by a masterful discourse by a well-known orator, Fr. P. Populaire, S.J., on the urgent need to have in Bengal numerous technical schools, like the ones

the Salesians have in Assam. "We must open our eyes to the stark reality," he concludes, "and not indulge in our chimerical dreams. Calcutta's youth has need of Don Bosco and we must all give a hand to the Salesians to repeat here what they have very well accomplished in so many other cities of the world."[3]

To conclude the function the choir sings Handle's powerful *Alleluyah* from the *Messiah*. Solemn Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, in front of the Cathedral, closes these unforgettable days of festivities in honour of Don Bosco in Calcutta.[4]

2. The New Archbishop of Madras

On 18th March 1935, Bishop Mathias receives the news of his appointment as Archbishop of Madras, succeeding the late Msgr. Eugene Mederlet. The thought of having to leave Assam, to which he is deeply attached, reduces the joy and elation he should have felt on receiving this news. In this field of the apostolate, so flourishing and promising, he has spent the most beautiful years of his life. The sufferings have been nothing compared to the joy and consolation he has experienced. But the Vicar of Christ has spoken, and it is necessary to obey and start all over again. It is another leap in the dark, with readiness to face the unknown consequences. "But I have to 'Dare and Hope' as always," he writes, "and so I answer to the Apostolic Delegate, I accept in *Nomine Domini* – in the name of the Lord."[5] The Provincial makes the appointment public on 4th April 1935.

After much prayer and reflection, Msgr. Mathias decides to assume charge of the new archdiocese on 20th July, the anniversary of his priestly ordination (1913), and the day the Mission of Assam is officially accepted by the Salesian Society (21st July 1921). In the three months that remain he plans to visit once again some of the mission centres, and to bring to completion various pending projects. For the rest he feels tranquil and grateful to God that he is leaving behind a very promising Mission, well on the road to a bright future. On this occasion the words of the Superior of St. Mary's Orphanage in Shillong to Fr. Lamberghe, S.J., come to his mind: "My dear Father, keep cheerful and trustful; we are like window

[3] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India*, 389–391.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid. 392.

panes; when one gets broken, we substitute it with another one that will do just as well, if not better."[6]

After visiting the various mission centres, Msgr. Mathias is back in Shillong to settle everything before his departure for Madras. In the month of June he preaches for the last time, the Spiritual Retreat to 37 confreres, 25 priests and 12 clerics and brothers. Six clerics are preparing themselves for ordination. It is a special Retreat in which he gives to his missionaries his last recommendations: a veritable Spiritual Testament.

On 29th June he has the joy of ordaining his first group of priests. Msgr. Mathias remembers the solemn moment of the imposition of the hands. Thirty priests are present in the sanctuary. Sixty raised hands are calling down the Holy Spirit on the new Levites. The Cathedral is filled to capacity. At that sight he feels a pang in his heart. In a few days he has to leave these priests and these faithful, and go to the other end of India, to start all over again!

On that same day a delegation of Protestant leaders approaches Bishop Mathias. For years the Protestants have been unrelentingly opposing the work of the Catholic missionaries. One of them tells him: "You must not leave Assam. You must continue to do good here. Whom must we approach to get this favour, the Pope?"

"I thank you," answers the bishop, "but it is too late. We Catholics are like soldiers; when we receive an order, we carry it out at all costs."

"We have decided," continues the man, "to write to the Pope. We want that you should remain here. There is still so much good to be done here."

"I try to dissuade them from doing such a thing which, I insist, would be altogether useless. Soon another bishop will take my place and the work will continue as, or, even better than before."

"Monsignor, we want to thank you for another reason. You are rendering a very good service to our Khasi people by bringing them closer to the greatest moral authority in the world: the Roman Pontiff."

"I was prepared for anything," concludes Bishop Mathias, "but not for this. ... Protestant confession in favour of the Pope."[7]

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[6] Ibid. 392–393.
[7] Ibid. 410–411.

On 28th June 1935 the Salesians bid farewell to their beloved Father and Founder of the North Indian Province. It is an informal but warm good-bye, an expression of the great family spirit now reigning in the Province. The first to speak is the Provincial, Fr. Scuderi. He has come to know and love Fr. Mathias from his boyhood days, then again in the novitiate, and later when he comes to Shillong at the end of 1928. He extols Monsignor's great love for Don Bosco and the Congregation, his great leadership and organizing qualities, his tremendous spirit of work and sacrifice, but especially his affable ways which win the hearts of all those who come into contact with him. He is indeed *un ruba cuori*, one who steals everyone's heart.

After the speech of the Provincial, all the leaders of the various institutions and mission centres speak, and Bro. Casagrande on behalf of the brothers, each recalling something personal which has endeared them to Msgr. Mathias.

Msgr. Mathias, remaining seated and with eyes closed, answers to all the praises showered on him by saying that he considers himself and wants to be nothing else but an instrument, a docile instrument, in God's hands. He recommends once again fraternal charity among all the Salesians in India and renews his recommendation, "Fill the whole of India with Don Bosco." "I greatly desire to promote and support Salesian Works, I want them, because, even though I'm an Archbishop, as I have been in the past, so I am now and I will always be, a son of Don Bosco."[8]

On Sunday, 30th June, at 3.30 p.m. there is a grand farewell gathering in honour of Msgr. Mathias by the religious Communities and the Khasi Catholics at Don Bosco's ground.

Early morning of 1st July Bishop Mathias leaves Shillong in torrential rain. At Gauhati he receives another touching farewell by the Salesians and the Catholics of Gauhati, and in the evening he boards the train for Calcutta. Great is his emotion and he can hardly restrain his tears, as he sees the banks of the Brahmaputra fading away while the train is speeding towards Bengal. He raises his hand to bless that land which has received him on that foggy morning of 13th January 1922. He takes out his Rosary

[8] Cfr. *Aemulamini* – the Newsletter of the time – in the Chronicle of the Province, 1934–1937, *Provincial Archives*, B.10.1.

and prays, thanking with all his heart, the Help of Christians who has always guided his steps and who has so abundantly blessed the apostolic labours of her children who come from far. That night he is unable to sleep, as the vision of Assam constantly flashes across his mind. All the Salesian missionaries spread out on the Hills and in the Brahmaputra and Surma valleys pass before his mind. He asks himself how it has been possible to achieve so much in such a short time. A deep sense of gratitude towards all his confreres who have surrounded him with their affection, thus infusing greater courage and daring, surges within his heart. He feels that the secret of their success is the great family spirit reigning among the Salesians, with Don Bosco as Father and Guide. In 13 years he has never felt the need to pull up anyone against grumbling. By God's grace, grumbling has not penetrated into their Mission. Every night he can go to rest with a tranquil heart and serene mind, sure that no one is trying to destroy by grumbling the good that is being done.[9]

On 4th July 1935 Msgr. Mathias leaves Calcutta for Nagpur to visit the bishop and other people of the place. On 11th July he returns and in the evening the Salesians accord him a farewell dinner to which they invite Msgr. Fernandes, the Vicar General and Administrator of the archdiocese during the absence of the Archbishop who is away in Italy, the Superior of the Jesuits, the rector of St. Xavier's, all the parish priests of the city, and the superiors of the two communities of the Irish brothers. Fr. Provincial and Fr. Pianazzi are also present.

Msgr. Fernandes speaks expressing everyone's sadness at Msgr. Mathias' departure and wishes him an abundant harvest in his new field of apostolate. Msgr. Mathias, in his turn, thanks all for their great help and good will towards the Salesians in the past years.

On 13th July 1935, accompanied by Fr. Scuderi, Msgr. Mathias leaves for Madras.[10]

3. The Sacred Heart Shrine at Mawlai

Fr. C. Vendrame is a great devotee of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. "At the beginning of my work at Mawlai," Fr. Vendrame writes, "there are only five Catholics." In 10 years they grow to over a thousand, in the

[9] Mathias, Quarant'anni *in India,* 412–413.
[10] Cfr. Chronicle of the C.O.P., 1935.

face of difficulties, obstacles, and hostility. He wants to build a Chapel for them. While he is wondering about choosing a Patron for it, a little Mawlai boy tells him, "Call it the Sacred Heart Chapel." Fr. Vendrame is pleasantly surprised. The idea appeals to him immediately. He builds not a Chapel, but a Shrine as a monument in lasting gratitude to the Sacred Heart for all His blessings on the Khasi Hills and to proclaim the love of Khasi Catholics for the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Fr. Vendrame starts the construction but he has no funds. Every rupee that he gets he gives to his Catholics, to poor families, and to St. Vincent's Home.



Mawlai: The Sacred Heart Shrine (1936)

Bishop Mathias comes to his rescue and brings the work to completion ably assisted in the task by Bro. Mantarro and Bro. Casagrande. The Shrine is dedicated on Palm Sunday, 13th April 1935. The day ends with the Eucharistic Procession and a solemn Consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.[11]

The parish community of Mawlai opens in 1938 with Fr. Di Benedetto Fiori[12] as parish priest. At that time, the Sacred Heart Shrine

[11] Cfr. Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands*, 81.

[12] Fr. Di Benedetto Fiori: born on 27.8.1896 at Udine (Italy), comes to India in 1924, makes his profession on 21.1.1929, is ordained a priest on 26.4.1931, dies in Turin on 11.9.1978, aged 82.

serves also as the parish church of Mawlai. Hence, the name Sacred Heart is given to the parish.

The parish community comes to the present site only during the time of Fr. Correngia[13] as parish priest, who builds the present church, which assumes the name of St. Dominic Savio.[14]

4. Catholic University Colleges

When Fr. Peter Berruti, the Prefect General of the Salesian Society, visits Assam in 1937, he goes to pay his respects to Msgr. Perier. The Monsignor tells him about a dispute between Card. Lepicier, who years before has been Apostolic Visitor to India, and the Jesuit fathers on the usefulness of University Colleges for evangelization. "Priests," he says, "have to give themselves to direct evangelization and to the care of parishes, while colleges have to be entrusted to the Religious brothers. What are so many priests doing in University Colleges? Let them do direct evangelization and let the best energies of the various Congregations not be wasted in works which have zero or close to zero impact."[15]

This is a much-debated question in India and it comes also to the notice of the Holy Father, Pope Pius XI. The Pope tells the Jesuits that not only have they to keep and make the existing Colleges flourish, but also to keep on establishing others, even in places where there are only non-Christians.

Fr. Berruti is pleased with what he is told and sees in it a confirmation of the Salesian method: to go to the youth of today to prepare tomorrow's men, and this especially in the Missions where it is needed to create an enlightened Christian generation.[16]

4.1 St. Antony's College

The mid-thirties see a great development in the field of college level education. St. Antony's College is affiliated to Calcutta University

[13] Fr. Albert Correngia: born in Milan (Italy) on 15.04.1906, comes to India in 1927, makes his first profession on 06.01.1929 is ordained a priest in Shillong on 29.4.1933, works in Dibrugarh (Only a few months), Don Bosco Shillong, Raliang, Mawlai, Mawkar; dies at Sacred Heart College (Shillong) on 15.04.1984 aged 78.

[14] *Cfr. History of Salesian Centres,* 85ff.

[15] Cfr. Ferrando, *Nell'India Nord Est,* 133f.

[16] Ibid.

for B.A. and B.Sc.; St. Edmund's for the I. Sc. B. A. and B.T.; and St. Mary's for B. A. and B.T. for girls.[17] Fr. Joseph Bacchiarello founds St. Antony's College. Fr. D. J. Wollaston[18] teaches the students Logic; while at the same time he teaches theology at Our Lady's House. In 1935 Fr. I. Ricaldone succeeds Fr. Joseph Bacchiarello and is the principal till 1949. He develops the College to I.A., I.Sc., B.A., B.Sc. and I.Com standards Fr. N. J. Kenny joins the College in 1948, when a College hostel is opened, as its warden. Fr. Ricaldone constructs the ground floor of the College building, which during the II World War is occupied by the military. During these years, the school and the College function on a shift basis.

In 1952 Fr. D. J. Wollaston becomes the principal. He adds the first floor to the building. Fr. Joseph Arokyasami replaces him in 1958 and shifts the College to its present premises, and Fr. P. Petta completes the shifting in 1982. Fr. Kenny is the vice-principal for many years. Fr. Stephen Mavely takes over as principal in 1985. The College also runs a Post-graduate course in Computer Applications. Started in 1934, the College is successively affiliated to the Calcutta, Gauhati and North-Eastern-Hill Universities. Started as an Intermediate College, it has grown to its present status of a well-known and appreciated institution in the country.

4.2 Salesian College, Shillong

To the above Colleges we must add Salesian College, Shillong-Sonada, which is not opened to the general public, as the three above-mentioned Colleges, but is meant for the intellectual formation of young

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[17] Cfr. Curran, "A century of Catholic Educational Endeavours in India", 352.

[18] Fr. Douglas Joseph Wollaston is born on 11.12.1902 at Akyab Burma. He has already a job when Msgr. Mathias asks him to become a Salesian, makes the novitiate in 1924 and his first profession on 21 January 1925. He is ordained a priest in Turin on 5.7.1931 (at Crocetta he receives his doctorate in theology). First assignment, headmaster of Don Bosco High School, Tardeo (Bombay). Two years later he is prefect of studies in Our Lady's House. After the fire of 1936 he is Rector of Don Bosco School Krishnagar. In 1939 he is Headmaster of St. John's and Prior of Bandel. In 1944 he founds, develops, and guides St. Joseph's High School at Khulna. In 1951 he is prefect of studies of the aspirants at Bandel. In 1952 he becomes the principal of St. Antony's College, Shillong, for 7 years. In 1959 he heads the mission and school at Hundung in Manipur. In 1962 he is Rector and Headmaster of Don Bosco School, Imphal, just shifted to the present site. He is Headmaster of the school of Marbisu, and for one year Headmaster of Don Bosco, Tura. His last years are years of much suffering. He dies on 17.1.1979, in Nazareth Hospital, Shillong, after being 54 years a Salesian and 48 years a priest, aged 76.

Salesians. Several times in the course of this history, the name of 'Salesian College' is mentioned, meaning by it the *Studentate* of philosophy and theology of Our Lady's House. However, it is only on 10th July 1935 that the College is officially affiliated to the Calcutta University for English, Khasi, Bengali, Assamese, Hindi, Latin, History, Logic and Civics to the I. A. Standard; and, on 12th December 1935, in Alternative English, German and Italian to the I.A. Standard. After the devastating fire of 10th April 1936, which in 18 minutes reduces the beautiful Our Lady's House to ashes, 'Salesian College' migrates temporarily, first to Woodcot (Tung), then to Bandel Church, and finally to Ghorabari[19] (Sonada), where it stands today.[20]

In 1948, on 4th September, Salesian College, Sonada, is affiliated to Calcutta University in English, Alternative English, Latin and History to the B.A. level from the session 1948-1949. On 11th May 1950, it is affiliated to the I.A. level in Mathematics and to B.A. in Economics. From the session 1960–1961, the College is affiliated from the two-year to the three-year Degree Course.

On 11th June 1962 Salesian College is affiliated to North Bengal University. The affiliation covers the same subjects to which affiliation is given by the Calcutta University, and the P.U.C. for the same subjects as for the previous I.A. level. On 20th April 1964 permission is granted to the College to function as a centre of holding examinations.

On 4th October 1969 temporary extension of affiliation in English up to Honours Standard is granted on a yearly basis. It is made permanent on 10th November 1971. Affiliation in History Honours is granted on 12th October 1978, in Education (Pass) and in Additional Compulsory Bengali and Hindi is granted on 6th October 1978, and in Philosophy (Pass) on 25th July 1989.

In July 1998 the College is opened also to non-Salesian religious students, in July 2000 it is opened to Seminarians and to a limited number of outsiders.[21]

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[19] Cfr. Salesian College Archives. *Ghorabari* is the little village, 2 kms. from Sonada, where the Brewery, which the Salesians buy in 1938, was situated.
[20] Cfr. Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands,* 89; *History of Salesian Centres*, 95–96.
[21] Salesian College Chronicle.

1936

5. Bishop Ferrando, the Second Bishop of Shillong

On 5th December 1935 Fr. Scuderi receives a telegram announcing the appointment of Bishop Ferrando as the new bishop of Shillong. The next day, in his goodnight to the confreres of Our Lady's House, Msgr. Bars, the Vicar Capitular, announces that Fr. V. Scuderi is appointed Administrator Apostolic of Krishnagar.

Bishop Ferrando takes charge of the diocese on 24th January 1936, but is given the official welcome on 14th March 1936. When he reaches the outskirts of Shillong, he finds his flock waiting for him. He kneels down and kisses the earth of his new diocese as an expression of sincere love and joy. Then he is led by a long procession of people to the old Cathedral with torches alight,as it is late evening. There, in his address to his spiritual sons and daughters, he says that he is placing his diocese at the feet of Jesus Crucified, in keeping with his motto 'In the Cross there is Salvation.'[22]

6. Fr. Vincent Scuderi, Administrator Apostolic of Krishnagar

On 3rd January 1936, Msgr. V. Scuderi, the new Administrator of Krishnagar, assumes office. On 26th January, he receives from Rome the Decree appointing him Administrator Apostolic, which is read in the Cathedral by the parish priest and is followed by the singing of the *Te Deum*. Outside the church the people welcome him.

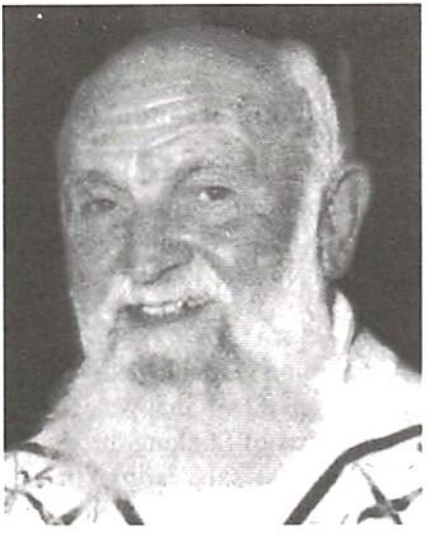
Under Msgr. Scuderi's guidance till January 1940, the missionary activity at Krishnagar receives a vigorous push. "Not withstanding the difficulties we meet with", he writes to the Rector Major in March 1937, "such as, the unhealthy climate, extreme poverty, made worse by the disastrous flood of last August, opposition, hostility, and even persecutions

[22] This is Fr. Paviotti's account, which seems to be based on Bishop Ferrando's book, *"Nell'India Nord-Est"*, 15. The Chronicle of the Province, however, gives a different date for the official entry of Bishop Ferrando in his diocese: "January 15, 1936, Bishop Ferrando reaches Shillong privately and immediately proceeds to Cherrapunjee where the next day he presides over the yearly feast. On February 15, 1936, he makes his official entry into the diocese." Cfr. Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands,* 85.

in some cases from certain quarters, with God's grace we have been able to make consoling progress."

The educational works at the centre of the diocese are being settled, a big piece of land is bought, and the school is enlarged and made capable of receiving 170 pupils in the higher classes.[23]

Soon the technical school is moved to a new site. A man with practical sense, Msgr. Scuderi clearly understands that to meet the chronic poverty of the people, besides high schools, which cater to an elite group, there is urgent need of opening technical schools and trade schools. "By multiplying the high schools", he continues in his letter to the Rector Major "we do not answer to the real needs of the Indian people. An exaggerated number of such schools creates only misfits unable to earn their livelihood. It is urgent, instead, to have technical schools, where together with a Christian conscience, the good worker is formed. We therefore get down to work, and with the help of two experienced lay brothers, who have already given proof of their skills in Shillong, set up the 'Don Bosco Technical School'. After one year of its foundation, the school is well developed and Fr. Candela, visiting



Msgr. VINCENT SCUDERI, SDB
Provincial, 1934–1941
Administrator Apostolic of Krishnagar, 1935–1940

Fr. Scuderi is born at Ramacca (Catania-Italy) on 30th May 1902. He makes his first profession in the Novitiate of San Gregorio (Catania) in 1918, and on 29th May 1926 he is ordained a Priest. On 12th October 1928 he leaves for India. After one year as professor of Theology at Shillong, he is made rector of the house in Gauhati and is given charge of the whole missionary District in the Brahmaputra Valley.

In October1934 he is nominated as the new Provincial of the North Indian Province, at the age of 33, and in the following year he is made also Administrator Apostolic of the diocese of Krishnagar. From 11th June 1940 to March 1943 he is interned in the Concentration Camp of Fort William (Calcutta), Ahmednagar, Deolali, and finally Dehra Dun, together with other Italian confreres.

[23] Cfr. Bollettino Salesiano, July 1937, p.163–184, in Alessi, *Pionieri nel Cuore dell'India*, 52.

the school in January 1937, is surprised at noticing its rapid progress and the interest of the pupils."[24]

Another important initiative of Msgr. Scuderi is the school for catechists at Jessore. The training of catechists is basic in a mission. "Six native catechists and a missionary" – Pius XII will say – "are more effective than six missionaries with one catechist." And Msgr. Demage, bishop of Seoul (Korea), says: "A missionary without catechists is like a craftsman without tools." After two years of preparation, on 26th December 1938 Msgr. Scuderi has the joy of giving the crucifix to the first four catechists. The school has other alternate vicissitudes and finally is shifted to Krishnagar, where a suitable place is procured for it.[25]

Msgr. Scuderi has to face many calamities, one of these being the floods of August 1936, a disastrous one, which destroys the crops and houses of the poor people in the diocese. In Nadia District many villages are submerged, while the poor people look for a place where they can spend the night.

Elected 'Camp Chaplain', he organizes the religious life and regular studies of the internees, staunchly defending before the Camp Authorities the rights of the prisoners. The camp authorities manage to get rid of him by having him transferred to the Parole Camp for families at Purandarh (Maharashtra) on 22nd March 1943. There he manages to win over everybody, from the Commandant to the sweepers, in a very short time. He organizes schools for the children of the internees and for the Indian personnel, including the sweepers. His zeal and high priestly qualities draw to him a Dutch Lutheran Pastor and his wife, who become his friends and helpers and are received by him into the church.

In 1946, when he knows he would be repatriated, he asks and obtains, through the help of the Under-Secretary to the Home Ministry, Mr. Shiv Shankar, who under the spell of his personality becomes his admirer, to go to Goa, then a Portuguese territory, where he remains for 6 years and gives life to a flourishing Salesian presence on behalf of poor boys.

In 1952, at the age of 50 he re-enters Sicily, where for the next 30 years, will be the soul of important Salesian presences at Caltanissetta, Gela, and Riesi. He spends the last five years of his life in or around Catania as Provincial Delegate for the Missions.

He dies on 22nd November 1982, aged 80, after 64 years of religious profession and 56 years a Priest.

In the District of Faridpur all the Christians are living in boats over their submerged huts. The Father-in-charge of that mission centre goes by boat to bring some help to his people, and is sad to see his recently

[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid. 53

built church under water. He celebrates Mass on a boat, while the Christians on other boats participate in the Mass with great devotion.

Fr. Ribaldone,[26] from Bhoborpara, writing to Msgr. Scuderi, who is in Italy, has his tale of woes. On 23rd August the river of Puthimari overflows its banks, floods the surrounding countryside submerging also the road to Krishnagar. During the night the road is breached and the poor people of Ranabondo are cut off and their lands inundated. Also the villages of Aulia, Bitterpara, Gongra, Maliapota, Fulbari, Betberia, Dumpukur and a number of other villages are flooded; the crops ready for harvest are buried under water and everything is destroyed.

Msgr. Scuderi in an article of *Osservatore Romano* presents these and other distressing news about the terrible floods to the people of Italy. "We are passing through fire and through water," he concludes his appeal for charity to the Italian readers of the paper.

There are floods again in 1938 and 1939 in certain parts of the diocese. In the December 1938 issue of the Salesian Bulletin we read the appalling stories of Fr. Righetto from Krishnagar, Fr. Lazzaro[27] from Shimulia, and other missionaries from Fulbari on the 1938 floods.[28]

One important work of Msgr. Scuderi is to open a road connecting the mission compound of Krishnagar with the main road, thus connecting the mission campus with the town.

Another area that draws the attention of the Administrator is the Sunderbans. Khulna has a resident priest for several years during the

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[26] Fr. Luigi Ribaldone: born on 25.2.1902 at Alessandria (Italy), makes his profession on 12.4.1923 is ordained a priest on 20.7.1930, dies at Lu Monferrato (Italy) on 28.9.1966. Cfr. *Missionari Salesiani* (Pisana, Rome: Pubblicazioni del Centro Studi di Storia delle Missioni Salesiane – Sussdi 6, Edizione SDB Etracommerciale, 1976), 98.

[27] Fr. Vincenzo Lazzaro: born at Randazzo (Sicily) on 16.2.1902, makes his profession in Sicily on 1.11.1920, is ordained a priest in Sicily on 8.7.1928, comes to India on 10.12.1930, dies at Calcutta on 22.7.1992 aged 90. Fr. Lazzaro puts his heart and soul into the work he is asked to do, whether it is building churches and chapels, establishing new centres (Behrampore, Ranabondo), or exercising his ministry of healing through homeopathy. But above all he is a pastor devoted to his duty, full of zeal for souls, regular at his prayer life. At different times he works as assistant pastor or as pastor at Shimulia, Bhoborpara, Ranabondo, Chapra, as rector at Azimganj. (Cfr. The Obituary letter by Fr. Bertie Fernandez)

[28] Cfr. Alessi, *Pionieri nel Cuore dell'India,* 53–56.

time of the PIME fathers. Later on, owing to the shortage of priests and small number of the faithful, the centre has to be closed down.

Msgr. Scuderi sends Father Castro[29] and Father Bianchi in 1936 to Malgaji, where they build a school and a church. But, in a short time, Father Castro dies, and Fr. Bianchi continues to look after Malgaji and the Sunderbans from Shimulia.

In 1937 Khulna reopens as a separate mission centre and Fr. Righetto takes charge of it on 18th February. He and Fr. Bianchi take up their residence there and minister to the people of Malgaji and the rest of the Sunderbans and Faridpur. For some time they live in a rented house, but soon they buy for the mission a plot of land of about 10 bighas in area. They set up a chapel in the same year, dedicated to St. Theresa of the Child Jesus, and build a residence in 1938.

It is under Msgr. Scuderi, in January 1936, that the Holy See grants to the Ordinary the permission to establish the Congregation of the Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate as a Diocesan Congregation. The Administrator gives the Decree of erection on 6th January 1937. The Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith insists on a separate novitiate house for these sisters. Consequently, a house is built for them on a piece of land near the new Don Bosco School. It is blessed and opened in May 1938. Msgr. Scuderi prepares a set of Constitutions for the Catechist Sisters, which is approved and published in Italian in 1938 and in English and Bengali in 1940.[30]

The last work of Msgr. Scuderi is the Shrine of Mary Help of Christians at Ranabondo, which takes the name of 'Mariampur' and becomes the Marian centre of the diocese and a centre of pilgrimages for the Catholics and the non-Christians.[31]

On 25th May 1939 Fr. La Ravoire Morrow is nominated bishop of Krishnagar. Msgr. Scuderi leaves Krishnagar in January 1940, with Fr. Siro Righetto in charge of the administration of the diocese till the arrival of the new bishop.

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[29] Fr. John Castro: born at Cordoba (Spain) on 23.8.1902, makes his first profession on 20.9.1920, is ordained a priest on 20.9.1930, comes to India in 1935, dies at Calcutta on 7.3.1936. Cfr. *Missionari Salesiani,* 25.

[30] Cfr. Narayan *The Heart of Bengal* 84–85.

[31] For more details on Ranabondo Cfr. Ibid. 85–86.

7. Through the Storm: The Fire

The 10th of April 1936 is Good Friday. In the afternoon of that day the people, the clergy and the clerics of our Lady's House attend the Good Friday service in the Cathedral. When walking down the flight of steps that leads from the Cathedral to Our Lady's House, a cleric notices smoke billowing from a dormer-window. He and others rush to the house and find flames sweeping across the length and breadth of the attic. An alarm is raised.



Shillong: The devastating fire of 10.4.1936

The time is 3.30 p.m. in the afternoon. People rush to help. The fire swiftly engulfs the whole house, as the pillars, the beams, the floors, etc. are made of pinewood and the walls are of ikra. It all becomes a huge blaze. The soldiers stationed in the nearby Governor's house come to help. A pump is found but cannot be activated. Very little can be saved. The house collapses: the fire devours the beautiful chapel, dormitories, offices, classrooms, library and the labs. In 18 minutes all is lost. The clerics are left with only the clothes they are wearing.

The people cut down the trees to prevent the fire from spreading to Loreto Convent. But soon another danger is perceived. The huge fire is blown by the wind towards the back of the Cathedral that rises on the hill above our Lady's House. Tin sheets cover the Cathedral walls. The soldiers throw water against the walls to cool them. Nevertheless, the sheets grow red hot, the planks and the beams shrivel, and get warped, the swallows'nests under the eaves of the Cathedral catch fire first, and then the whole wall and the church burst into flames. The people pull out as

much as they can from the cathedral, the bishop's house, and the parish house. But the artistic altar made by a Salvatorian Brother and the new Organ that has just been installed are lost in the fire. The cathedral, the bishop's house and the parish house go up in flames. By 10.00 p.m. all that remains is a heap of ashes.

That very night Bishop Ferrando holds a meeting with all the priests. It is decided to hold the Holy Saturday service in the open air at the Calvary monument, and the Easter Solemnity in St. Antony's College hall, soon to be turned into a Pro-Cathedral. On Easter Sunday the bishop says, "We celebrate the Mass of the Resurrection. Take courage. I promise you that, with God's help, we shall rebuild the Cathedral."[32]

The devastating fire sends shock waves throughout Shillong. Sympathy and help come from every quarter. The Governor himself comes when the Cathedral is in flames and offers hospitality. Then he writes a letter of sympathy. Messages come from the Holy Father, Fr. P. Ricaldone, the Rector Major, and the Apostolic Delegate from Bangalore. Msgr. Mathias leaves for Shillong on Easter Sunday itself.

That same evening Fr. Provincial is informed of the fire by a telegram from his secretary, Bro. Cogliandro. But the telegram is received by him only on Saturday at 10.00 a.m. Shocked by the news, Msgr. Scuderi leaves for Calcutta, and there he phones to Shillong for details. In Calcutta he meets Archbishop Perier and discusses with him about procuring a roof for the clerics and novices who are now homeless.

The clerics and novices are given hospitality by the Jesuits who generously put their own holiday villa at Tung (Darjeeling) at their disposal.[33] The clerics and novices leave Shillong for Woodcot Villa on 13th April 1936 and on the following day are accorded a more than fraternal welcome by the Jesuit fathers and brothers. For the whole of their almost year long stay, the Jesuits generously provide all they need.[34]

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[32] Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands,* 86.

[33] In the Pisana, *Archivio Generale*, F. 176 there is a long report in Latin by a Jesuit Father of the generous hospitality of the Jesuit Fathers to the Salesians in Woodcot after the fire in Shillong. For a copy of the same Cfr. *Provincial Archives* B.5.

[34] Ibid. 85–87.

On 17th April Msgr. Mathias, Msgr. Scuderi, Fr. Uguet and Fr. Pianazzi visit Woodcot and bring a word of comfort to the Salesian community. The following day, Msgr. Mathias, accompanied by Bro.La Malfa, reaches Shillong, and is welcomed by the people. In the darkness of the night, Msgr. Scuderi goes to see the ruins of Our Lady's House. Msgr. Mathias speaking in Khasi encourages the people gathered in the temporary Cathedral. On 21st April, Msgr. Mathias and Msgr. Scuderi leave Shillong after holding elaborate discussions with Msgr. Ferrando on the reconstruction of the destroyed works.

In Shillong, the English speaking Catholic community opens a monthly subscription for the re-building of the Cathedral. Subscriptions are opened in the *New Leader* from Madras and the *Catholic Herald* from Calcutta. The Rector Major aids munificently both the bishop and the Provincial. Many other people from abroad help generously. And things begin to move swiftly.

On 20th May Msgr. Mathias informs Bishop Ferrando that the plans, drawings and specifications for the new Cathedral are ready. Mr. Gogerly, a renowned architect of Calcutta, prepares them. An elderly, experienced person and a good Catholic, he is ever so happy to build a religious institution to thank God for the gift of faith. He loves Don Bosco. However, he will never see the beautiful Cathedral he has designed, as he migrates to Australia where he dies.

It is Bro. S. Mantarro who carries out Mr. Gogerly's plans. With burnt out corrugated iron. sheets he builds a little shack for the drawings of the Cathedral, another for his bed, and a third for the Oratory tackle and band instruments. For several years he lives there, guides and supervises the building of the Cathedral and runs the Oratory for the children of the town. He forms a group of masons, faithful and efficient, and they help him in the construction.

The foundation stone of the new Cathedral is blessed on 25th October 1936, feast of Christ the King.

The fire is not a setback for missionary activity. Bishop Ferrando in July can send the following data to the Holy See for July 1935 to June 1936: Baptisms 7,259 and Catechumens 4754.[35]

[35] Ibid. 87.

8. Other Events in 1936

April 22nd witnesses the reorganization and redistribution of the priests left in Shillong for the various chaplaincies. The oratories are entrusted to the Don Bosco boys and to the brothers in practical training.

On 2nd June Fr. Dominic Farina dies of encephalitis at Raliang. He comes to India in 1925, aged 39. He hails from Sicily. As a cleric, during his practical training, he is the model of the Salesian Assistant. He is a companion of Msgr. Mathias at Foglizzo during his studies of theology and is ordained a priest in 1912. His first assignment in India is to take charge of the new mission centre of Jowai, where he lives under truly heroic conditions. There is neither bed, nor chair, nor table in the house. To add to this, he has to struggle against sectarian opposition. He is an inveterate punster, with always a ready smile on his lips and a pleasant, always charitable, retort on his tongue. His wit is always charitable and kind, never a sting in it. In 1930 Fr. Farina is transferred to Raliang. His knowledge of agriculture above the ordinary proves of immense help in the agricultural school, but he will be chiefly remembered as a teacher of catechism. At his burial all the people weep at the loss of their Father and Friend. Even his bitter Protestant opponents mourn him: "Fr. Farina is the missionary of God sent among us as the light in the midst of darkness."[36]

On 20th June, at Kurseong, Msgr. Ferrando ordains Frs. Dal Zovo, Dal Broi, Ferrario, Boscardin, and Sergi priests in the chapel of the Theological College of the Jesuit fathers.

The Rector Major, Fr. Ricaldone, summons Msgr. Scuderi to Italy through a telegram sent on 29th July. He returns on 20th November together with Fr. Vincent Ricaldone who will be preaching the December retreats before proceeding to his Mission in China.

On 29th November, at Woodcot, the spiritual retreat for the clerics is preached by Fr. V. Ricaldone and Fr. Marengo, the novice master; while at Bandel Fr.A.Colussi and Fr. Cocco preach the retreat to the new group

[36] Chronicle of the Province, 1934–1937, with the obituary letter of Fr. D. Farina included. *Provincial Archives*, B 10.1. On Fr. Farina Cfr., also Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 317–319; Ferrando, *Nell'India Nord Est,* 120–124.

of novices who have recently come from Italy. Both retreats are concluded on December 8th, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

On 9th December, the students of theology leave Woodcot for their holidays in various houses of the Province, while the students of philosophy remain on.

On 22nd December 1936 Msgr. Scuderi, together with his heartfelt greetings for Christmas and New Year, has also to communicate with great sorrow the news about the theft that takes place during the night of 18th December in Bandel Shrine where they desecrate the Holy Tabernacle, trample underfoot the Consecrated Hosts, and steal the sacred vessels and the Crown of our Blessed Lady. He asks for an hour of Adoration and general Communion in all the houses in reparation for the sacrilegious acts.[37]

1937–1938

9. The Second Extraordinary Canonical Visitation[38]

In 1937 and part of 1938 the second extraordinary visitation of the North Indian Province by two superiors of the General Council, Fr. Berruti,[39] the Prefect General of the Salesian Society, and Fr. Candela,[40] Councillor for Technical Education, takes place.

Fr. Candela reaches Calcutta from Madras on 10th January 1937. Fr. Berruti will reach only at the end of 1937 after visiting the Missions of the Far East.

On the same day of his arrival, Fr. Candela starts the visitation of the COP. In the afternoon, at about 3.00 p.m. he gathers together the

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[37] Cfr. Ibid.

[38] Cfr. Chronicle of the Province, Extraordinary Visitation, 1938, in B.11.1; also C.O.P. Chronicle. Cfr. also report of Rev. Fr. Candela to the Rector Major and Council and his letters in, *Archivio Generale*, F. 177.

[39] Fr. Peter Berruti: born in Turin (Italy) on 7.3.1885, makes his first profession on 30.9.1901, is ordained a priest on 29.6.1910, 5 years Provincial, 18 years Prefect General, dies in Turin on 1.5.1950. Cfr. *Missionari Salesiani*, 11.

[40] Fr. Antony Candela: born in Oran (France) on 20.12.1878, makes his first profession on 29.9.1895, is ordained a priest on 28.3.1904, for 33 years Member of the General Council, dies in Turin on 21.8.1961. Cfr. *Missionari Salesiani*, 21.

confreres in their community room where the letter of the Rector Major presenting the Extraordinary Visitor is read, followed by the introductory conference by the Visitor.

After Calcutta Fr. Candela visits Krishnagar, Jessore, Shimulia, and Saharampur. The only community still to be visited in Bengal is that of Bandel, where he will come later when all the clerics will be back from the holidays to start the new school year.

On 9th February Fr. Candela leaves for Assam and visits first all the mission centres in the plains, and on 24th February he reaches Shillong to visit all the communities and mission centres in the Khasi Hills. On 20th March he comes down to Bandel to visit the *studentates* of philosophy and theology and the novices who by now are temporarily settled there.



The Estraordinary Visitors in 1937–1938
V. Rev. Fr. P. BERRUTI (1885–1950), and
V. Rev. Fr. A. CANDELA (1878–1961)

On 29th March 1937 Fr. Candela, together with Msgr. Scuderi, leaves for Rangoon and for Siam. We will find him once again in Calcutta on 8th December 1937, at the solemn blessing of the church and of the Don Bosco Technical School at Liluah.

On December 21st 1937 Fr. Peter Berruti comes from Madras and starts immediately a very quick visit of Gauhati, Tezpur, Shillong, Krishnagar, and finally Bandel, where the two Visitors preside over the rectors and parish priests' meeting from 3rd to 6th January 1938.

In his introductory conference Fr. Berruti brings the blessing and the best wishes of the Rector Major, explains the purpose of such meetings, insists on the great responsibility they all have as missionary pioneers, and imparts some pieces of advice regarding the health of the missionaries. "Don't be too much in a hurry", he says, "don't have the presumption of doing everything yourselves. God himself, did not do everything all at once."

Ten sessions are held, in which all the relevant topics are discussed and on which the two superiors give their enlightened directives. The minutes of these meetings are given in printed form to all the houses. They are to be kept in the archives of the various communities and be considered strictly confidential. The deliberations and guidelines, contained in the minutes, will be given great importance and will guide the communities and the individual confreres in the following years till the next extraordinary visitation, which will be held after the War in 1949.

The Visitors leave the assembled missionaries this souvenir: to be good missionaries, better Religious and more Salesian; not to forget the duty of growing in holiness and the faithful observance of their vows. To this end, they exhort all to have recourse to the Holy Eucharist.

On 6th January 1938 the two superiors leave for Saharampur, from there they proceed to Bombay and on 12th January they board the ship for Europe.

10. The Migrating *Studentates* of Philosophy, Theology and of the Novitiate[41]

We have seen how after the fire in 1936, the clerics and the novices of our Lady's House are sent to Woodcot, as guests of the Jesuits. They remain there till the end of that scholastic year. In the mean time, in the months of November and December arrangements are being made in Bandel to receive the novices and the clerical students for the new scholastic year. Msgr. Scuderi often visits Bandel to supervise the preparations.

The new novices coming from Europe immediately settle down in Bandel, and on 1st December they start the retreat that precedes the novitiate preached by Fr. A. Colussi and Fr. Cocco. It is concluded on 8th December, with the feast of the Immaculate Conception. The canonical erection of the novitiate is done on 17th April 1937.

At Woodcot a retreat starts on 29th November preached by Fr. V. Ricaldone and Fr. O. Marengo who has just been nominated novice master in the place of Fr. Foglia. After the retreat, the students of philosophy

[41] Cfr. Extraordinary Visitation 1938, B. 11.1.

remain in Woodcot till about the middle of January. Then they go down to Bandel. After the feast of the Immaculate Conception, the students of theology are dispersed to the various mission centres for their holidays. In March 1937 they also go to Bandel for the new scholastic year.

Bandel, however, is not meant to be a permanent residence and presents a number of drawbacks, such as, the heat in summer, the inadequate and unsuitable lodging facilities and the poor health of a number of students and staff members, especially due to malaria. The superiors are therefore forced to think of other alternatives. The two extraordinary Visitors are concerned about it and want a quick solution to the problem.

On 10th January 1937 Fr. Candela comes to the North from Madras already with a plan of his own, at least as regards the students of theology. In his letter to the Rector Major, dated 27th December 1936, he writes about the Seminary at Poonamallee and of his desire to settle there the students of theology from the North.

"Yesterday," he writes, "I went to see the new seminary acquired and renovated by Msgr. Mathias. It is indeed a beautiful building, which seems to have been made for this purpose." He then describes all the advantages, should it become an inter-diocesan Seminary. "In the circumstances," he continues, "I think we can settle in Poonamallee the students of theology. I foresee that such a decision will be very painful for those in the North. But it seems to me that it is proposed, if not imposed, by the circumstances." In his letter Fr. Candela mentions also four reasons in favour of this plan:

- "We have no other studentate of theology in India, as Our Lady's House has been burnt down.
- We have to provide efficient and suitable personnel for Poonamallee.
- By uniting the two we spare formation staff and teaching staff.
- Poonamallee is a beautiful place; it has ideal premises, and a quite big compound."

"Msgr. Mathias," he concludes, "to whom I have communicated my plan, approves it."[42]

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[42] From the above letter it is clear that Msgr. Mathias is not the first one to suggest Poonamallee as a solution to the problem of the *Studentate* of theology, as it is commonly believed in the North, and as Msgr Ferrando himself writes in his book *Nell'India Nord-Est*, 139. For the letter Cfr. *Archivio Generale*, F.177.

The same idea Fr. Candela expresses in a letter to Msgr. Scuderi from Miyasaki on 17th August 1937. "If it is possible to make use of Poonamallee for our students of theology, it will be a big saving of personnel."[43]

At the end of 1937, after the Visitation, Fr. Candela is joined by Fr. Berruti who too is in favour of this plan. The two Visitors decide to give it a try, subject to the approval of the Rector Major and his Council.

The confreres in the South are happy with this solution, but not those in the North and some express their criticism to this new plan. Fr. Berruti becomes aware of this and he writes a letter to Msgr. Scuderi, just before leaving Bombay for Italy, in which he leaves clear instructions: "The College 'must' continue," he writes, and all the students of theology have to go down to Madras with their rector, Fr. Guttierez, and Fr. Hauber, as confessor." He asks that all obey in a Salesian, filial manner, and expresses his displeasure at the lack of submission and even open criticism on the part of some. In his letter he also mentions the serious reasons for the decision taken: the *studentate* of Bandel is not at all regular, as some students are also regular teachers of the students of philosophy and of the novices; the health of the confreres causes great anxiety; the teaching staff is not adequate; the lodging facilities are neither enough nor suitable. The Rector Major and his Council will take the final decision in Turin.

Msgr. Scuderi acknowledges the letter, expresses his sorrow, asks pardon for the negative reactions of some confreres, and promises that all will accept with Salesian docility any decision taken by the superiors. He, however, respectfully expresses also his own personal serious reservations on the merit of the various reasons brought forward in favour of Poonamallee, something that he has not been able to do before, due to Fr. Berruti's short stay in the Northern Province.

11. Salesian College' at the Ghorabari Brewery

On 28th January Fr.Candela writes from Turin saying it is the desire of the Rector Major and his Council that both *studentates* remain in the North, but they have to be situated in the Hills: one in Kurseong, the other in Shillong. The novices can be with the students of philosophy or can

[43] Ibid.

also be by themselves. He exhorts them to move fast and make all the required preparations, so that all are out of Bandel possibly before summer sets in.

An explosion of joy by every one in the North greets the decision and Msgr. Scuderi acts fast to see to its implementation.



Sonada: The Brewery

On 9th March he writes to Fr. Candela: "On receipt of your letter giving me the most welcome news, I immediately go up to Shillong and I arrange that the students of theology occupy the house the bishop is building for the FMA Sisters, while the sisters will provisionally move into a rented house, the expenses being met by Mr. Pierroz. I also make the plans for the new *Theologate*, which will come up fast and with moderate expenses. I'm sending the details to the Rector Major. Tomorrow I'm leaving for Sonada to finalize the details for the acquisition of the property I have written to you about. If there are no legal blocks, everything is already agreed upon, and, within the month of April, the students of philosophy and the novices - if the decree of erection of the Novitiate reaches in time - will be able to settle down there definitively. The students of theology will be able to do the same in Shillong.[44]

[44] For these two letters. Cfr. Extraordinary Visitation, B.11.1. The students of theology go up to Shillong on 28 April 1938.

The chronicle of the C.O.P gives us the details of the hectic activity that precedes the final acquisition of the property at Sonada:

March 13: Fr. Provincial and Fr. Uguet go up to Sonada to buy the Sonada Brewery.

March 19: Fr. Provincial is coming back from Sonada and, as difficulties have arisen regarding the buying of the new property, he is leaving the same night for Shimla to meet the proprietor. On this same day, Fr. Uguet comes back from Sonada, very sad, because things did not go according to plan.

March 23: Hurray! The Brewery is ours. Fr. Uguet, together with Fr. Ferrario and Bro. Michael, goes up again to Sonada to take possession of the new property. Fr. Provincial arrives back from Shimla. He is down with fever, but he is the winner. The house is ours![45]

March 30: Fr. Pianazzi is nominated rector of the *Studentate* of philosophy and on 31st March, he leaves for Sonada.

The Chronicle of 'Salesian College' furnishes us with the details of the departure of the students of philosophy from Bandel and of their arrival at the Brewery.

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[45] Quite different is Fr. Uguet's account of the acquisition of the Sonada Brewery in his "Know your Province", in the Newsletter, Calcutta, No. 11, 5/75, dated 30.9.'75. Fr. Scuderi, the Provincial, and Fr. Uguet go up to Sonada with the intention of buying the Sonada Brewery. They first contact Mr. Hardy, the Secretary of the Planters' Club of Darjeeling, who is the agent of the "Solan Meakin Breweries". The latter refuses to co-operate as he has already promised the Brewery for Rs. 6,000 to Mr. Hunter of Sonada. Mr. Hunter, an Irish Catholic married to a Protestant Lady, is determined to acquire the Brewery. After meeting Mr. Hardy for the second time, Fr. Scuderi and Fr. Uguet from the Club go to the Telegraph Office and send the following Telegram to the manager in Shimla: "Kindly accept the offer of Rs. 8000 cash for Sonada Brewery. Inform decision immediately". To this they receive the following reply from Shimla: "Offer Rs. 8000 accepted, provided you pay cash immediately – Director Solan Meakin Breweries". Not having the money with them, the two Salesians ask for a loan from the superior of the Loretto Convent, and with the help of the Manager of the Imperial Bank of Darjeeling, they contact by phone the Manager of the Company in Shimla, telling him to credit the Company (Solan Breweries) with Rs. 8000, informing him that it is the payment for the Sonada Brewery as per the Telegram. By 5 p.m. they have the answer that everything is O.K. The same evening Fr. Scuderi leaves for Krishnagar and next morning Fr. Ferrario and Bro. Castelli arrive at Sonada. Mr. Hardy is informed of the purchase and so also the *chowkidar*. Fr. Uget takes possession of the Brewery. St. Joseph has done his work very well! The two Salesians have previously put a medal of St. Joseph on the wall of the tennis court of the Brewery.

On 30th March the Bandel community celebrates its last feast together. On 1st April the students of philosophy leave Bandel and board the Darjeeling train for Siliguri. Fr. Gutttierez, their rector, leads the group to hand over the clerics to Fr. Pianazzi, their new rector. The travelling group is made up of Fr. Guttierez, Fr. Paviotti (deacon), Bro.Balocco, assistant of the philosophers, and 18 students. Among them are Bros. Giacomin, Gobetti, Marchesi, Cavenagh, Villa, Morra, Stadler, and Bertolino, who all will have much to contribute to the life of the Calcutta Province in the years to come.

At the Brewery the train does not stop, but it slows down from its already slow speed to allow Fr. Guttierez to alight and Fr. Pianazzi to enter the train. They reach Sonada at 4.00 p.m. leave their bedding at St. Theresa's Villa and walk down to the brewery site, welcomed by Fr. Ferrario,[46] Bro. Castelli, and Bro. Michael Cahoj.[47] Here they have tea, spiritual reading and supper. After supper they walk back to the Villa for the night.

On 3rd April, after breakfast they all walk down to the Villa. After lunch they bid farewell to Fr. Guttierez, who leaves for Calcutta with a stop over at St. Mary's Kurseong. Fr. Ferrario also leaves for Krishnagar. In a meeting with their rector the Salesians prepare a time-table for the coming days: they will spend the night at St. Teresa's Villa, in the morning they walk down to the Brewery, here they have their daily practices of piety and their meals. During the day they work to make the old Brewery habitable.[48] Only after supper they walk up to the Villa for the night. The rector gives the weekly conferences, and all the various liturgical services for Palm Sunday and Holy Week services are held as far as it is possible in the new place. Only on 27th April they leave St. Theresa's Villa definitively.

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[46] Fr. Mario Ferrario: born at Milan (Italy) on 30.3.1904, comes to India in 1928, makes his profession on 9.1.1930, is ordained a priest on 20.6.1936. He is Rector in several houses, especially Rector and Manager of the C.O.P. and Provincial Economer. He dies at Buscate (Italy) on 23.3.1962, aged 58. (Cfr. *Missionari Salesiani,* 44.)

[47] Bro. Michael Cahoj: born at Ruskovce (Czechoslovakia) on 19.11.1911, makes his first profession on 31.7.1934, reaches Shillong in January 1935, dies at Shillong on 1.7.1994, aged 83. A convinced religious and a great worker as a *factotum.* He works in Shillong (Our Lady's House), Bandel, Sonada, for some years in Dibrugarh, Tezpur, Tura, and for 15 years in Savio Juniorate, an inspiration to the young aspirants. Cfr. *Religious for Modern Times, Glimpses into the lives of Salesian Brothers*, 67.

[48] Fr. Joseph Marchesi, then cleric Marchesi, gives us a graphic description of the work done by the students for over a month. Cfr. Alessi, *Pionieri nel Cuore dell'India,* 131.

On 4th April the Ghorabari community is graced by a visit of His Grace, the Archbishop of Calcutta, Msgr. Perier. He says that he is very happy to have a new Religious community in the archdiocese, because it is a new centre in which Holy Mass is celebrated every day. He exhorts the clerics to compete in piety and sanctity with the brothers of St. Mary's, to brew a new kind of beer, the spiritual beer of fervour and sanctity. He calls the new house, the house of studies of St. Joseph.

The months of April and May witness the settling down of a regular religious and Salesian community with all its various activities. Regular band practices begin on 9th April. On 12th April, Bro. Castelli leaves for Krishnagar, and on the 19th Bro. V. Mauri comes to take his place in the supervision of the works of renovation of the old Brewery. On 20th April the deacons Bordin and Buccieri join the community. On 24th April the May *Sermonets* start in the verandah of St. Theresa's Villa. On 28th April the Exercise for a Happy Death is held with a conference by the rector, the examination of conscience and the other prescribed practices of piety.

On 13th May, the novices arrive from Bandel, together with Fr. O. Marengo, the novice master, Fr. Ayuso,[49] the confessor, and Bro. Zannini, the assistant. On the same day Bro. Balocco and Bro. Zannini exchange their respective roles. Bro. Zannini becomes the assistant of the students of philosophy, and Bro. Balocco becomes the assistant of the novices.

On 15th May, there is a reorganization of the staff: Fr. Buccieri is appointed Prefect of Studies and Fr. Paviotti, Catechist. The professors are Fr. rector, Fr. Master, Fr. Ayuso, Fr. Buccieri, Fr. Bordin, Fr. Paviotti, Bro. Zannini, Bro. Balocco, Bro. Mauri, and Bro. Cavenagh. On 16th May, regular classes begin for the three courses of philosophers and for the theologians. The novices begin classes only on May 20.[50]

'Salesian College' is back again to its regular life, made of prayer, classes, regular holding of feasts with academies and entertainments, various activities, such as, music, games, picnics, coupled with a great

[49] Fr. Leandro Ayuso: born in Avila (Spain) on 27.2.1893 makes his first profession on 24.7.1919, is ordained a priest on 19.9.1925, dies at Salamanca on 24.4.1973. Cfr. *Missionari Salesiani*, 6.

[50] On November 5, the Deacons: A. Buccieri, U. Bordin, and O. Paviotti are ordained Priests; and clerics: W. Balocco, V. Mauri and F. Zannini are ordained Sub-Deacons at Shillong. Deacons: W. Balocco, F. Zannini, G. Colussi, and E. Usai will be ordained priests on 23rd May 1939 at Salesian College, Sonada.

amount of manual work, both outside and inside the house, to make the old Brewery look like a poor but dignified religious house, everything being seasoned with a great spirit of sacrifice, family spirit, and joy.

12. Liluah: Blessing of the Church and of the Don Bosco Technical School[51]

The land for the technical school at Liluah is bought in 1928, a huge workshop is set up in 1930, but due to unavoidable circumstances, especially due to lack of personnel, that venture could not be materialized. It is the courage of Msgr. Scuderi, the Provincial, which brings about its realization in 1937.



Liluah: The old building comprising Church, Boarding, School, and Workshop.

On 17th February 1937, the contract is signed for the construction of the technical school. Present on the occasion are: Msgr. Scuderi, Fr. Uguet, Provincial Economer, Fr.A.Colussi, Prefect of the C.O.P., who will be supervising the works, and Mr. Gogerly, the architect.

On 24th February, Msgr. Scuderi goes to Liluah to bless the foundation stone of the school. Present at this private function are:

[51] Cfr. Chronicle of the Province, *Provincial Archives*, B.10.1; Cfr. also COP Chronicle.

Fr. Uguet, Fr. A. Colussi, Fr. Guttierez, rector of the Bandel community, Fr. Marmol,[52] Fr. Ayuso, and the architect, Mr. Gogerly.

The work proceeds at a fast pace and on 23rd November, Msgr. Scuderi, Fr. A.Colussi,[53] the new rector, and Bro.Kenny, go to start the new community. The beginnings are tough, because of the scarcity of basic necessities. Their main aim is to make every thing ready for the solemn blessing of the church and of the school, which is scheduled for 8th December, the feast of the Immaculate Conception. The *Aemulamini* gives us a graphic description of the first day, or better, of the first night and of the following days till 8th December.

"The house of Liluah is opened privately in a very particular manner. The new personnel, led by our dear Fr. Provincial, reach the place in the evening of 23rd November. It is pitch dark. The custodian, who for several years has taken care of a big shed, and now feels proud of being the custodian of such a grand palace, comes to meet us with a poorly lit oil

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[52] Fr. Francis Marmol: born at Cadiz (Spain) on 1.10.1886, makes his first profession on 15.8.1905, is ordained a priest on 22.12.1917, comes to India on 31.12.1926, dies in Bandel on 20.5.1974. He works hard as a missionary with Fr. Piasecki at Gauhati and Dibrugarh. In 1935 he is in Krishnagar. He is constantly on the move to Bongaon, Jessore, Shimulia, and Khulna. In 1938 he is at the C.O.P. in 1951 he is sent to Liluah as confessor. Affectionately called Fr. Nana, jovial, optimistic, great apostolic zeal, a great missionary, a Salesian to the core, most obliging to confreres and boys.

[53] Fr. Attilio Colussi is born at Casarsa (Italy), on 1.12.1907. When 15 he goes to the missionary *aspirantate* of Ivrea (Italy). On December 1925 he leaves for Assam, makes his novitiate at Shillong and the profession on 6. 1. 1927. He studies philosophy and theology at Shillong, makes his practical training at Tardeo (Bombay). He is ordained a priest on 7.7.1934. His first assignment is to be a missionary for the Garos. In 1937 he is the first Rector of Don Bosco, Liluah. During the war years he is in Assam, Rector and parish priest at Gauhati. From 1950 to 1968 he is the parish priest of the Cathedral Parish (Calcutta). He is the spiritual guide of several youth movements: 'The Young Christian workers', 'The Legion of Mary', 'The Apostolate of Our Lady of Fatima'. From its very beginning till the end of his life, he is connected with the Institute of the Sisters of Charity of MotherTeresa. From 1968 to 1974 he is Rector and principal of Don Bosco School, Park Circus. From 1974 till the end of his life he is in the Provincial House in charge of the mission office, keeping contact with the Benefactors of the Province, and busy in the exercise of his pastoral ministry as Confessor and spiritual guide of several religious Communities. He dies aged 82 on 2nd November 1998. Fr. Colussi is totally dedicated to Christ and to his Kingdom: simple, good and exemplary religious, a lover of the Eucharist, of Mary most Holy, and of the Pope. He is a simple and popular preacher, a sought for spiritual guide, good and generous with all, a true Son of Don Bosco, and a lover of souls. In October 1942, as Parish Priest and Rector of Don Bosco Gauhati, he cooperates with Bishop Ferrando in the founding of the Institute of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians.

lamp. With a few candles bought at the spot and a matchbox, we enter our house! We have our supper in our pockets: two tins of sardines and a piece of cheese! But no one is bothered about eating at this moment."

"The rector, Fr. A.Colussi, has already prepared beds and mattresses heaped up in a room (the rector's office), together with plates, chairs, pots, the necessary articles for the office of the *Don Bosco In India*, bed sheets, mosquito nets and... mosquitoes! With so many candles, it looks as if we want to celebrate our arrival with a grand illumination. But providentially no fire breaks out!"

"When we finish bringing up to the second floor the mattresses and the pillows, and also the newly bought blankets, we start thinking about having supper. But we have forgotten to bring some bread with us. The workers, who are getting ready to go to sleep, are sent to look for bread and also for some tea. The custodian turns into a cook and at about 10.00 p.m. we are able to have something hot."

"The house is not yet completely finished: there are yet no doors, no windows, no washbasins, but there are walls to protect our sleep. At the 'good night', Fr. Provincial, promises us a conference on the following day before Holy Mass. And at last we find ourselves in bed! Early morning the sound of about ten factory sirens competing with one another suddenly wake us up. Fortunately they begin only at 3.00 a.m. and then they take their turn every half-hour."

"The new day finds us in the Chapel. Around an improvised Altar between the two statues of Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco, we listen to the conference of dear Fr. Provincial. It is enough for you to know, dear *Aemulamini*, that the Motto of this house is *Purity and the Eucharist*, which is the programme of those who work and who will be working in future within the walls of this house of Don Bosco."

"The beautiful conference is followed by two Holy Masses. It is the 24th of the month in which we keep the commemoration of Mary Help of Christians. After taking care of the soul, the body too has its own requirements, and we set about preparing some breakfast. Nothing extraordinary, only the eggs are fried in a new kind of frying pan, what masons use for carrying the cement mixture. The Provincial is holding the frying pan and Fr. rector breaks the eggs!"

"The work still left to have the house ready for the blessing is enormous. In the Chapel only the floor is complete, the Altar is all to be assembled together, in every corner of the house you find masons at work. The day of the inauguration is approaching fast and very little is ready. Fr. Provincial calls the novices from Bandel and leaves everything to them to prepare. A big 'thank you' is due to them and to their assistant, Bro. Zannini[54], who working day and night make the house ready for the solemn inauguration. A big 'thank you' goes especially to Fr. Provincial who puts in so much work and sacrifice to make possible the realization of a long cherished dream. He is the soul of every activity, to him goes the gratitude of the personnel of the new house and of the whole Province which now looks at Liluah as the new Provincial house."[55]

12.1 Eighth December 1937

Preparations are in full swing up to the last moment, under the guidance of Fr. Provincial. In the afternoon the people begin to arrive and they all remain pleasantly surprised at seeing the imposing building.

The dignitaries begin to arrive: Archbishop Perier, Bishop Ferrando of Shillong, the Visitor Fr. Candela together with Fr. Cinato, the Provincial of the Southern Province, the Regular Superior of the Jesuits, the Provincial of the Christian Brothers, the Italian Consul and his Chancellor, the Architect, Mr. Gogerly, and other personalities, among whom are many Confreres who come from the various houses of the Province, a good number of Jesuit fathers, and a great number of people.

Msgr. Perier, accompanied by the Salesian clerics who have come from Bandel, blesses the new church, the first one in India to be dedicated to St. John Bosco. His Grace is seen to shed tears of joy when he enters the church to the singing of the Litanies of the Saints.

Before the blessing of the school, Msgr. Scuderi reads a very touching speech in which he recalls the last dream of Don Bosco (1886)

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[54] Fr. Francis Zannini: born on 22.8.1911 at Campolongo del Brenta (Treviso – Italy), comes to India in 1930, makes his first Profession in 1931, is ordained a priest on 23.5.1939, in June 1940 he is interned in Fort William, Ahmednagar, Deolali and Dehra Dun. In 1946 he goes back to Italy. In 1950 he joins the Middle East Province; he works in Cairo, Beirut, Abadan, Teheran, California, Canada and back to Abadan in 1975. He dies there on 30.5.1977, aged 76.

[55] The Provincial Office is brought down from Shillong to Liluah on 30 December 1937.

in which he sees his Sons at Calcutta, and gives the origin, the purpose and the method of work of this new institution.[56]

The Archbishop responds saying that he too has other dreams to realize through the Salesians. He then cuts the ribbon and enters to bless the spacious premises of the new school.

The official function ends with a tea party for the guests and with a solemn dinner in the evening for all the Salesians present, Archbishop Perier, Mgr. Ferrando, and a few other guests.

12.2 The Church

Bishop Ferrando celebrates the first Mass in the new church, at Don Bosco's Altar, on 9th December.

His Grace, the Archbishop, canonically erects the church as a parish church, which will also serve as Chapel for the boarders. It will be catering to the spiritual needs of a considerable number of Catholics, if one considers the fact that close by there are numerous houses of railway employees.

There are three Altars: two side Altars with two beautiful statues above them, that of the Sacred Heart and of Mary Help of Christians; while Don Bosco smiles from above the main Altar in the niche in the wall behind the Altar.

A spacious choir loft with its harmonium is waiting for the young singers to give life to the liturgical functions. The 24 big windows, and at night, 10 chandeliers, light up the whole church. Besides the benches, there are also 60 chairs with kneelers, brought there from a nearby Chapel, which, with the new church, has no more reason to exist.

From the interior of the house, there are three doors to the church, and in front there is the main door for the parishioners. On the left, rises the belfry with only one bell for the time being.

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[56] In 1937 there are 4 Technical Schools in the North Indian Province: at Shillong, Gauhati, Saharampur and now at Liluah; and till April 2 Agricultural Schools, the one of Raliang and the one of Saharampur. On 1 April 1937, the Don Bosco Agricultural School of Saharampur ceases to exist, and the Technical School opens in a new place close to the Parish Church with Fr. Foglia Rector and parish priest.

1939

13. Don Bosco in Burma[57]

13.1 Don Bosco and Burma[58]

In his desire Don Bosco precedes his children to that distant land.

"He is greatly attracted to the foreign missions" – writes his biographer Fr. Lemoyne – "mostly because at this time in Piedmont the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, originally established in Lyons, has grown phenomenally in a very short time since its inception."[59]

"Nor does he abandon the idea of becoming a missionary. He feels strongly inclined to bring the light of the Gospel to those who do not have the Faith, among whom he would meet thousands, even millions of boys. He is enthused by the fact that after a perilous and almost uncharted journey, the Oblates of Mary, in 1839, penetrate the kingdoms of Ava and Pegu,[60] where they preach the true Faith, and that, in 1842, this missionary territory has been entrusted to them, and a member of their congregation is appointed bishop. Great are the fruits of their apostolic labours. Father Cafasso, who notices everything Don Bosco undertakes, lets him study French and Spanish, but when he begins to take up English, he tells him: "The foreign missions are not for you."[61]

The first ones to spread the Gospel in Burma, however, are not the Oblates of Mary, but the Barnabites, who are outstanding also in the scholastic and cultural field. They publish the first book in Burmese characters.

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[57] For this section on Burma our main sources are: Alessi, *Una Vita per l'India;* Alessi, *Pionieri nel Cuore dell'India;* Leone Barattoni, *Relazione sulla situazione della Birmania in questi ultimi anni e sulle opere Salesiane ivi fondate* (Firenze: 1966.) These are personal notes of the Author. Cfr. *Provincial Archives*, C.51.

[58] Myanmar is today's name for Burma and Yangon is the name for Rangoon. We shall continue to use the names of Burma and Rangoon for most part of this work.

[59] Cfr. John Baptist Lemoyne, *Biographical Memoirs*, Vol. I (New Rochelle, New York: Salesiana Publishers, 1965), 246.

[60] Ava and Pegu are the ancient capitals of Upper and Lower Burma respectively. [Editor of the English Edition of the MB.]

[61] Cfr. John Baptist Lemoyne *Biographical Memoirs*, Vol. II (New Rochelle, New York: Salesian Publishers, 1966), 160.

The Oblates of Mary, who have their residence close to the Shrine of the *Consolata* in Turin, succeed the Barnabites. These religious attract the attention of Don Bosco. But his desire to go as a missionary to Burma will be realized by his Sons in 1939, when they land at Rangoon.

In 1870 priests of the Foreign Missions of Paris take the place of the Oblates and establish their residence in Rangoon and in Mandalay, while the Foreign Missions of Milan establish their residence in Toungoo.

It is Fr. Lafon,[62] a venerable priest of the Foreign Missions of Paris, who calls the Salesians and offers them the orphanage and other works founded by him. In 1928 he writes to Msgr. Mathias offering him his works. Monsignor answers that he would be very happy to go to Burma, but scarcity of personnel does not allow him to do so. In 1934 he renews his appeal. But he has to wait three more years, before a positive answer is given.

At last on 2nd April 1937, the extraordinary Visitor, Fr. Candela, accompanied by the Provincial, Msgr. Scuderi, makes a quick visit to have an idea of the works, which are being offered. As a consequence of this visit, in 1939, it is decided to accept the offer and send the first expedition to start the work.

13.2 The New Mission

The farewell to the pioneers being sent to found the new mission takes place at the Don Bosco School of Liluah on 24th January 1939.

The first group of missionaries comprises of two priests, Fr. A. Alessi, rector and leader of the expedition, and Fr. U. Bordin;[63] two brothers,

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[62] Fr. Lafon, still brisk at the age of 78, exuding gentleness and Christian goodness, makes a tremendous impression on Fr. Alessi the first time he meets him. At the age of 26 he is ordained a priest. Leaving the family he loves so much, and his beloved Country, France, he leaves for the missions without ever looking back. He reaches Mandalay from Malaysia in 1894, and takes charge of the 'Chinese Mission' of Mandalay, where there is a Parish and a little school. He takes care of the Parish, develops the school, opens an orphanage, a home for widows and their children, and a dispensary. "Fr. Lafon, says Fr. Alessi, is an indefatigable worker, ready for any sacrifice, with an open and generous heart towards the poor and the sick. He lacks only the spirit of the organizer. Due to this no other missionary is willing to live with him." Alessi, *Una Vita,* 126.

[63] Fr. Ubaldo Bordin: born in 1909, comes to India in 1928, makes his first profession on 9.1.1930, is ordained a priest on 5.11.1938, dies at Port Chester (USA) on 25.11.1984, aged 75.

Bro. Bongiorno and Bro. Dell'Acqua;[64] and two clerics, Bro. Cavenagh[65] and Bro. Del Col. The Provincial, Msgr. Scuderi; accompanies them.

The journey by ship lasts three days, and on 27th January they reach Rangoon and next day they are in Mandalay. "When we enter the church," writes Fr. Alessi in his chronicle, "we are surprised at noticing that Don Basco has preceded us." "It is five years," says Fr. Lafon, "that my little orphans kneel before this picture to ask Don Bosco to send his sons in our midst."

Three days later, on 31st January, on the feast of Don Bosco, with a solemn Pontifical Mass presided over by Msgr. Faliere, bishop of Mandalay, the Salesians take possession officially of the institution, which will be called "Lafon Memorial School", in honour of the generous benefactor. The institution comprises the parish church, a home for widows, an orphanage, and a public school.



Mandalay: The Church and the School built by Fr. Lafon

Unfortunately, the beginning of the salesian mission in Burma, coincides with the beginning of the World War II, on 1st September 1939,

[64] Bro. Charles Dell'Acqua: born at Milan (Italy) on 22.9.1906, makes his first profession on 8.12.1931, comes to India in 1930, dies at Legnano (Italy) on 12.10.1972.

[65] Bro. Dyonisius Cavenagh: born at Clogher (Ireland) on 6.9.1917, makes his first profession on 7.9.1935, comes to India in 1935, dies in Shillong on 24.6.1944, a victim to T.B.

which in a short time will spread from Europe to the Far East, and which will affect badly the new venture in Burma, as future events will tell.

The first thing the Salesians hasten to do is to know the city that will be their future field of apostolate. Fr. Alessi gives a detailed and graphic description of it.[66]

What greatly impresses our missionaries visiting the city is the behaviour of the citizens: their welcoming smile, their cheerfulness, their goodness and spirit of hospitality, which is reigning among them. Here is not the giver who is thanked, but the receiver, because by receiving the benefactor is helped to make more friends.

Msgr. Scuderi initially is concerned about his Salesians, fearing that the comforts they would find would cause harm to the spirit of poverty and sacrifice to which they are used in Assam.

"But from the very first moment we enter Fr. Lafon's house", writes Fr. Alessi, "every fear disappears. Not only do we find poverty, but real misery. In the house there are only three beds in a corner of the dormitory of the orphans, and here are seven of us! They have only 41 rupees with them and have to provide for all our needs, and for the needs of the orphans, of the widows, and of the other works.

"Poverty and sacrifices do not frighten us. We roll up our sleeves and start work at once with enthusiasm and Salesian cheerfulness. On entering the Bay of Bengal in the vicinity of Rangoon we make a solemn promise: we pledge with all our strength to reproduce in Mandalay a faithful copy of the Oratory of Turin, and realize in Burma a genuine family of Don Bosco. And I believe we have been faithful to our promise."[67]

13.3 Initial Difficulties

"The first difficulties," continues Fr. Alessi, "derive from the lack of organization in the house. The boarding, more than an orphanage, is a motley crowd of young ruffians, like those Don Bosco met at the *Generala*.[68] ...The local clergy calls this place, 'a den of thieves'. The great majority of the 150 boys regularly plays truant, many do not come

[66] Alessi, Una *Vita per l'India,* 135–136.
[67] Ibid. 136.
[68] In Don Bosco's times the *Generala* is a reformatory in Turin.

back for meals and not a few remain outside even at night. Fr. Lafon explains the fact of having so little money to offer us saying, 'I used to hide the money in my room, below the pillow, but one night some boys stole it away while I was sleeping.' The first thing to do is therefore to put some order in this undisciplined and rebellious gang.[69]

They start immediately from the first of February by putting out a big notice with the timetable for rising, meals, classes, recreation, and rest. More than half of the boys take no notice of it, but others try to follow the new rule.

All goes well for the first three days, but on the fourth day when the bell rings at the end of the recreation, three ringleaders approach Fr. Alessi and ask in an arrogant tone:

"What is the meaning of this bell?"

"It means the end of the recreation and the beginning of the study", answers Fr. Alessi calmly and with a smile.

"We do not care at all about these signals! Here we alone set rules."

They gather all the boys under a tree, in the playground, and speak to them. The Salesians prudently withdraw. This calms them a little, but they all remain sitting under the tree.

At 5.00 O'clock, when the bell goes for Benediction, all enter the church. Taking advantage of this opportunity, Fr. Alessi calls the three ringleaders and tells them clearly:

"Here there is no more place for you. Take all your belongings and go home or anywhere else you like!"

When the other boys see their companions leave, they give a cry, rush out of the church, break into the study hall and the dormitory, take their belongings, jump over the gate and run on to the road to join their leaders. In less than 10 minutes the house is empty.

Fr. Lafon cries on seeing this general stampede, but eventually he also understands that nothing else can be done, if one wants to establish some order in the house.

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[69] Alessi, Una *Vita per l'India* 131.

About a dozen small boys soon come back, and about 10 other boys are pardoned and readmitted. This allows the Salesians to carry on till the end of the school year, more so because all schools are closed, due to a general strike called by the students against the British government.

"To these first difficulties," writes Msgr. Scuderi in the *Bollettino Salesiano* of 1st March 1939, "others are added, one being the sudden sickness of a lay brother struck down with typhoid that almost brings him to death's door; the enervating heat, the scarcity of water, the need of learning a new language, not to mention the political upheavals and chain strikes. All these put the very existence of the new mission in jeopardy. Only the courage of Fr. Alessi and his confreres succeed in overcoming obstacles and difficulties of all kinds."[70]

In May new admissions are made for the orphanage: only genuine orphans and deserving poor boys are admitted. They reopen the school, admitting also external students, and begin also a trade school: on 3rd June the tailoring department with 6 boys under the guidance of Bro. Bongiorno, and on 18th August, the carpentry department ably directed by Bro. Kramer.

The home for the widows, the dispensary, and the parish are also put in good shape! Parish attendance increases, due also to the fact that they have introduced the devotion to Mary Help of Christians.

After a year of hard work all the works of Fr. Lafon are back to full capacity and the missionaries can say with satisfaction: "at last we have started!"

Fr. Lafon lives with the Salesians, taking part in their life and activities. The bishop also is enthusiastic with what the Sons of Don Bosco are achieving, but new and more terrible trials are about to fall on their work and on the whole Country.

[70] Ibid. 138.

CHAPTER VII
THE WAR YEARS
1939–1946

1. The Second World War 2. Italy Enters the War 3. Fr. Uguet Assumes Government of the Province 4. The Difficulties of the New Provincial 5. Sonada Becomes an *Aspirantate* 6. The Centenary of Don Bosco's Priestly Ordination 7. Provincial Catechism Competition 8. The Italian and German confreres of Assam are Interned 9. Through Hardships and Setbacks Evangelization goes on 10. The Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians 11. Sonada: The Italian and German confreres are Interned 12. Sonada 13. Hundred and Forty Salesians in the Dehra Dun Internment Camp 14. Krishnagar 15. The Salesians in Burma in the Storm.

1939

1. The Second World War

On 1st September 1939, World War II breaks out between Germany and the Allies. In Shillong the German confreres, Fr. A. Killerman[1] and Fr. N.M. Schmidt are interned in a makeshift camp. In Sonada Bro. Stadler and Bro. Michael Cahoj are arrested, taken to Darjeeling and then to Calcutta and interned in Fort William. On 29th September Bro. Michael is released and he goes back to Sonada. Bro. Stadler will be released from Ahmednagar in December and on 10th December he is back in Sonada.

Noticing a sense of uneasiness among the confreres due to the new situation created by the war, on 2nd September 1939, Msgr. Scuderi sends a circular letter to them with precise directives as what to do in the new situation: "Let us pray and put all our trust in God," he writes, "there is no reason to be alarmed. Continue with your work. We have nothing to fear as we are on a mission of peace and service on behalf of souls. Be very prudent in talking among yourselves and with outsiders. Have nothing to do with politics. I hereby intend to forbid all non-rectors, the reading of papers and listening to the radio. Be always respectful towards the Authorities." Similar directives he will repeat in a letter of 29th May

[1] Fr. Andrew Killerman: is born at Heinrichskirchen (Baveria – Germany) on 15.11.1900, makes his first profession on 10.08.1920, is ordained a priest on 10.07.1927, comes to India in 1937, dies in Krishnagar on 13.7.1984, aged 83. He works in Krishnagar, Shillong, Barpetta Road, Jessore, and Krishnagar Cathedral.

1940. "Pray and have confidence in God. Be always prudent in talking and acting. We are missionaries. Be always respectful of the Authorities and obey their orders."[2]

On 23rd September 1939 10 novices coming from Italy arrive at Calcutta under the leadership of Fr. Di Benedetto Fiori. When the radio on board their ship, *Conte Biancamano*, announces the outbreak of the War, they are nearing the Bombay harbour. Italy being an ally of Germany and fearing that the British Authorities may requisition the ship, the Captain does not touch Bombay, but proceeds towards Japan. Since Italy does not enter the War immediately, as it is feared, the ship lays anchor at Singapore, where the missionaries meant for India leave the ship and on board an Indian ship they reach Calcutta. On 24th September six novices meant for the North Indian Province leave for Sonada accompanied by Fr. Ferruccio[3] Colussi, the four meant for the South Indian Province leave for Madras on 26th September.[4]

On 13th September 1939, the new bishop-elect of Krishnagar, Fr. Louis La Ravoire Morrow, reaches Calcutta. He is nominated bishop of Krishnagar on 25th May 1939, and now he comes only for a quick visit to Krishnagar to have an idea of his new diocese and of its needs. On 20th September he leaves for Europe. He is consecrated bishop by Pope Pius XII, together with eleven other missionary bishops, on 29th October, feast

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[2] Cfr. *Circular Letters of the Provincial*, 1934-1951, *Provincial Archives*, B.5.

[3] Fr. Ferruccio Colussi: is born at Concordia (Italy) on 2.7.1908, comes to India in December 1925 to make his novitiate, makes the first profession on 6.1.1927, is ordained a priest on 7.7.1934, dies at Krishnagar, where he is parish priest, on 24.5.1940, aged 31.

[4] This is the last big group of Novices coming from Europe to make their novitiate in India. The six going to Sonada are clerical novices: Paolo Taverna, Luciano Colussi, Domenico Curto, Martino Caligaris, Masucco Giovanni, and lay Brother novice Fausto Pancolini. One more novice and a few professed Salesians will be allowed to enter India before the outbreak of the war between Italy and England in June 1940.

Two young Priests, Fr. Antonio Bernardi and Fr. Leone Barattoni, reach Sonada on 23rd November 1939. Five young Salesians: clerics Antonio Duca, Enrico Fantin, Nicolò Lo Groi, and Rosario Stroscio, lay Brother Volfango Venturini and a clerical novice, Mario Porcu, reach Sonada on 9th December 1939. Together with them, one young Priest, Fr. Francesco Ardusso, and clerical novice Mauro Casarotti land in Bombay on 5th December 1939, and on the same day they are made to proceed for Madras. These are the last Salesians and Novices coming to India before the outbreak of the war between Italy and England in June 1940. Only after Independence a few more missionaries will be allowed to enter India until the Indian Government will put a stop to the entry of foreign missionaries altogether. The last Italian clerical novice to enter India to make his novitiate is young Joseph Fantin. He makes the novitiate at Mawlai, Shillong in 1950 with Fr. Dal Broi as novice master. (Note 4 continued on page 248.)

of Christ the King. After his Ordination he goes to America to collect funds for the new diocese and will take charge only on 27th October 1940.

Following the directives received from the superiors in Turin, Msgr. Scuderi leaves Krishnagar on 1st January 1940, leaving Fr. Siro Righetto to function as Administrator till the arrival of the new bishop.[5]

The difficulties of the War do not stop or weaken the missionaries' enthusiasm and zeal. From 11th to 14th October 1939, a rectors' meeting is held at Sonada that deals with 18 themes, the main ones being: 'The missionary activity,' treated by Fr. Piasecki; 'The interior life of the missionary' (practices of piety, the common life, the religious life), by Fr. Tomè; 'The Salesian Rector', by Fr. Scuderi; 'Poverty', by Fr. Uguet. Other topics are: 'The Clerics in practical training', 'the problem of vocations', 'catechesis', 'the Festive Oratories', 'appeals to benefactors'. All the talks are well prepared and are followed by frank and lively discussions in which all take part. The minutes of this and of other rectors'meetings are very inspiring and reveal the spirit reigning in the Province: spirit of charity and cooperation, spirit of sacrifice, zeal for souls, love for Don Bosco and the Congregation. The never missing shadows present in any picture of the activity of imperfect men serve only to enhance the brightness of the more numerous positive elements mentioned before.[6]

1940

On 9th June 1940, Msgr. Scuderi calls Fr. Uguet urgently to Bandel, where he is sick in bed. He is mourning the death of his father who passed away recently, the news of which is communicated to him by Fr. Ricaldone. When Fr. Uguet comes he shows him a letter from Fr. Berruti, the Prefect General, which reads: "Your six year term of office has expired, you are very tired and must rest. Entrust the government of the Province to Fr. Uguet.[7]

On 10th June, 940, Msgr. Scuderi sends out a Circular Letter from Bandel to all the confreres in which he writes: "My nomination as

[5] Cfr. COP Chronicle and Msgr. Scuderi's letter to the missionaries of Krishnagar dated 23rd February 1940, in *Provincial Archives*, A.1.1.
[6] Cfr. *Rectors'Meetings*, 1931-1950, in *Provincial Archives*, B.17.1.
[7] Cfr. Alessi, *Pionieri nel Cuore dell'India*, 16.

Provincial expired on 1st March of this year. In conformity with the directives received from our superiors who authorize me to do so, from 15th June I entrust the care of the Province to Fr. Uguet, who will continue till the nomination of the new Provincial."[8]

2. Italy Enters the War

On 10th June 1940 Italy enters the War alongside with Germany against England and France.

On that very day in Calcutta, cleric Joseph Marchesi, doing his practical training at the COP, is taken and interned in Fort William. On 11th June all the Italian confreres who reside in Liluah and in Bandel, including Msgr. Scuderi, the Provincial, are also temporarily interned in Fort William. Fr. Alessi writes that Msgr. Scuderi could have avoided being interned in Fort William in June 1940. When the police arrive to take away the confreres he asks them: "Why do you take them away? What wrong have they done?" "They are Italians and therefore enemies of England." "In that case take me as well as I too am an Italian." "But we have no warrant to take you." "Take me also, I want to follow my confreres." "At this they take me away at once."[9] On 15th June they are taken to the concentration camp at Ahmednagar (Maharashtra), from there they are shifted to Deolali (Maharashtra). In Ahmednagar they find other interned Religious: Jesuits, Capuchins, Paolini, PIME, etc.[10] Msgr. Scuderi and the Salesians start various programmes on behalf of the civilian and military prisoners: classes to the less instructed soldiers, English classes, tuition classes on school subjects, conferences on India, staging plays, choral singing, a small orchestra, and games (volleyball, football). There were also religious activities on Sundays and feast days, the publication of a leaflet *fides nostra,* 'our faith,' spiritual and material assistance, etc. Msgr. Scuderi administers the sacrament of confirmation to 40 soldiers.[11] In Deolali they have a very hard time due to inadequate and poor living arrangements. Scarcity of water being one of these, and because of this about 900 prisoners go on a hunger strike. Finally they are shifted to Dehra Dun on 7th October 1941.[12]

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[8] Cfr. *Circular Letters of the Provincial*, in *Provincial Archives*, B.5.

[9] Alessi, *Missionario di Fuoco*: *Msgr: V. Scuderi Salesiano* (Turin: LDC, 1985), 117. Cfr. also COP Chronicles, where there is a difference in the date.

[10] Alessi, *Missionario di Fuoco,* 120-121.

[11] Ibid. 123-127.

[12] Ibid. 130.

In Sonada, the Town Inspector, who comes to requisition the car and the wireless set, brings the news of the outbreak of the War. He is extremely kind, and assures the rector that the confreres will not be disturbed, if they do not give any reason for it. The non-Italians have no restrictions. In the evening Fr. Marengo, the new rector,[13] speaks to the community. "It is consoling", he writes in the house Chronicle, "to notice how all the confreres are animated by charity. They are determined to avoid speaking or thinking of the events... They go about their duties with the usual cheer and calm. If anything, they seem to be more united, more brotherly. God be thanked!"

On 12th June Fr. rector and Fr. Thomas Lopez, with the Town Inspector's permission, go to Darjeeling to meet the Superintendent of Police (SP), about the possibility of Fr. Pianazzi going daily to St. Mary's to attend classes and Bro. Michael to Kurseong or Darjeeling for marketing. The SP has no time to see them that day, but he agrees to come to the College the next day. It is, however, the Town Inspector who comes with new instructions and restrictions from the SP. They are:

- To reside at Salesian College and not to change residence without permission.
- To purchase everything that they need at Sonada *bazaar*, no other *bazaar* is allowed.
- To take exercise only within a radius of one mile, never outside this limit without permission.
- It is forbidden to possess bicycle, car[14] or other means of transport,
- It is forbidden to discuss politics or at any time to express any opinion on the merits or conduct of the War.
- If for any reason they have to exceed one-mile radius limit, they must apply in writing to the SP, at least three days in advance, and will not exceed the one-mile limit until they have received a written permission.[15]

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[13] Fr. Pianazzi ceases to be Rector of Salesian College in February 1940 when he begins to attend classes at the Theological College of St. Mary's (Kurseong). Fr. Marengo becomes Rector in his place. Cfr. Msgr. Scuderi's letters to Fr. Ricaldone on 24 January 1940 and 9 June 1940, in *Provincial Archives*, A.1.1.

[14] On 22 August 1940 the SP allows the car to be brought back and to be kept in the College, considering that it is not enemy property but Salesian Mission property, but it has to be dismantled or the carburettor or magnets kept at the Jore bungalow P. Station. And strangely enough, the College is asked to pay for the time the car has been kept in the Stuart's Garage in Darjeeling. Cfr. SCS Chronicle, Vol. I.

[15] Salesian College Sonada, Chronicle, Vol. I.

On 16th June, Bro. Joseph Cockshoot unexpectedly arrives at the College on behalf of Fr. Uguet. He is in Darjeeling since the 14th, and stays at the holiday-home of the Archbishop of Calcutta trying to meet the Governor in order to ask him to make things easier for the confreres. Msgr. Perier too tries his best on behalf of the Salesians. On 17th June, Bro. Cockshoot returns to Calcutta as his attempts are in vain. On 24th June, Fr. Pianazzi obtains a transfer to St. Mary's, where he will stay on till the end of the scholastic year.[16]

In Krishnagar diocese all the confreres are not affected by the new developments. In Assam all the Italians and German confreres are at first confined in Shillong, either at Mawlai or at Don Bosco's, but on 26th June they are released and allowed to go back to their missions.

On 20th June, in Sonada, on Fr. Provincial's advice, the superiors dismiss all the servants they can possibly dispense with, including the sweeper. The clerics give a helping hand to whatever needs to be done in the kitchen and refectory. To spare coal they collect firewood from the nearby forest and the novices are given the charge of chopping it. Bro. Michael and Bro. Fioredda[17] take over the cooking as the cook too is sent to Bandel. Bro. Porro,[18] for a short time, helps in the kitchen and in the vegetable garden. Every day, after tea, most of the students help out in the garden. On Thursdays, instead of the usual walk, all work in the garden. All the Brothers are enthusiastic about the new arrangement and it is a great relief for the superiors to see how they understand the delicate new situation and how eager they are to do their utmost. Greater restrictions cannot be imposed on them without having to interfere with the regular class routine.

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[16] During the winter holidays Fr. Pianazzi is allowed to come back to Salesian College. On 14 February 1941, he goes back to St. Mary's to continue his course, which he concludes brilliantly on 8 November 1941. Some confreres from Salesian College, Fr. Dal Zovo, Bros. Moja, Composta and O'Callaghan are allowed to be present at the defence of his thesis. During the year 1941, Fr. Pianazzi is allowed to come to Salesian College a number of times: during Holy Week, for the feast of Mary Help of Christians and for Rector's Day. Cfr. SCS Chronicle.

[17] Brother Fioredda: born in 1910, comes to India in 1938, makes his profession on 22.12.1939, dies at Calcutta on 8.2.1978, aged 68.

[18] Brother Paolo Porro: born at Milan (Italy) on 6.7.1911, comes to India in 1937, makes his first profession on 8.12. 1938, dies at Castellana (Italy), on 3.10.1970 aged 59.

On 9th July 1940 Fr. Uguet arrives in Sonada. In a conference to the community he acquaints all with the actual difficulties of the Province. Gathering the House Council he discusses with them several urgent matters. No money is to be spent except for food or clothing. To spare kerosene, he suggests imitating the example of the community in Mawlai, by making changes in the timetable. Accordingly they decide to anticipate everything by half an hour, going to bed early and rising early in the morning. If need be, they will even anticipate it by one hour, to be able to avoid lighting the petromaxes, except one for Benediction and supper. After experimenting for a few days, it is felt that half hour anticipation would be sufficient. As regards food, as far as possible, nothing is to be altered.

On 16th August 1940 Fr. Thomas Lopez is transferred to Liluah. It is a big loss to the community because of the tremendous service he is rendering to the community, and in particular, to a small group of Salesian brothers who are doing the recently started two-year course of formation under his direction. Above all, all will miss his great example of poverty, hard work, and dedication.[19]

However, the restrictions imposed by circumstances do not dampen the spiritual fervour, the excellent family spirit and the seriousness in studies.

As regards family spirit, the chronicle gives some details about the rector's day celebrations on 13th October 1940. "The Rector's Day is very solemn in the church, in the theatre hall, and in the refectory. Some prominent persons from Sonada are invited for the entertainment and they respond to the invitation. Staff and brothers spare no efforts to make it a success. This is another proof of the good spirit that reigns and of the union between staff and brothers."

The chronicle also gives details about the solemn Feast of Christ the King. The way the adoration is conducted and the success of the

[19] A two-year Juniorate course for the young lay Brothers starts functioning in January 1940. It is the realization of one of the efforts of Msgr. Scuderi at reorganizing the Formation Houses and improving the various stages of the initial formation, as he mentions in a letter to Rev. Fr. Ricaldone on 24 January 1940. Other plans refer to the establishment of an Inter-provincial *studentate* of theology at Mawlai, the preparation of theology professors by sending students to St. Mary's Kurseong for their degrees, the first being Fr. Pianazzi; and opening an *Aspirantate* at Bandel with Fr. Bacchiarello as Rector. Cfr. *Provincial Archives*, A. 1. 1

procession held inside the compound, are also proofs of the religious and spiritual fervour of the community. Oratory boys and adults – all non-Christians – carrying flags take part, and two non-Christian boys serve as pages strewing flowers along the path of the procession. A good number of men and women watch or follow the procession. They all enter the Chapel where they assist at the last Blessing with religious silence. After the Blessing Fr. Marengo addresses them a few words in Hindi explaining the meaning of the Feast and concludes with a few words of exhortation, which the people seem to appreciate.

Fervour in studies is shown by the frequent and well-prepared debates on important themes related to their curriculum of studies. In July the clerical members of the staff set the example of a model debate on the topic 'scientific education versus classical education'. In the following three months the students of philosophy, under the guidance of their respective teachers, exercise their debating skills on some relevant topic, such as, 'the Reformation as an historical fact' (22nd September), 'whether all religions are equally good' (6th October), and 'the origin and evolution of life' (27th October).[20]

These three aspects of the life in Sonada will continue to be given great importance in the following years too, till December 1942 when the Italian students will be taken to Deoli and the non-Italians will be asked to go to help in the various houses, in the place of the interned confreres.

3. Fr. Uguet Becomes Provincial

According to Msgr. Scuderi's letter of 9th June 1940, Fr. Uguet is due to assume office on 15th June. But Italy joins the War on 10th June and the Provincial, Msgr. Scuderi, is interned on 11th June, and hence Fr. Uguet is compelled to take charge immediately. He will fulfill this heavy task for the next ten years. He does it with zeal and total dedication through his visits to the various centres spread out in the Northeast, in Bengal, and even as far as Saharampur, spending many days on tiring journeys using all the available means of communication: train, steamer, bus, etc. It is indeed a heavy burden taking into consideration his poor health to travel

[20] Cfr. SCS chronicles for the entire portion on Sonada.

through the Province. A man exuding serenity and calmness in the midst of troubles especially as the war is raging, he makes his presence felt in the Province with his *Circular Letters*. A lot of decisions of far reaching consequences are taken together with his Council.

His first Circular Letter to the confreres is of 26th June 1940, hardly ten days after assuming office, in which he exhorts all to see in 'these dark and troublesome times,' a call to live henceforth a life of prayer and sacrifice. "Let us see," he writes, "whether we have anything to correct in our religious life." He recommends "faithful observance of the Rules and of the practices of piety," and the recitation of the Holy Rosary for the interned confreres.

On 6th November 1940 he writes again communicating the Pope's desire to keep Sunday, the 24th of the month, as a day of special prayer so that God may intervene to end this fearful scourge of the war. "Let priests celebrate that day's Mass for the intentions of the Holy Father, the non-priests receive Holy Communion for the same intention." He ends with requests for prayers for the interned confreres.



V. Rev. Fr. MARIANUS UGUET, SDB
Provinial (1941–1950)

Fr. Uguet is born at Barcelona (Spain) on 10th April 1898. He makes the *aspirantate* at Campello (1911) and the Novitiate at Carabancel (Madrid) in 1914. He is ordained a Priest on 14th June 1914 at Campello (Alicante) and leaves for India in January 1926, together with Fr. Francis Marmol and cleric Archimede Pianazzi.

In February 1926, he is sent to join Fr. Dominic Farina to open the new mission at Jowai, among the Jaintia, where, due to poor health, he remains only for six months. He is then asked to be the Catechist in Don Bosco School Gauhati, and later in November 1927 he is transferred to the COP as assistant Vicar. He remains in Calcutta till he finishes his term as Provincial in 1950.

From 1950 to 1952 he is back in C.O.P. as rector; from 1952 to 1956 Vicar General, parish priest and rector in Dibrugarh. In 1956 he is rector of Don Bosco School Liluah. In 1962 he is rector of Don Bosco Polytechnic at Cossipore (North Calcutta). He is then given a break and is transferred to Bandel as Confessor and in-charge of the Retreat House. From 1970 to 1974 he is rector of Don Bosco School at Okhla (Delhi).

At Christmas he writes again, sending his greetings to all and asking for prayers for the interned confreres and for the superiors in Turin. In this letter he also communicates the recommendations of the Apostolic Delegate to all Ordinaries and superiors:

- A missionary renounces any immoderate interest in the temporal affairs of his own country,
- It is deplorable to set the temporal interests of one's own country before those of one's own Heavenly mission. Take no sides in controversies about forms of government and other political matters,
- Whatever be the form of government, obey lawful authorities.

During the remaining years, he gives all his time to the ministry of Confession: in Liluah (1974–75), in Oriens Seminary Shillong (1974–78), again in Liluah (1979–80), back in Oriens Seminary (1980–82), and in Don Bosco School Okhla (1982–85).

He spends his last years (1985–89) praying for the needs of the Province. He breathes his last on 18th February 1989, at the age of 91. His body is laid to rest in Bandel.

He is the oldest Salesian missionary linking the Province of Calcutta with the early years of Salesian history in the North.

On 20th June 1940 Fr. Uguet meets his Councillors, Fr. Guttierez and Msgr. Bars. Sensing the danger of Fr. Uguet being interned, in case Spain joins the War, Fr. Piasecki is called from Dibrugarh to be a member of the Provincial Council. They presume the permission of the superiors in Turin and hope to inform without delay. On 9th September Fr. Piasecki is made rector, parish priest, manager of the COP, and Provincial Economer. Msgr. Bars takes Fr. Piasecki's place in Dibrugarh. Should Fr. Uguet be interned, Fr. Piasecki will temporarily assume charge of the Province.

In the meeting of the Council on 21st November 1940, the future of the *aspirantate* at Bandel is taken up for discussion. Since it is not possible, due to lack of personnel, to substitute for the Italian confreres who are now interned, the Council decides to send the aspirants to Sonada. Five or six clerics will be placed in Salesian College, Sonada for the study of theology. They will also be teaching the students of philosophy and the aspirants.[21]

[21] Cfr. *Circular Letters of the Provincial, Provincial Archives*, B.5; *Minutes of Provincial Council Meeting*, B.8.2; COP Chronicle.

4. The Difficulties of the New Acting Provincial[22]

Two challenges that Fr. Uguet faces immediately on assuming office are the problem of finance and the shortage of personnel.

Not being able to receive financial help any longer from benefactors in Europe, he has to rely only on whatever resources he can mobilize in a poor country like India, which is involved in the war effort of the British Empire. With meagre resources and ever-increasing needs he has to support the houses of formation: the *aspirantate*, the novitiate, the *studentates* of philosophy and theology, besides having to help the interned confreres who are also in great financial difficulties. When he takes charge of the Province, he inherits a debt of Rs. 3,000; has to return Rs. 100,000, the cost of COP to the Assam Mission; and has to pay back Rs. 50,000 to the Bandel Archconfraternity, which has paid the cost of the land where the Don Bosco School, Liluah, stands today.

He starts meeting the challenge by asking for a loan of Rs.5,000 from Archbishop Perier, who is a generous patron of the Salesians. From the pastoral ministry our missionaries render to the 18 military chaplains serving in the American Army stationed in Assam, he receives

[22] On 9 June 1940, Fr. Scuderi entrusts Fr. Uguet with the government of the Province. On 29 January 1941, Fr. Uguet writes to Fr. Scuderi: "From Vatican City it is announced that you have been reappointed as Provincial of the North Indian Province. The superiors have not received your letter of last June. Tell me what to do..." On 10 February 1941, Fr. Scuderi writes from Ahmednagar: "I am surprised at the news of my reappointment. Probably the superiors do not know that I am interned. I ask you to continue to perform the duties of the Provincial, a thing which you can do even better than I can do." On 20 May 1941, Vatican Radio announces: "Considering the present condition of Fr. Scuderi, the Rector Major communicates that during the absence of the Provincial, Fr. Marianus Uguet will be governing the Province with all the powers of the Provincial delegated *ad omnia*." On 19 October 1943 from Shillong Fr. Uguet writes to Fr. Scuderi that the superiors have written to him that he has a free hand in the government of the Province in agreement with the Constitutions and Regulations, and that he is told that Vatican Radio has communicated a message from the Rector Major saying: "You are my delegate with all the powers of the Provincial." Cfr. Fr. Bacchiarello's letter to Fr. Berruti from Sonada dated 1st April 1947, in *Archivio Generale*, F. 180. On 18-19 November 1945, Fr. Uguet communicates to the recently reconstituted Council (Msgr. Bars, Msgr. Cinato, Fr. Piasecki, Fr. I. Ricaldone) having received a letter from Fr. Berruti, which only confirms his nomination as Provincial in 1941. In the Council meeting held at Shillong on 18 November 1947, Fr. Uguet informs the Council of his re-election as Provincial for another six-year term. Cfr. *Provincial Archives*, B.8.2.

between 70 to 80 dollars per week. But this is not sufficient. Divine Providence, however, does not abandon him and comes to his aid in a most unexpected way.

One day a Punjabi gentleman enters his office. "Father," he says, "I know your are in great trouble. I am an expert in running 'lotteries'. If you wish I can help you to solve your difficulties."

"I ask for some time to think it over," answers Fr. Uguet, and he runs to the Archbishop for advice.

"Don Bosco was doing it," the Archbishop answers, "you also try and may God bless you."

And he calls his Vicar General, Msgr. J. Fernandes, the future Archbishop of Delhi, and tells him about the proposal of the Punjabi gentleman. "Father," says Msgr. Fernandes, "that Punjabi gentleman is an honest person, if you don't do it, I will do it."

"And what about the permission from the government?" asks Fr. Uguet.

"I will think about this," says Msgr. Fernandes.

The gentleman asks only for a trusted administrator and a room for setting up the office, his helpers would do the rest. He launches the sproject with a great publicity. The first prize will be Rs. 100,000, the second, Rs. 50,000, and the next three winning tickets will get Rs. 10,000 each. The following are the conditions: after defraying all the expenses, 75% will go to the Province and 25% to the organizer.

Msgr. Fernandes helps to obtain the necessary permission and that is how the DB Charities begins with its office in Bandel and with Fr. Fossati as honourary secretary. Due to the complaints of some people that business should not be conducted from the Holy Shrine of Our Lady, the superiors agree that the Lottery be shifted to Liluah, but very soon it is realized that even that is not the right place. Finally it reaches the COP,

the Provincial House, under the direct control of the Provincial with a Secretary appointed by him.[23]

The first draw brings to the Province a net profit of Rs. 10,000. The draw is held two or three times a year for a number of years. With this help Fr. Uguet is able to pay off all the debts, give back Rs. 100,000 to the Assam Mission, pay back the debt of Rs. 50,000 to the Bandel Arch-confraternity, support the formation houses, and construct the first half of the building of Salesian College at Sonada.[24]

Regarding the problem of personnel, the situation is rather grim, but not so unmanageable as that of the German Salvatorian fathers at the outbreak of World War I in 1914, when all the German missionaries, including the German sisters, are repatriated. Now the majority of the missionaries are Italians. But there are also a number of Spanish, French, English, Irish, Dutch confreres, one Pole, and also a few Indian confreres. During the war no new missionary expedition can be organized and even when the war is over, Fr. Ricaldone writes to Fr. Uguet, "We are no more in a position to help you, neither with money, nor with personnel. Italy is on her knees and we wonder how we will be able to get on our feet again." Eventually, this will turn out to be a blessing in disguise. It forces Fr. Uguet and the superiors to begin a drive to recruit local vocations in a big way. But this can be materialized only after the war. During the war

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[23] The Lottery is a real providential gift to Fr. Uguet and it proves to be a greater gift to his successors. During its almost 30 years of existence, the Lottery has a chequered history, periods of great success, but also difficulties and setbacks, including legal battles in court. When the division of the undivided North Indian Province takes place in 1959, one of the conditions approved by the superiors is that the profit of the Lottery be equally divided between the two resulting Provinces. In June 1968, the precarious financial condition of the Calcutta Province compels the Provincial, Fr. R. Stroscio, to ask the superiors in Turin to relieve the Province of this heavy burden of having to give its contribution to the Gauhati Province. After a careful consideration of the actual situation, the superiors decide in favour of the Calcutta Province. As if this decision was not sufficient, on 30 November 1970, Fr. Stroscio writes another long letter to the Rector Major himself, renewing the request to be freed from this burden. To this Fr. Ricceri answers with his letter of 23 January 1971, granting the request (Cfr. *Provincial Archives*, B 1.1). From 1969 onwards, the difficulties increase and make the future of the Lottery uncertain. This leads finally to its closure. The 82nd draw of 17 October 1974 is the last draw held for the D.B. Charities Lottery. Stiff competition from the State Lotteries promising better prizes forces the decision of discontinuing it, at least as long as the existing conditions prevail. (Cfr. Alessi, *Pionieri nel Cuore dell' India*, 17–19; and *Salesian News Letter* – Calcutta, I, No. 6, p. 8, dated 15.12.1974; ibid. no. 7, p. 3).

[24] Cfr. Alessi, *Pionieri nel Cuore dell' India*, 17–19.

efforts are being made to get vocations from our mission centres in the North.[25]

It is indeed providential that Fr. Uguet is nominated as acting Provincial just the day before Fr. Scuderi and the Italians are interned in Fort William. Being a Spanish citizen he can move freely. The few available confreres give him the possibility of substituting at once for those who are taken to the internment camp, something which enables the various centres to continue functioning regularly, although at a reduced pace.

Fortunately, those Italians, who, at the outbreak of the war are resident in India for at least 15 years without visiting Italy to see 'the glories of Mussolini', are allowed to remain in their places. Among them are: Fr. Marengo, Fr. Pianazzi, Fr. Tonello, Fr. Dal Broi, Fr. Boscardin, Fr. Zanon, Fr. Costa, Fr. Attilio Colussi, Fr. Comba, Fr. Cerato, Fr. Igino Ricaldone, Bro. Mantarro, Bro. Casagrande, and a few others. Through the good offices of some powerful friends in the Assam government, Bishop Ferrando and cleric Tognocchi, affected by TB, are also spared. The Italian missionaries working in the diocese of Krishnagar are also spared due to the strong and timely intervention of Bishop Morrow.

5. Sonada becomes an *Aspirantate*

From the very beginning, Msgr. Mathias, confronted with the great possibilities opening up before him, understands that the flow of missionaries from Europe would not be able to meet the ever increasing need of opening new mission centres.

It is necessary to find local vocations, who will find it easier to get acclimatized, learn the languages of the people, and be incarnated into the cultural context of the people. He also sees at once the advantage of having local vocations being formed together with the young recruits coming from Europe to make their novitiate. As a result of this policy, Fr. Uguet can now count on Fr. Wollaston and a few other Indian clerics

[25] On 25 January 1947, the Salesian College chronicle gives us the statistics of the boys who passed through the Sonada *Aspirantate* and of their success:

- Boys who left from Sonada or from the Novitiate for various reasons,	24
- Already professed,	22
- Presently at the Mawlai Novitiate,	16
- Presently in the School,	22
TOTAL	84

and brothers. The outbreak of the war, however, totally stops the flow of novices from Europe. The last group reaches Sonada on 25th September 1939. Fr. Scuderi immediately realizes the need of having a proper *aspirantate* for local vocations and he starts one in Bandel at the beginning of 1940 with Fr. Bacchiarello as rector. On 11th June 1940, the Italian confreres residing in Bandel are taken to Fort William and after a few days to Ahmednagar. Since the lack of personnel makes any substitution impossible, on 21st November 1940, the Provincial Council, presided over by Fr. Uguet, decides to shift the aspirants to Sonada.

Accordingly, on 4th March 1941, 10 aspirants and 3 clerics, Bros. O'Callaghan, Bennet and Patrick Burns, reach Sonada. Of the 10 aspirants, 5 are Khasis, 3 Anglo-Indians, and 2 Nepalese. Arrangements are made for their dormitory, refectory, and study hall. They are warmly welcomed, although they reach during a heavy hailstorm. Bro. Burns is appointed the assistant of the aspirants. The three brothers, who come with the aspirants, join the three brothers in practical training who are already in Sonada, Bros. Dario Composta, Calogero Mastruzzo, and Joseph Moja, and start their theology course with Fr. Marengo and Fr. Dal Zovo[26] as their teachers. All the six students of theology teach the students of philosophy and the aspirants.[27] Sonada, thus, becomes also an *aspirantate*

[26] Fr. Ruggero Dal Zovo: born at Verona (Italy) on 16.9.1909, comes to India in 1927, makes his profession on 21.1.1928, is ordained a priest on 20.6.1936, dies at Shillong on 8.7.1972, aged 62. Fr. Dal Zovo exercises his priestly ministry at Krishnagar, Sonada (Prefect of studies and Rector), Saharampur (Rector), St. Antony's College, Shillong. From 1956 to 1965 He is Vicar General of Msgr. Marengo at Dibrugarh. An excellent man, exemplary religious, zealous priest, ceaseless worker, good preacher, and author of numerous booklets and pamphlets in English and Khasi.

[27] To the 10 aspirants from Bandel others are added already in 1941: a Senior Cambridge boy from Delhi (Francis Cyril) on 9 March 1941, and three boys from Burma, an Anglo Indian, one Karen (Victor Zea), and one Burmese (Louis Tin Maung), the last two sent by Fr. Alessi on 28 April 1941. On 29 January 1942, a new aspirant, Bro. Fernand Napoleon Denault, a C.S.C. perpetually professed Brother, joins Sonada. He comes from Chittagong with the intention of becoming a Salesian Priest. He remains in Sonada for the next four years, first as an aspirant and teacher to the aspirants; then as a novice with Fr. Marengo as Novice Master, while still teaching the boys. After his profession he continues to be in Sonada as a practical training Brother, till he goes to Mawlai for his theology in 1946. He is ordained a priest on 7.8.1949 and works as a missionary in Bengal. He is the last Salesian missionary to leave Khulna (East Pakistan) after the partition. He returns to Canada and works there as a Salesian till he dies in Montreal on 26 December 1980, aged 71. On 3 April 1942 Master Thomas D'Souza arrives quite unexpectedly. He leaves Rangoon as a refugee with other members of his family and now comes up to Sonada from Mysore to become an aspirant. Other aspirants come to Sonada in the following years, all from North India. The drive for vocations from the South (Kerala) begins only after the war.

and it will continue to be such till August 1962. Since there are no novices, the novitiate is suspended.[28]

6. The Centenary of Don Bosco's Ordination

On 7 January 1941, Msgr. Mathias, the Archbishop of Madras, writes to the Provincial, passing on to him a message from Fr. P. Ricaldone received through the Vatican Radio. In his message, the Rector Major gives some news regarding the state of the Congregation, as it is experiencing the ravages of the war.

But the core of the message is especially to remind the whole Congregation that the year 1941 is the centenary year of the beginning of the Salesian works, and also the centenary of the priestly ordination of Don Bosco, which falls on 5th June. He recommends that these two centenaries be properly celebrated in ways compatible with the distressing conditions imposed by the trauma of the war. To help all in these efforts he gives to the Salesians, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and Cooperators, a relevant *Strenna* for the year: *To honour the Catholic priesthood by making known its excellence and by zealously fostering priestly vocations.*

Fr. Uguet makes the recommendation of the Rector Major his own and writes a meaningful letter to the confreres on 27th March 1941. He commends all the confreres for accepting and putting into practice all the instructions he sends to them in his previous letters: "difficulties are overlooked and our work practically suffers no set-back." With regard to the Rector Major himself, he is sorry to inform that Fr. Ricaldone has

[28] 11 novices (mostly from Europe and a few Indians) make their first profession on 6 January 1941. After this profession Sonada practically ceases to be a novitiate house. In the year 1941 the Province has no novices at all. On 8 February 1942, four Indian aspirants (clerical novices, Ignatius Sungmur, Daniel Aegidius, Francis Cyril and lay brother Tarcis Sona) leave for Madras to make their Novitiate in Tirupattur, with Fr. E. Guttierez as Novice Master. On 21 November 1943 four aspirants (J. Felix, Maurice Nicholson, Peter Lourdes, and Roland O'Hara) receive the clerical habit, and three boys (Benedict Kiro, Thomas Dungdung, and Samuel Lakra) receive the medal of the lay brother. Next day the seven future novices leave for Madras and Tirupattur to start their novitiate with Fr. E. Guttierez as Novice Master. They make their first profession on 6 December 1944. In 1945 the Novitiate is in Dibrugarh with Fr. Guttierez as Novice Master. In 1946 the novitiate is shifted to Mawlai with Fr. Guttierez as novice master, and there it remains till 1956, when it is finally shifted to Sunnyside.

been unwell for a time, though he is better now. The Rector Major's desire is that the confreres concentrate all their efforts to keep up the works they already have, without launching into any new enterprise.

But the core of Fr. Uguet's letter, like the message received from the Rector Major, is dealing with the forthcoming double Centenary: "We are in the centenary of Don Bosco's Ordination," he writes, "You have received in due time the *Strenna* for 1941, and I hear with pleasure that it is already the object of conferences in our houses. As far as we can we should not fail to commemorate in a worthy manner this centenary in our houses. It will be very appropriate for every rector to arrange a little Congress in which the grandeur of the Catholic Priesthood is illustrated. I am sure that Don Bosco will make this a means to foster the growth of many and good vocations among our boys.[29] We are arranging for a course of retreats to take place in Mawlai from 28th May to 4th June, which all the rectors of Assam will attend, and which will be followed by the Rectors' Meetings... The Retreat will have a worthy conclusion with the homage of the Province to our Holy Founder: the Ordination of 14 new priests. May Don Bosco accomplish great things through the work of these new Levites!"[30]

Finally, Fr. Uguet asks prayers for "dear Fr. Scuderi. He has not wholly recovered yet. Please ask also the boys to pray for the same intention."[31]

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[29] In Sonada all the students of philosophy are asked to write an essay on Don Bosco as a Priest. The clerics take the recommendation of the Provincial very seriously and write very extensive essays based on Don Bosco's Biographical Memoirs and other Biographies of Don Bosco available to them.

[30] Among those ordained there are the names of some who eventually will have much to contribute in various ways to the development of the Calcutta Province, such as, Fr. Umberto Colzani, Fr. Pompilio Doro, Fr. Giulio Ferretti, Fr. Agostino Guarneri, and Fr. Aldo Decaroli. There are also two Indian confreres, Fr. Louis Kerketta and Fr. Elias Hopewell.

Fr. Elias Hopewell Kariong: born on 21.5.1908, makes the noviciate in 1931, and his first profession on 8.12.1932, is ordained a priest on 5.6.1941. He works in Sohra and Mawlai, spends most of his life in Bishops House, Shillong, where he dies on 28.10.1966, aged 58. He is a great Khasi writer, especially a great Khasi poet. The Khasi Translation of the New Testament is considered to be his masterpiece. He is noted specially for his spirit of poverty, his tender love for children, his love for flowers and his being a perfect model of the Salesian Assistant. Cfr. on 25th death Anniversary by Fr. Joseph Thellekkat, Provincial.

[31] For the Rector Major's message and Fr. Uguet's letter, Cfr. *Circular Letters,* B.5.

7. Provincial Catechism Competition

In his letter of 21st July 1941, Fr. Uguet presents the topics that will be treated at the Rectors' meeting: the organization of schools, a provincial catechism competition, and aspirants.

"To commemorate as worthily as possible the first centenary of our works and to comply with the orders of our superiors, it is decided that a Provincial Catechism Competition be held this year. One candidate from each Salesian school and each mission district will take part in the competition. The candidates must be selected exclusively from pupils – boarders or day scholars – of our schools. The subject matter for the competition – which is not to be a theological discussion, but simply a memory test – is the chapter on sacraments from the various catechism books in use in our houses.

The competition is held in Shillong on 7th December 1941. The Provincial level competition is preceded by competitions in each house and in each mission district. Prizes are given to the first three and to the winning house. Souvenirs are given to all boys taking part in the competition. It is also decided that a fund be raised for the purpose and that each house will contribute at least Rs. 5.00 towards the fund.[32]

Special instructions are issued in connection with the Catechism Competition. Fr. Igino Ricaldone heads the organizing committee. He keeps contact with the houses and gives all the required instructions. There are three Judges: Rev. Brother Principal of St. Edmund's College, Fr. Provincial, and Mr. Pierroz; and nine Examiners, one for each language: English (Mr. Chyne), Bengali (Bro. Cremin), Assamese (Fr. Paviotti), Hindi (Fr. Marengo), Khasi (Mr. German), Garo (Mr. Suresh), Nepali (Mr. Louis Bhandari), Burmese (Bro. Cavenagh).[33]

1942

8. The Italian and German Confreres of Assam are interned

On 11th February 1942 all the Italians in Assam who have been in India for less than 15 years (about 60 of them) are interned in the Sacred

[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.

Heart College compound in Mawlai, which is enclosed within barbed wires. The college is known as 'Temporary Internment Camp', with an officer in-charge and a few policemen. Fr. Vendrame is made rector of the Salesian community, now turned into a 'Concentration Camp' and renamed for fun as 'St. Peter in Chains'.

When the rapid Japanese advance threatens Assam, the government decides to send the Mawlai internees to Deoli (Rajashtan), escorted by Captain Parson and 50 Gurka soldiers. They leave Shillong on 10th August 1942. Before leaving they thank Mr. Dennehy, the Chief Secretary to the government of Assam, for his kindness towards them. Praising the internees, the Chief Secretary says that he did not consider them as Italians or Germans, but as Salesians who have come to do good. He adds that they leave behind a spotless reputation.

The journey is slow and at times fraught with dangers. It is the time of the 'Quit India Movement'. Captain Parson is not very kind towards the prisoners, but he possesses a great sense of duty, and with courage and alertness, he defends their life. "Through fire and through water", they reach Calcutta very late on the night of the 11th. Captain Parson listens to the advice of the fathers to take them to Don Bosco, Liluah. The rector, Fr. Buri,[34] an Argentinean, opens wide all the doors. They have supper, a bed, peace and a good rest. The following morning they are again on their feet marching towards the station to board the train bound for Patna. During the frequent and inevitable stops, due to the interrupted railway-track and flooded fields, they are not exempted from alert-signals and dangers. After four days of hunger and heat, the railway tracks are repaired and the train reaches Patna.

In Patna there is a flourishing diocese entrusted to the American Jesuits. It is not difficult for the bishop, Msgr. Sullivan, to take the prisoners to the spacious dormitories of the 'College'. The Salesians will be ever grateful to the bishop and the Jesuit fathers for their exquisite kindness, whose guests they remain for a full week. Eventually, travelling through Uttar Pradesh and Ajmer (Rajashtan) they reach Deoli, an internment camp in the desert.

[34] Fr. Lawrence Buri: born at Cordoba (Spain) on 3.7.1905, makes his profession on 27.1.1923, is ordained a priest on 10.8.1930, comes to India in 1938 (?), dies at Cordoba on 11.6.1961, aged 55.

9. Through Hardships and Setbacks Evangelization goes on

The departure of such a big group of missionaries, is no doubt, a big blow to the missionary activity of the Salesians in Assam, but evangelization does not come to a dead stop, it goes on, even though at a slower pace and with many set-backs.

A dozen mission centres are being managed with the bare minimum of confreres. Fr. Peter Tonello[35] and Bro. Paul Sebastian[36] staff the Mawlai parish founded in 1940. Fr. Neyens, a Belgian Salesian, opens the Golaghat Mission in 1941.[37] Fr. John Bennat works with him. In 1936 Fr. M. Devalle[38] opens the Barpetta

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[35] Fr. Peter Tonello: born at Fontanella (Treviso – Italy) on 30.10.1903, makes the first profession on 4.10.1921, comes to India in 1925, is a priest on 9.11.1929. He spends his long life as assistant parish priest or as parish priest in several missionary centres in the Khasi Hills. His longest stint of 19 years as asst. parish priest is at the Cathedral Parish, and of 21 years as parish priest is at Cherrapunjee. On 31.5.1986 he is at Sacred Heart College, Mawlai, where he spends the last 9 years of his life. He is a great missionary after the example of Fr. Vendrame. He dies in Gauhati on 20.1.1995, aged 92.

[36] Bro. Paul Sebastian: born on 29.6.1914, becomes a Salesian on 8.12.1934, dies at Sacred Heart College, Mawlai, on 7.5.2002. He is a pupil at Tardeo, Bombay, when the Salesians take over the school. He has worked in Shillong, Sonada, Krishnagar, Bandel, Liluah, Guwahati, Tezpur, and Tangla. For 25 years he works at St. Paul's Seminary, Shillong.

[37] Fr. Peter Jean Neyens starts the Golaghat Mission on 4.8.1941. By the close of 1941 Fr. Neyens establishes 95 flourishing communities totalling 6878 Catholics. After the War Fr. Neyens leaves for Australia on 30.4.1946. Fr. Fiorenzo Mellino succeeds him as parish priest on 1.4.1946. When the latter is transferred to Sonada on 13.2.1952, Fr. Bollini, the assistant parish priest succeeds him. 28.12.1950 is a red-letter day in the annals of the Golaghat Mission, as five Lotha Nagas from Lakhuti come to Golaghat marking the beginning of the Church in Nagaland. As Fr. Bollini cannot keep up with the touring, Fr. Larrea joins the community having been appointed to look after the Nagas. The boarding at Golaghat has 240 Adivasi boys and 93 Naga boys mainly from Lakhuti. The foundation stone for the new Church is laid on 14.6 1954. Msgr O. Marengo blesses it on 1. 10. 1956 in the presence of about 1100 faithful. Fr. Bollini leaves Golaghat after 23 years on 26.7.1969 and is succeeded by a number of other fathers, who in various ways contribute to the development of the parish. In 1998 the Golaghat Parish has 4.000 Catholics in 26 sub-stations. Cfr. Mattappally, ed. *A Chronicled History of the Houses of the Province of Dimapur,* 33-40.

[38] Fr. Michael De Valle is born a Clavesana (Cuneo-Italy) on 18.11.1908, comes to India in 1925, makes his profession on 6.1.1927, is ordained a priest on 7.7.1934, dies in Gauhati on 13.10.1988, aged 80. Fr. Devalle is a very zealous missionary and a very good teacher. He opens the Mission of Salana in Nawgong. In 1960 he is a professor and confessor at Sacred Heart College, Mawlai. For 23 years he works hard for the boys in St. Paul's Seminary, Shillong.

Mission,[39] where the Gauhati boarding school is transferred during the war. Fr. E. Zanon[40] succeeds Fr. Devalle. Fr. Costa[41] and Fr. Pianazzi take charge of Tura. Fr. Joseph Dal Broi and Fr. Guttierez are in Tezpur and Fr. A. Colussi and Fr. Cerato in Gauhati.[42]

Another setback suffered during the war is the requisitioning of most of the Catholic institutions and some mission centres by the government. In Don Bosco School, Shillong, 8 out of 16 confreres are interned. Para-military recruits occupy the mechanics workshop and their instruction is imposed on the Salesian personnel, causing great difficulties to the confreres. The confreres and pupils are forced to dig their own trenches where several times they are forced to run for cover.

The Don Bosco technical school cum boarding of Gauhati is opened in 1926. In the beginning there is only the carpentry department, to which the press is added in 1937. In 1942, when the Japanese invasion of Assam seems to be imminent, the civil authorities advise us to close the school and send the boys home. The small boys are sent home in May 1942, while about 30 artisans are kept to furnish the recently opened

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[39] The Barpetta Mission is opened in 1936. The pioneer missionaries who deserve special mention are Fr. Michael De Valle and Fr. Thomas Lopez. It serves as a launching pad for several other ventures. It is also a centre from where priests visit and establish other mission centres. Some of the new parishes carved out from this parish are Bengtal, Dotma, Doomni, Kumarikata, Barama, Baganpara, Gosaigaon, and Soraibil. With the arrival of Fr. Remus Morra, the mission will establish the well-known dairy farm. [Fr. Remo Morra is born at Scarnafigi (Cuneo-Italy) on 25.4.1918, comes to India in 1934, makes his profession on 19.3.1936, is ordained a priest on 11.10.1945. Most of his missionary activity is in Barpetta Road from 1953 till his death, as Rector, Headmaster, and in charge of the farm. He dies on 29.4.1985 aged 67.] An Assamese medium school is founded in 1943. In 1993 an English medium school will be started. Cfr. *History of Salesian Centres*, Vol. VIII, 26ff.

[40] Fr. Ernesto Zanon: born at Casarsa, (Udine – Italy) on 23.8.1905, comes to India in 1925, makes his first profession on 6.1.1927, is ordained a priest on 7.7.1934; works in Gauhati, Tura, Barpetta Road (for 20 years), is Rector of Don Bosco Gauhati, Don Bosco Dibrugarh; after the death of Fr. Ferrario he is the manager of the COP. From COP he goes to Delhi. His last assignment is as the parish priest of Liluah parish, dies of cancer on 25.4.1975, aged 69.

[41] Fr. Giulio Costa: born at Bologna (Italy) on 11.11.1901, comes to India in 1925, makes his profession on 6.1.1927, is ordained a priest on 26.4.1931, dies at Mendal, a victim to his opponents on 16.4.1970.

[42] To everybody's surprise the building of the Cathedral is continued through the war years. In May 1943 the cement casting of the central nave is done. (Paviotti, *The workof his hands*, 93)

military hospital with camp beds and other needed furniture. At the end of June, the military authorities requisition all the premises, including the carpentry workshop, leaving only a little space for the two priests in charge of the parish. In August of the same year, Fr. Provincial provisionally shifts his office from Liluah to Gauhati.[43] St. Edmund's and Loreto Convent become military hospitals.[44] St. Antony's College, the missions of Dibrugarh and Tezpur and the *Theologate* of Mawlai are also requisitioned with a small apartment usually spared for the parish personnel.

In the wake of the Japanese advance into Burma, refugees pour into Assam leaving a trail of disease and death along the way. The survivors reach Dibrugarh in a pitiable condition. The Catholic Mission and the Sisters of Charity offer them hospitality and assistance. The Sacred Heart Church built by Fr. Piasecki is made to serve as a refugee camp for the Burmese.[45] In Gauhati the Cotton College Hostels house some 2000 civilian and military patients. There too the FMA Sisters tend the sick, to the limit of their endurance, and with danger to themselves from contagious diseases. There is an awful shortage of medicines. Foreign sisters are not interned but are subjected to restrictions like the priests who are not taken to the camp. Often they are made to remain within the town boundaries where they live.

Fr. Colussi and Fr. Cerato, both being Italians, have their activity very much restricted. They cannot go out of the city without a special permission, which is always denied on principle. Not being able to do any pastoral work in the District, their activity is all directed to the care of the refugees from Burma, of soldiers of all races and colour, and of workers from all parts of India. The main premises of the Mission are put at the disposal of the refugees for over two months. Besides spiritual assistance, the refugees are given food, health care, and even financial assistance as much as possible.[46]

[43] Cfr. *Provincial Archives,* B.12.

[44] In 1943, Loreto Convent catches fire. Only the patients can be saved. Also the Queen of the Missions Sisters' Convent in Raliang is burned down. Cfr. Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands,* 93.

[45] Cfr. Mattappally, ed. *A Chronicled History of the Houses of the Province of Dimapur,* 17.

[46] Cfr. *Provincial Archives* B.12.

Hardships are caused not only by shortage of personnel, but also by price rise, disappearance of essential commodities from the markets, the attraction for the catechists of a better pay in government military service, the lack of funds to meet mission expenses, etc.

The arrival of the American GIs in Assam is a blessing. They are bountiful. The chaplains and the soldiers are generous in their offerings. They contribute foodstuffs and clothing. In Dibrugarh, they furnish and finance the newly started novitiate.[47]

10. The Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians: 24th October 1942

By far the most important and Spirit-inspired event during the war is the founding of the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians. Bishop Ferrando, who has been, for quite some time, cherishing the idea of founding a native Congregation of women consecrated to the work of evangelization, now more than ever perceives the urgent need of sisters who can devote themselves to evangelizing and instructing the people in the villages, especially women and children.

In the convent of St. Mary's Gauhati, a group of girls intensely desire to become Salesian Sisters. The Superior, Sr. Severina Schiapparelli, in whom they confide, is not convinced that the girls have a genuine desire and a mature faith. Moreover, they lack sufficient education and qualification to begin the training for religious life. The girls do not give up hope. They wait and pray for God's intervention on their behalf.

At the end of the school year they refuse to go back home. Their assistant, being at a loss as to what to do, reports the matter to Fr. Attilio Colussi, the parish priest. For Fr. Colussi this is very welcome news, as he knows already Bishop Ferrando's mind in this regard. During one of the visits of Bishop Ferrando to Gauhati, he briefs him on the request of the girls. Bishop Ferrando considers the matter favourably and after much prayer, consultation, and thought, decides to start working on the project. The *aspirantate* begins at St. Mary's Convent under the care of

[47] Cfr. Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands*, 93–94.

the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Fr. Attilio Colussi is their spiritual director.

The official establishment of the new Congregation takes place on 24th October when 8 novices begin their novitiate with Sr. Severina Schiapparelli as novice mistress and Sr. Luigina Saletta as her assistant. The new Congregation receives the name of 'The Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians'. "The Congregation is dedicated, first and foremost, to the Missionary Apostolate. Therefore, the evangelization and catechetical instruction, especially of womenfolk and children in the villages of the dioceses in which they work, shall always have pride of place among the apostolic and charitable undertakings of the Missionary Sisters."[48]

"Other works to which the sisters shall devote themselves for the glory of God and the good of souls are: elementary and secondary schools for boarders and day pupils; festive and daily oratories; orphanages; homes for infants, widows and the aged; charitable dispensaries; any other work that has for its aim the spread of our holy religion and the salvation of souls."[49]

Over the years, they live up to the expectations of their Founder, and of the bishops of the dioceses where they serve. Their growth is considerable. Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil SDB, writes: "The Congregation has played a major role in the amazing growth of the Catholic community and Catholic Faith in Northeast India and has spread its wings to the rest of the country and the World."[50]

Fr. Noel Kenny serves as the spiritual father of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians for 30 years. "There is nothing he will not do for them," writes Fr. S. Mavely in the obituary letter, "Their well being and their spiritual care are uppermost in his mind and heart... He undertakes the arduous task of updating their Constitutions in the light of Vatican II, writes 'the Way of Perfection', a commentary on the renewed Constitutions, and moulds and nurtures the spiritual profile of the

[48] Constitutions of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians, Art. 4.
[49] Ibid. Art., 5.
[50] Cfr. Jane Mary Tadhathil, *A great Missionary Legacy* (Shillong: Centre for Indigenous Peoples & Missionary Sisters Publications 1997), 28ff. Cfr. also Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands*, 94–95.

Congregation and its members. His unconditional love for them and his generous services for their welfare make him an inseparable part of the story and life of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians."[51]

In 1945 the Institute becomes one of Diocesan Right and on 21st March 1977 with the *Decretum Laudis* (The Decree of Praise) of Pontifical Right. The renewed Constitutions are approved by Rome on 1st November 1990. Fr. E. Viganò, Rector Major of the Salesian Society of St. Francis of Sales, accepts the Institute of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians into the Salesian Family on 8th July 1986.[52]

On 31st 12. 2002 there are 810 professed members and 119 novices, working in 140 centres, of which 132 are spread over 35 dioceses in India, 6 centres are in 3 dioceses in Italy, 1 in South Africa, and 1 in Germany. The Fourth General Chapter held in 1988, sets up three Provinces: Shillong, Tezpur, and Tinsukia. On 15th December 1996, a Region is erected comprising the centres in West Bengal, Bihar, Andra Pradesh and Kerala. On 9th December 2003 three more Provinces come into existence with the division of Shillong Province and the division of the Region into two

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[51] Cfr. Obituary Letter of Fr. Noel Kenny written by Fr. Stephen Mavely, Rector of St. Antony's College, Shillong. Fr. Noel Kenny is born on 14.9.1910 at Rangoon. He has his early education with the De La Salle Brothers. After matriculation, he finds employment with the Great Eastern Cable Company, first at Rangoon and later at Bombay. An avid sportsman, he distinguishes himself in the fields of sports and games, especially tennis and billiards. In Bombay he comes into contact with his life-long friend and mentor, Fr. Douglas Wollaston, who, changing his mind about becoming a De La Salle Brother, encourages him to become a Salesian of Don Bosco. On 26.12.1932 he resigns his post and joins the Salesian *Aspirantate* at Tardeo. He makes his novitiate at Our Lady's House, Shillong, and professes as a Salesian on 8.12.1935. He makes his perpetual profession on 8.12.1938. He is a member of the pioneering community under Fr. A. Colussi to start the Don Bosco School at Liluah. On 23.5.1943, Bishop S. Ferrando ordains him a priest. Till 1952 he is a member of the community of Don Bosco Technical School. In August 1948, Fr. Kenny takes charge of the College Hostel, a responsibility he discharges for 16 years. In 1958, he takes over as Headmaster of the School for two years. In 1960, he resumes his work at the College as vice-principal and there he remains till the end. He is Rector of the College community from 1982 till 1989. His work for the Sisters must also be mentioned. From 1958 to 1964 he devotes his services and care to the Salesian Sisters, and from 1965 till his death he is at the total spiritual service of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians. He breathes his last on 8.11.1995. Fr. Kenny is laid to rest at the Salesian Cemetery at an impressive funeral attended by several Bishops, hundreds of priests and nuns, and thousands of people from all walks of life.

[52] Cfr. *Acts of the General Council*, 319, 51.

independent Provinces: Myndihati (Jaintia), Bangalore, and Kolkata. 150 aspirants and 65 postulants are getting ready to enter the Institute.[53]

11. Sonada: The Italian and German Confreres are interned

We have seen how the Italian and German confreres of Assam with less than 15 years in India are interned in the theological college at Mawlai in February 1942. There is no immediate change, instead, in the condition of the Italian and German confreres who are confined to Salesian College, Sonada. Mr. Viyera of the Intelligence branch informs Fr. Marengo that the restricted confreres would be left in the same condition as they are now. Bro. Michael Cahoj is allowed to move freely as his name is not in the list of those confined. Fr. Rector is allowed to move freely within the District.

But a sense of uncertainty prevails till November 1942. Already on 21st February unofficial information warns that the Italian confreres would most probably be interned. Two days later the SP confirms the news, but it is not certain. On 18th April the four confreres who are in the Parole Camp at Catapahar – Fr. Barattoni, Bros. Giacomin, Bertolino, and Bongiorno – are taken to the Internment Camp at Dehra Dun.

On 22nd October 1942 the confreres of Krishnagar are informed that they will be removed to the Internment Camp. Through other sources it is learned that the confreres of Tirupattur too are going to be interned. But nothing is certain about the confreres in Sonada. On the contrary, two days later, Mr. Viyera again informs Fr. Marengo,"there is absolutely nothing to worry about."

The worst fear, though not totally unexpected, comes true on 28th November. Mr. Viyera himself informs "all the Italians, with the exception of Fr. Marengo, will have to leave for the Civil Internment Camp of Deoli on 2nd December". On that very morning the students finish their philosophy examinations and, together with this news, they are told that all other examinations are cancelled.

On 30th October Fr. rector and Bro. Michael go to meet the SP to plead with him to exclude Fr. Dal Zovo from the list of the internees, as he

[53] Rosita Joseph, 'Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians: Origins and Orientations', in Paul Vadamkupadam and Jose Varicasseril, ed. *Apostle of Christ*, Vendrame Institute Publications, Sacred Heart Theological College, Shillong, 2003, 43–56.

is badly needed in the College. Fr. Uguet too reaches from Calcutta with the same intention, but he is told that there is not much the SP can do, as it is too late. Fr. Uguet then phones Fr. Piasecki to intercede with the Chief Secretary to the government. However, there is no news about Fr. Dal Zovo's case.

The day of their departure arrives and a pall of gloom descends on Salesian College. Fr. Provincial presides over the community Mass. After an early breakfast, the departing students finish packing, and at 9.00 o'clock all gather in the Chapel to pray for a safe journey. At 10.00 a.m. the train stops at the College. The hour of separation arrives. Mr. Viyera himself together with 10 Gurka soldiers will accompany the prisoners to Deoli. They will go via Katihar. Mr. Viyera, a good Catholic friend of Fr. Marengo, treats the confreres with kindness all along the journey, although not always very successfully due to the anti-British feeling among the people, and gives them all possible facilities when they pass through Kanpur and Delhi.

The group consists of 2 priests: Fr. Marocchino[54] and Fr. Dal Zovo; 1 lay brother, Bro.Medaglia; 3 assistants, Bros. D.Composta, C. Mastruzzo, and J. Moya; and 18 student clerics. With their departure Salesian College ceases to be a *studentate* of philosophy till March 1946.[55]

The Sonada group reaches Deoli just before the feast of the Immaculate Conception. One or two days later, the confreres from Tirupattur arrive. The Krishnagar group too is expected soon, but that never happens, due to Bishop Morrow's timely and energetic intervention on their behalf. He sends a telegram to the Governor of Bengal and to the

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[54] Fr. Albert Marocchino is born in 1912, comes to India in 1924, is a novice in 1925, makes his profession in 1926, is ordained a priest on 29.4.1933, dies at Manila (Philippines) on 17.10.1991, aged 79. He is a zealous missionary in Bengal, Saharampur, and Nagaland.

[55] It is in March 1946 that the arrival of six students of philosophy makes the *studentate* come back to life again. Three of them (clerics Peter Vincent Lourdes, Joseph Felix, and Roland O'Hara) have made the novitiate in Tirupattur (1943-44) and also the first year of philosophy in 1945. Three more have just finished their novitiate in Dibrugarh (clerics Francis Tim Maung, Dominic War, and Thomas D'Souza) and now come to Sonada to start their philosophy course. Writing to Fr. Berruti from Sonada on 4.1.1947, Fr. Bacchiarello writes: "We are now on holidays, except the clerics (3 practical trainees and 6 students of philosophy, who are studying for Matriculation or for I.A. Examinations)." Cfr. *Archivio Generale*, 180; Also *Provincial Archives*, A.2.1 and 2.

Viceroy in Delhi. He sends also a cable to Her Majesty, the Queen, at Buckingham Palace. On the day of their departure for the Internment Camp he gets a 48-hour reprieve. Then a letter from the Home Minister of the government of India arrives telling him that because of his 'splendid work' the British decide to let him keep the Italians at Krishnagar.[56] Only Fr. Varga [57] is taken from Bhoborpara through the Jessore Road without the bishop's knowledge. When the bishop comes to know about it, it is too late, as Fr. Varga is already out of the diocese.

In Deoli, the newcomers from Sonada and Tirupattur find the confreres from Shillong, and also other priests and Religious: Capuchin fathers with their old Bishop Msgr. Poli, Dominicans with their young Bishop Cialeo of Multan, Jesuits, PIME fathers, OCD fathers, and others. The contingent from Shillong, having their theology professors with them, resumes classes on settling down in the camp. The priests busy themselves in revising their theology, studying languages, and attending conferences followed by discussions by various professors and missionaries among the interned religious. The topics of such conferences are mainly on pastoral and missionary methods. The discussions that follow the talks and the sharing of views and experiences are very formative, especially for the young students of theology.

Among the clerics coming from Sonada and Tirupattur, some are students of theology and they continue their various courses of theology, others have finished the study of philosophy (in Sonada or Tirupattur) and begin their theology, a third group of students who have not completed their philosophy are made to complete it.

Life in the camp is well regulated with time for practices of piety, classes, study, games, feasts, and even outings.[58] The feast of Don Bosco on 31st January is solemnized in a fitting manner. A Dominican Father preaches a splendid panegyric on Don Bosco. There is also the ordination of nine Salesian deacons on 30th January 1943. Among those ordained are Fr. Cogliandro, Fr. Albera, Fr. Bollini, Fr. Dossi, and Fr. Battaglia.

[56] Cfr. page 32 of "The Texas Bishop of Krishnagar", in *Memoirs of Father Bishop*, 28 (Unpublished).

[57] Fr. Bartholomew Varga: born on 6.5.1906 in Hungary, is a Salesian on 23.10.1925, a priest on 24.4.1934, comes to India in 1936, works in Gauhati (Confessor), Bhoborpara, Barpetta Road, North Lakhimpur, Don Bosco Krishnagar, confessor in Ranaghat, Bandel, Sonada, Auxilium Parish, Hatia (Ranchi), where he dies on 11.6.1988, aged 82.

[58] Every week the Internees are allowed, subject to some restrictions, two outings: one, full-day 9.00 am to 5.00 pm; the other, half-day 2.00 pm to 5.00 pm.

1943–1946

12. Sonada

With the departure of the Italian confreres Fr. Marengo is the only priest left in Sonada. Brother Sheehy is once again made assistant to the aspirants. On 7th December brother Denault begins his novitiate with Fr. rector as novice master, but owing to the present conditions he has to continue his work as a teacher and assistant to the aspirants. On 14th December 1942, Fr. Bayart, S. J. comes from St. Mary's Kurseong. He will come once a week on Saturdays to hear the confessions of the confreres and of the boys.

On 1st January 1943 Fr. Tobas and Fr. Goffe from Cuttack diocese arrive in Sonada. Fr. Tobas leaves after a few days, while Fr. Goffe remains in Sonada as Confessor while his services are required. His bishop spares him for our Province till the war ends. He is happy with his new assignment and so too are the Salesians and are thankful to God for his generous help. He remains in Sonada till 1st December, edifying everyone with his spirit of poverty, deep piety, and availability to teach the boys.

On 2nd September 1944 Fr. Paul Burnick[59] arrives from Tirupattur to help in various ways, especially to teach the boys. He is also made catechist of the house. He remains in Sonada for two years, until the Italian confreres of the North, who after being released from the concentration camp and helping in Tirupattur, are able to reach the various formation houses.

The life of the aspirants goes on as before with studies, classes, exams, feasts, visitors both Salesians and non-Salesians, and arrival and departure of aspirants.

[59] Fr. Paul Burnick: born in Pustal in present Slovenia on 11.1.1917, makes his first profession on 11.7.1934, comes to India in 1934, is ordained a priest at Tirupattur on 30.1.1944, dies at Dimapur on 17.7.2000. From 1934 to 1963 he serves in various capacities in the Salesian houses of South India, with a break of 2 years in Salesian College Sonada. From 1963 till the end of his life he works in Northeast India, in Kohima, in Manipur, and in Meghalaya (Savio Juniorate, Sacred Heart, and Sunnyside). His last transfer in 1985 is to Salesian College, Dimapur, where he dies. Of him it is said, "Here is a true Israelite in whom there is no guile": a gentleman, a lovable person, never giving in to idleness in any way, possessing a deep sense of humour, obedient, a patient sufferer, a zealous missionary, a great devotee of Mary. Cfr. Obituary letter.

On 30th April 1943 a terrible gale blowing from midnight to 3.00 a.m. plays havoc with some of the buildings. The roof of the boys' dormitory lands on the road below the house, but by the grace of God, no one is injured. But the damage caused is considerable, owing to the exorbitant price of building material.

On 26th July 1943 Fr. Piasecki comes to Sonada for an important business. The superiors decide to build a church (80'x34') dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in the garden to the left of the Villa, facing the road.[60] When the church is completed, they plan to continue with the new College, a two-story building by the side of the Villa. As far as possible, the material from the old building will be used for the church. Excavations for the church building start on 17th August 1943. Notwithstanding the many hurdles on the way, mainly due to the difficulty of getting the required building material in time, Archbishop Perier blesses it on 18th November 1945. Bro Ferraris does all the woodwork, the main altar especially being his real masterpiece.[61]

In March 1946 the *studentate* of philosophy reopens with the coming of six students, three each from Tirupattur and from Dibrugarh after their novitiate. The three coming from Tirupattur have also completed the first year of philosophy in Tirupattur in 1945.

In 1946 several Italian confreres, either from Tirupattur or directly from the Internment Camp, come to join the staff of Sonada. Three clerics come to do their practical training, Bros. A.Duca, H.Fantin, and R. Stroscio. Fr. J. Bacchiarello comes directly from Dehra Dun on 7th April 1946, so too Fr. M. Devalle, who arrives on 23rd May. Fr. W. Balocco comes as the new Prefect of the house on 10th December.

On 25th December 1946, confreres and boys give a touching farewell to Fr. Marengo who has been rector for the past seven years,

[60] This Church is built with the money sent by the Italian Prisoners of war in Ranchi and with the materials of a dismantled go-down near the road.

[61] Bro. Ferraris arrives unexpectedly from Calcutta on 12 June 1944. He remains in Sonada while arrangements are made to have him admitted to some sanatorium as he is found to be affected by T.B. Eventually he does not enter any sanatorium, but improves very visibly till he is declared totally cured. During this time he makes himself busy by making all the required woodwork for the new Church, such as the main Altar, the side Altars, the pews, the doors, the confessional box, and anything else required. He also helps in the physical education of the aspirants as a very efficient drillmaster.

during the difficult years of the war. Next day, on 26th December, together with Fr. Marengo and Fr. Provincial, 10 aspirants leave for Mawlai to enter the novitiate. Fr. Joseph Bacchiarello is appointed as the new rector of Sonada on 4th February 1947.

13. Hundred and Forty Salesians in the Dehra Dun Internment Camp

The Deoli experience does not last long for the interned Salesians. By the middle of March all the interned priests and religious are moved to the Internment Camp at Dehra Dun. It is a much bigger Camp than that of Deoli, situated a few kms away from the City of Dehra Dun in a locality called Premnagar, and it is meant for Civilian prisoners: Germans, Italians and other nationalities who are allies or sympathizers with the Germans. It consists of several wings, separated from each other by a corridor and barbed wire.[62]

The Deoli internees are taken to the Italian Wing III, which, with their arrival, encloses nearly 600 internees, about 300 civilians and as many priests and religious. The Salesians alone make up nearly half of the priests and religious. In a letter to the Rector Major on 29th June 1943, Fr. Bacchiarello writes of a community of 140.

Great is the joy of the Salesians of the Northern Province when they see once again their Provincial, Fr. Scuderi, and the other 20 confreres with him. Most of them are those who are interned on 10th or 11th June 1940, when Italy enters the War. In April 1942 are added to their number the four confreres from Burma, who were interned in the parole Camp of Catapahar (Darjeeling).

Their joy, however, is short lived. After a few days of their arrival, Fr. Scuderi is ordered to leave the Camp and is taken to a parole Camp for families at Purandarh (near Bombay). It is a trick planned by the British Authorities to break the morale of Wing III prisoners, and to break him too.

Fr. Scuderi is the Chaplain of the Camp, and with his winning personality, enthusiasm, and various activities promoted by him for the

[62] At one end of the Camp there is also the Generals' Wing, where Italian Generals and high-ranking Officers taken prisoners in Africa are interned.

welfare of the internees, he keeps all united, something which the Camp Authorities, bent on sowing division and dissatisfaction among the prisoners, cannot stomach.

On their arrival in Dehra Dun, several confreres ask those who are interned from the very beginning how true are all the rumors and adverse criticism against Fr. Scuderi and the other confreres with him, which have been spread among the confreres outside the camp, and they find to their own satisfaction that nothing is true.

Before leaving the Camp, Fr. Scuderi delegates Fr. Bacchiarello to take his place as Acting Provincial. But this arrangement too is only for a short time. Soon news comes that Fr. Cinato, the Provincial of the Southern Province, is made Provincial of all the Italian confreres in the Camp. He forms his Council, and the confreres are divided into two communities, the community of the priests and lay brothers with Fr. Bacchiarello as rector, and the community of the clerical students (philosophy and theology) with Fr. Peter Meliga as their rector. Both rectors have their Council and Fr. Mario Ferrario is the Provincial Economer and the Economer for both communities.

In the Camp, the Salesians, both the small group which is interned in 1940, and now the big group that comes from Deoli, do not lose time bewailing their lot. They soon organize themselves and keep busy in various ways. The priests deepen their knowledge of theology, prepare sets of sermons for retreats, study languages, some become chaplains of the civilians, others become teachers, interpreters, infirmarians. The clerics continue their philosophy or theology courses they have started in Deoli or in Dehra Dun before the arrival of the Deoli group.

The life of piety is regular, and feasts are well solemnized.[63] Well prepared entertainments, so much appreciated by fellow prisoners, indoor and outdoor games, such as football and hockey, and outings subject to certain restrictions, make the camp life bearable.

The presence of the Provincial and of Bishop Cialeo in the Camp makes easy the regular conferring of Holy Orders. Already in Deoli a group of 9 deacons are ordained priests in January 1943. Several others are ordained in the course of 1943 and 1944, the last group of 6 Deacons

[63] Fr. Vendrame, chaplain of the Camp after Fr. Scuderi's departure, writes to the Rector Major, "The Feast of the Immaculate was a real triumph".

being ordained by the Archbishop of Agra, Msgr. E. Vanni, on 20th September 1945. Altogether about 30 priests are ordained in the Internment Camp.

At different times, Msgr. Mathias, Msgr. Morrow, and the Delegate Apostolic are allowed to visit the prisoners. Fr. Careño and Fr. Maschio come to visit the confreres, but they cannot enter the Camp, the confreres are allowed to go and meet them outside. Cleric G. Comandù, a student of theology, in a letter of 20th April 1944 to the Rector Major writes about the visit of Msgr. Morrow in November 1943. He comes in the name of the Delegate Apostolic. Three times he is allowed to be with the Salesians for lunch and he can freely enter the Camp, something that nobody else has been allowed to do so far. Fr. Cinato too writes about the visit of Bishop Morrow. The Delegate Apostolic is allowed to visit and meet the confreres in October 1944.

The years 1944 and 1945 see the release of several groups of confreres who are allowed to go back to the Salesian community, 25 in April, 31 by the end of August, and a third group on 22nd January 1945. Fr. Cinato is among those of this last group. The confreres of the North, however, are not allowed to go back to Assam or Bengal, but are temporarily sent to Tirupattur. Only before the end of 1945 are they allowed to go back to the North.

In May 1946 there are still 52 confreres left in Dehra Dun. Fr. Bacchiarello is released at the beginning of April 1946 and Fr. M. Devalle in May 1946 and they reach Sonada. In his letter of 6th September 1946, to Fr. Berruti, Fr. Bacchiarello writes from Sonada of having received the list of the released confreres from the Dehra Dun Concentration Camp. Five confreres of the North: Frs. Ravalico, Moja, Berti, Zola and Giacomin, and two from the South, Frs. Mora and Colombo, accept the alternative to go to Goa and join Fr. Scuderi sometime in September 1946, instead of going back to Italy. When the British made it clear that Fr. Scuderi would have to be repatriated, Fr. Scuderi opts for the Portuguese territory of Goa.[64] There, with the help of these enthusiastic young priests, he establishes a flourishing Salesian presence.

[64] When Mr. Shiv Shankar, Under Secretary to the Home Ministry in Delhi visits the 'Parole Camp' at Purandarh in March 1945, Fr. Scuderi asks him insistently to be allowed to go to Goa. "What about the visa?" asks Mr. Shankar. "Then allow me to go to Bombay to try," answers Fr. Scuderi. "I give you 8 days for Bombay." He obtains the visa and on 2nd April 1945, he leaves for Goa. Cfr. Alessi, *Missionario di Fuoco*, 138.

Three confreres from Burma, Fr. Barattoni[65] and Brothers Bertolino and Bongiorno, wait for a definitive solution in their regard. Eventually it is a positive one and they are allowed to go back to Burma. Finally Fr. Giacomin too is allowed to go back to Burma.

Twelve confreres leave for Italy in September. Some are repatriated; others go back to Italy of their own accord.

The last 11 confreres, led by Fr. Joseph Marchesi, the Prefect of Studies and the only Council member left in the Camp, leave the Internment Camp on 18th October 1946. The group consists of Fr. J. Marchesi, Fr. W. Balocco, Fr. Bili, Fr. A. Doro, Fr. C. Spitale, Fr. Stadler, Fr. Varga; two brothers, Bro. Conti and Bro. Medaglia; and two clerics, Bro. Frassi and Bro. Lo Groi. They go by train to Calcutta and from there to Assam, reaching Shillong on 22nd October 1946.

We have narrated the regular life and the apparently peaceful and even joyful life of the confreres in the camp. However, below the external manifestation of joy there is also much interior suffering and tension. Fr. Balocco writing to the Rector Major on 2nd December 1945 writes:" Our religious life is now under the Salesian fatherly care of our dear Fr. Bacchiarello. Notwithstanding the difficulties and psychological tension, for a few months we are enjoying peace and family spirit. The psychological tension is due to doubts and anxiety with regard to our future." Fr. Ravalico writes to the Rector Major on 1st April 1946, of his own doubts and anxiety in finding himself still in the Internment Camp after 71 months, together with about 40 Italian missionaries of other Orders and Congregations and a few Civilians.[66]

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[65] Fr. Leone Barattoni: born at Vicenza (Italy) on 21.12.1911, is ordained a priest on 1.9.1937, makes his profession on 8.9.1939, comes to India in November 1939, goes to Burma in February 1940, is interned in the years 1942–1946, he is expelled from Burma on 4.8.1966, and dies in Turin on 31.7.1976, aged 65.

[66] Some time in 1943 the Camp Authorities open a new smaller Wing (Wing No. 5) for abo t 150 priests and religious. All the priests and religious, except the Salesians and four Carmelite fathers who opt to be with the Salesians, are shifted to the new Wing. By the end of 1944 two/thirds Salesians are released and with them also a good number of the fathers of Wing 5. Before the end of 1945 the few left in Wings 5 are brought back to Wing 3. A good number of civilians who declare themselves Fascists after Italy withdraws from the war on 8 September 1943, are removed to another Concentration Camp and only a few remain in Wing 3. By September 1946 only few Salesians remain in a Camp meant for 600 prisoners.

"However, beloved Father," Fr. Ravalico writes in his letter, "don't think that your children are demoralized or that they spend the day bewailing their lot. Not at all! In spite of everything, we rejoice, we sing and keep cheerful and try to make others cheerful."

There are many reasons to be demoralized, especially for those who are interned from 11th June 1940 and kept in the camp till the very end of the war (August 1945) and beyond, such as Fr. Marchesi, Fr. Balocco, Fr. Bili, and Bro. Conti. One reason is the trying living conditions, such as food and lodging. The food that is quite good at the beginning, though not at all sufficient for young students, turns out to be poor in the last two years. The military barracks are with thatched roof and due to two heavy monsoons are now leaking badly and the thatch is rotten. Other reasons could be the awful censoring of letters, the many negative rumours concerning the confreres in the camp that are making the rounds among the confreres outside the Camp, the uncertainty about their future, some tension among the Salesians themselves, especially in 1943 and 1944. All these difficulties cause great interior suffering. Fr. Bacchiarello's letter to the Rector Major on 24th April 1944 is quite explicit: "In general, and in particular the internment experience, has been very advantageous to all both spiritually and intellectually. It has also given the opportunity to know all the confreres of the North and of the South. It was a good opportunity, but we hope it will never repeat itself again." The last phrase is quite revealing, if we place it alongside what Fr. Bacchiarello himself writes to the Rector Major in his letter of 29th June 1943, "the sufferings 'for peace in the house' are neither few nor light."[67]

14. Krishnagar

Bishop L. R. Morrow takes possession of his diocese on 27th October 1940. When he enters the diocese, after one year of fundraising in U.S.A. for "the poorest of the poorest dioceses in India," he puts the collected money to good use in buying land to build schools, houses, dispensaries. From the very beginning he has to face the most difficult years of World War II (1939–1945). Italy's entry into it brings in numerous difficulties owing to the fact that the clergy is mostly made up of Italians. No new missionaries can come out of Italy during the war years. Those already in the diocese are allowed to continue their work till the end of 1942. But

[67] All letters written by confreres to the superiors in Italy can be found in *Archivio Generale*, F. 180.

also for them, as for those in Assam, in Sonada, and in Tirupattur, the order of internment in Dehra Dun arrives and December 6 is set for their departure. But God in His mercy does not abandon His children in that hour. Bishop Morrow asserting his rights as an American citizen succeeds in preventing the internment of practically every Salesian priest or brother under his jurisdiction, except Fr. Varga. And what is more, by the bishop's initiative and the zeal of his missionaries the diocese actually makes progress even during the war years.

In 1943 Bengal experiences the most disastrous famine in its history. It is reckoned that not less than 3 million people die of hunger or are victims of various diseases due to malnutrition. An emergency committee is formed of Hindus, Muslims, and Christians. By common accord Msgr. Morrow is made its chairman.[68]

There are three military camps in the diocese: the British at Jessore, the Australians at Dublin, and the Americans at Ranaghat. The fathers of the diocese minister to the Catholics in these areas.

Schools and orphanages receive special attention of the bishop from the very beginning. The promotion of literacy in the



Rt. Rev. Bishop
LOUIS LARAVOIRE MORROW, SDB
Bishop of Krishnagar (1939–1969)

Bishop Louis La Ravoire Morrow is born in Texas on 24th December 1892, of a Catholic French father and an Irish American Episcopalian mother. As a young man he lives in Mexico, where he is subjected to some of the religious persecution then

[68] Cfr. Alessi, *Pionieri nel Cuore dell'India*, 58f. Also in later years Bishop Morrow will serve the City of Krishnagar in an official capacity. In 1952 he is elected Commissioner of the Municipal Board, and re-elected in 1955, 1959 and 1962. Due to the demands on his time for the work of Vatican Council II he begs to be excused from standing for re-election in 1965. He is also appointed official visitor to Nadia District Jail and to the Government Hospital. From 1960 to 1969 Bishop Morrow is consultant of the Indian Red Cross Society of West Bengal. From 1969 to 1976 he is convener of the Assessment Committee of the Catholic Bishop Conference of India (CBCI).

whole region is his first concern. It is reckoned that at his arrival in the diocese the Catholics who can read and write are not more than 5%. When he leaves the administration of the diocese in 1969, the illiterate are less than 40%. He opens schools everywhere within his diocese.

St. Joseph's school at Khulna, which opens first in a stable in 1940 under Fr. Bianchi and Fr. Paoletto,[69] rapidly grows into a highschools by 1943. Later, under Fr. Douglas Wollaston who is in charge from 1943 to 1951, the school ranks among the foremost in the whole of East Bengal. In 1943 a school is started at Ranabondo, and schools are opened also in several other places.

At Krishnagar, the Don Bosco Technical School is enlarged to accommodate a bigger number of boys and comes to be known as "Senior Don Bosco". It undertakes the training of military recruits for the war. Industrial exhibitions are organized during the war with material prepared by the technical department of the school, as well as by the Holy Family Convent at Krishnagar.

taking place in that Country. To avoid further harassment, for the sake of his work he adds to his name his mother's maiden name 'Morrow' with the intention of emphasizing his American citizenship.

He joins the Salesian Congregation in 1908 and is ordained a priest in Mexico on 21st May 1921. The following year he goes to Manila as Secretary to Archbishop Piani, the Apostolic Delegate of the Philippines. For 17 years he serves the Church in those islands with all his talents and energy. He founds the Catholic Truth Society of Manila, and writes a number of catechetical illustrated textbooks, which are well known throughout the English-speaking Catholic World. Among them, 'My Catholic Faith', later re-named 'Our Catholic Faith', 'My Jesus and I', 'My Baptism', 'My first Communion', 'My Bible History', 'My Wedding Day', and others, all published by 'My Mission House', in the United States.

On 25th May 1939 he is nominated bishop of Krishnagar. On his way to Rome for his consecration, the bishop-elect pays a flying visit to Krishnagar and is appalled by the extreme poverty of the diocese, and the first thing he does after his consecration is to go home to the United States, on a begging mission for his diocese before returning to Krishnagar.

He is consecrated by Pope Pius XII on 29th October 1939, feast of Christ the King. On presenting him the 'Pectoral Cross', the Pope tells him, "This cross is the least heavy. I am sending you to an extremely poor place, be a Father to all." And this is the resolve of Bishop Morrow, to be a true Father, especially to the poor and the needy.

When he enters his diocese on 25th October 1940, after one year of begging for "the poorest among the poorest dioceses in India," he puts the collected money to good use in buying land to build schools, houses, dispensaries. He has to face the most

[69] Fr. Egidio Paoletto: born at Verona (Italy) on 11.7.1907, comes to India in 1927, makes his profession on 6.1.1929, is ordained a priest on 27.6.1937, dies in Turin on 8.10.1975, aged 64.

In 1942 in Krishnagar, the centre of the diocese, the bishop opens a primary school, which in 1949 becomes a high school. The 'Junior Don Bosco School' for boys and the 'Junior Holy Family School' for girls are inaugurated in 1944. And in the same year, a similar work for 80 boys and 120 girls is started at Shimulia.

The building of new chapels is undertaken, besides the repairing of old ones in various places in the diocese. At Krishnagar a separate residence is provided for the bishop, and four electric pumps are provided for water supply in the mission residences.

difficult years of World War II (1939–1945), especially the threat of his missionaries (mostly Italians) being taken to the Concentration Camp of Dehra Dun, and the great Bengal famine of 1943.

In 1952, he is elected Commissioner of the Municipal Board, and is re-elected several times, until his attendance at the Vatican Council II makes him cease to accept further elections. During the 30 years of his episcopate, the diocese makes great strides in the pastoral, cultural, and social sectors.

On 15th November 1969 he is informed that the Holy See has accepted his resignation, thereupon he withdraws into the Mother House of the Sisters of Mary Immaculate, to spend his last years of life under the loving care of his spiritual daughters.

He breathes his last on 31st August 1987, aged 94, after being 79 years a Salesian, 66 years a priest, and 48 years a bishop. He is buried in the Cathedral of Krishnagar.



Krishnagar: The Cathedral Church of the Divine Redeemer.

Msgr. Morrow rebuilds the Cathedral, enlarging four times the size of the previous one, and it is his wish that there should be a Chapel for the perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. At the beginning a Contemplative Order of Nuns from Kerala agrees to come and hold the adoration day and night.[70] But due to certain difficulties of their own, they withdraw. At their departure two sisters of Mary Immaculate take turns in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament exposed all through the day, from 6.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. The piety and the Christian life of the faithful notably improve since 1952, when this practice is started.

In the entire building operations brother Castelli,[71] a mason by profession, is the bishop's right-hand man.[72]

A report to the Provincial from the community of Krishnagar parish in the years 1941–1945, gives us some more information on the work of the missionaries.[73]

The community consists of 7 confreres. The territory of the mission measures an area of 6 square miles. Six villages or centres are served from Krishnagar: Krishnagar proper, Chandra, Barasat, Jahalkali, and Behrampore. In these years there is no noticeable increase in conversions. The number of Catholics from 1210 in 1941 rises to 1296 in 1945. The difference is due to the increase in the number of boys and girls in the orphanages coming from the other districts of the Mission. There is no mass defection, three Catholics become Protestants and two revert to their previous religion.

The hopes of the missionaries are pinned on the education of boys and girls in the orphanages. In Krishnagar there is a daily festive Oratory for Catholic and non-Catholic boys, with an average daily attendance of 30. A well-organized club for adults draws a good number of young men. Evening classes for non-Christian children are also held.

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[70] The Franciscan Nuns of Perpetual Adoration take up residence in Krishnagar on 21.5.1953, start the perpetual adoration on 11.10.1953, and withdraw in 1960.

[71] Bro. Carlo Castelli: born in Italy in 1911, comes to India in 1934, makes his First Profession on 8.12.1935, goes back to Italy on 13.4.1967, dies in Italy on 23.9.1992, aged 81.

[72] Cfr. Narayan *The Heart of Bengal,* 87f.; Alessi, *Pionieri nel Cuore dell'India,* 58ff.

[73] Cfr. "*Casa e distrettto missionario di Krishnagar*", in *Resoconto quinquennale delle Case Salesiane, Provincial Archives*, B.12.

15. The Salesians in Burma in the Storm

With the departure of Fr. Barattoni, the two clerics, Bro. Bertolino and Bro. Giacomin, and the lay brother, Bro. Bongiorno for the Parole Camp (in January 1941) and later for the Interment Camp, only five confreres remain in Burma, Fr. Alessi and Fr. Bordin; two brothers, Bro. Dell'Acqua and Bro. Kramer,[74] and a cleric, Bro. Valette. Fr. Alessi himself vividly describes the tremendous hardships they have to undergo during the Japanese occupation, in a letter he writes to the Rector Major on 3rd August 1946.

"We live," he writes, "three years of trials, dangers, and all kinds of suffering. We live through two wars. This zone of the city is bombed 149 times, as it borders on the railway station and is surrounded by three military installations. The number of bombs that fall around us is incalculable: some fall on our land, more than 200 on the widows' home, and 16 on the school. Some buildings are totally destroyed, others are seriously damaged. Only our beautiful church is miraculously saved, but the greater part of the roof is taken off by the displacement of air caused by the bursting of bombs, while splinters destroy 26 statues. Around us and for a two-km radius everything is razed to the ground. We are grateful to God that even during this tremendous period of difficulty, we are always able to continue our work of assistance and apostolate, even though at a reduced scale. We are able to provide shelter to many poor people who are without a roof over their heads to protect them. At times there are more than 1000 refugees. During these three long years, in some way or other, we manage to survive, living exclusively on grass, rice and roots of trees. To be able to feed our orphan boys and the refugees we sell all what we manage to save from the bombings, up to the last shirt, up to the last sheet of paper."

"As you will remember," he continues, "beloved Father, we come to Burma in 1939. It is a time of political unrest, and the schools have to remain closed the whole year through. We have just opened when the war breaks out and new trials face our work. But the trial by fire comes when hostilities break out in the East, on 8th December 1941, the feast of

[74] Bro. G. Kramer, a carpenter by profession, goes to Burma from India in March or April 1940. Expelled from Burma at the end of June 1966, he joins the Philippine Province. He is still active in Papua New Guinea. Recently he published a little booklet about his life. (From a letter of Dr. Edward P. Evans to Fr. Lo Groi, dated 4th August 2000.)

the Immaculate Conception. Fourteen days after that, four confreres out of 9 are interned in India. The feast of Don Bosco of the following year brings us the first refugees, all poor people who are escaping from the bombing on Rangoon and South Burma. On Good Friday Mandalay is destroyed. An air attack, probably the most severe one that Burma suffers, in a few hours destroys the central part of the city. The number of deaths goes up to 2000. Out of the 30,000 houses, firebombs burn down over 21,000 of them, as they are all made of teakwood. On that day our house escapes total destruction by a real miracle."

"The thousands of unfortunate people pressed by the advance of the Japanese army bring with them cholera and black smallpox. Innumerable are the victims. For Mandalay and outskirts the official number is 1.500 who every day die of cholera. It enters also our house and in a few hours our young cleric Valette,[75] four of our boys, and a few refugees die of the disease. On 1st May 1942, the Japanese occupy the city. On Easter Sunday of the following year, owing to the continuous bombing by the Allies and the financial difficulties caused by the occupation, we decide to send the confreres, the orphans and the refugees to the Protestant leper asylum. Their ministers at the beginning of the war abandon the latter and the Catholic Mission together with the leper asylum of St. John takes care of it. For over two years we find shelter in three accurately disinfected pavilions, which our beloved bishop, Msgr. Faliere puts at our disposal, together with a good number of huts."

"In September 1943, when Italy surrenders, we are treated as internees and detained in the leper asylum. Fr. Lafon, the founder of our works who has called us to Burma, remains to guard our residence and our school of Mandalay. Notwithstanding his 80 years of age, he remains at his post, as a vigilant sentinel, till two months before the liberation, when an attack of cerebral malaria takes him to the Father's home to enjoy his eternal reward."

"Our internment in the leper asylum ends on 19th March 1945, the day in which Mandalay is freed. Only God knows how we come out safe between two armies that are contesting for the territory inch by inch. Without doubts, in these hours of extreme danger, St. Joseph intervenes

[75] Bro. Valette, a French cleric has left the Congregation to join the Paris Foreign Missions, but blocked by the outbreak of the war, comes back to stay with the Salesians. Cfr. Alessi, *Una Vita per l'India,* 145.

and obtains for us the grace to escape a terrible death. Thanks to the protection of our heavenly Mother, the Help of Christians, the loss of personnel and lives is minimal."

"It is one year since we have left the leper asylum and all of us Salesians and boys and a few workmen start working with great zest from morning till evening on the half demolished walls and on what is left of our buildings, cleaning and adjusting whatever can still be used, at least temporarily. In a few months we succeed in putting a cover over our heads with a few old mats and thatch, thus protecting ourselves from the sun and the inclement weather. But the two churches of Sagaing and Ywatoung are no more there."

"Enjoying a very special permit to be able to move around during these past four years, I have been able to gather together our good Catholics, first inside a mosque, then in a Buddhist school, then in the military hospital, in the private houses of friends, and finally even in the office of the military police. At this moment our works are flourishing. The orphanage has more than a hundred pupils, the day school has more than 400 pupils, the technical school begins to look up once again and the carpentry department has already 18 artisan apprentices. On Sundays the parish church is packed to capacity."

"We are able to erect about 20 huts, where as many poor widows with numerous children, who have lost everything, find now a sure refuge. Other huts are being built around the church. A last very consoling news, after 8 years of our being here, two of our pupils are Salesians and study philosophy in India, two are finishing their novitiate and six are studying Latin in our *aspirantate* at Sonada."[76]

Note 4 (page 208) continued:

Fr. Antony Bernardi: born on 17.09.1910 makes his first profession on 11.09.1929, is ordained a priest on 02.07.1939, comes to India in November 1939. He is assigned to the Krishnagar Diocese where he remains all his life without ever returning to his native country. He works in Shimulia, Bhoborpara, Ranabondo and Maliapota. Brought to Krishnagar (Cathedral) he puts his outstanding musical talent at the service of his ministry and of church music. He is noted for his humble, simple and open but effective life among the poor and simple people. He dies on 15.04.1919 aged 88.

[76] Cfr. Alessi, *Pionieri nel Cuore dell'India,* 68–70, in *Bollettino Salesiano* (January 1947), 28–70. For more abundant and at times dramatic details, Cfr. Alessi, *Una Vita per l'India,* 140–175.

CHAPTER VIII
THE REVIVAL: 1946–1951

1. Back from Exile 2. The Military give back the Requisitioned Institutions 3. India's Independence 4. Independence, Partition, and the Krishnagar Diocese 5. Other Events in 1947: 5.1 The XVI General Chapter 5.2 The Silver Jubilee of the Arrival of the Salesians in Assam 6. Sonada: 6.1 Blessing of the First Portion of the New College 6.2 The College is affiliated to B. A. Degree 6.3 A Miracle ? If not a Miracle, it is a very Singular Grace! 7. The First Home-visit by Foreign Missionaries 8. The Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate Help of Christians 9. A Strategic Withdrawal from Saharampur 10. Roses and Thorns for the Salesians in Burma: 10.1 Revival 10.2 The Storm 11. Nagaland Opens the Door to the Catholic Missionaries 12. A Third Extraordinary Visitor: Fr. Albino Fedrigotti 13. Changes of Personnel and other Events affecting some houses and the Province as a whole: 13.1 Sonada: Change of Personnel, the Cyclonic Storm and the Landslides 13.2 A Change of Guard: the New Provincial, Fr. A. Pianazzi 14. The 1950 Earthquake 15. The Activity of the New Provincial: 15.1 Bandel Becomes an *Aspirantate* for a Second Time 15.2 Fr. Pianazzi is Transferred as Provincial of Madras 16. The Shillong Diocese Mothers the Diocese of Dibrugarh 17. The Death of Fr. Peter Ricaldone.

1946

1. Back from Exile

As the war draws to a close, restrictions on missionaries begin to be lifted and internees are set free. About two-thirds of the Salesians interned in Dehra Dun are released in two batches in 1944 and a third batch on 22nd January 1945. These, however, are not allowed to return to the North, but are sent to the Southern Province. The students and their teachers are sent to Tirupattur to continue their theology courses. The priests serve the Church in the Southern Province.

After the War, almost all the confreres belonging to the Northern Province come up to the North. Some temporarily stop at Bandel. From there some leave for Sonada in early 1946, either as students of philosophy or as assistants and teachers. Others are distributed in the various houses in Bengal. The missionaries from Assam and the students of theology go up to Assam.

"Bishop Ferrando's report to the Holy See records 70,914 Catholics, with 40 foreign and 3 Indian priests, 46 foreign and 16 Indian sisters, 554

catechists and 311 teachers. During the war years, the Catholics have increased only by about 10,000. Evangelization work, to a certain extent, has slowed down but the Church weathers the storm. Two factors help: first, by rule the Salesians are not allowed to get involved in politics, and second, the Assam missionaries hail from many nationalities. It is an integrated team. Though the majority is Italian, the mission is not Italian. About half of the mission personnel during the war are non-Italian. The government has no reason to suspect the missionaries."[1]

At the same time, however, a fact stands out as plain as a pikestaff: the necessity to step up the effort to foster indigenous vocations. At the end of the war, in the Northeast, Indian Salesians are 15, novices 10, aspirants in Sonada 22 – a little flock in view of the impending need and difficulties to overcome. Europe is bled white by the war. From our Catholic communities not many can come: education has not reached the villages, the priests cannot visit them more than two or three times a year and are unable to form children for priestly or religious life. Only Shillong, Gauhati, Liluah, Don Bosco Krishnagar, and Mandalay have boarding schools with an environment suitable for vocations. Besides, the boardings of Gauhati and Liluah are closed down from 1942 to 1946. But even if all the above mentioned boarding schools were to be functioning, they cannot supply the required numbers, because the boys from the hill tribes who are sent to these boardings come from recently converted Catholic families and the superiors in Turin sound a bell of caution. In the Provincial Council meeting of 18th November 1947, Fr. Provincial makes known to the members a peremptory order of the Rector Major not to accept boys as aspirants from families that are not for three generations Catholic.

However, when God seems to close a door, in His Providence he opens a new one. Fr.Uguet tells us how this new door gets opened. "I knew," he says, "a Carmelite Father, Fr. Aurelian, whose cause of beatification has been introduced. He is working in Kerala, which counts the greatest number of Catholics and which has always given to the Church in India numerous and good vocations. At this time we have no Salesian presence in that region. Fr. Aurelian is a Spaniard as I am, and therefore, with great confidence I write to him, asking if he can send me some good boys who show some disposition to become religious. If he is not in a position to do so, I ask him at least to help me to contact some local parish priests who are willing to help us in this regard.

[1] Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands*, 95–96.

He answers that he is happy to help the Sons of Don Bosco to evangelize the Indian people and invites me to send down someone to contact the parish priests and the families."[2]

In 1948, Fr. Uguet sends Fr. Bacchiarello, the rector of Sonada, down to Kerala and he recruits a good group of boys who arrive in two batches of 12 each in February and May and are settled in Salesian College with the aspirants.[3] The following year, Fr. W. Balocco goes to Kerala to recruit vocations and those who are chosen are sent to Tirupattur for one year. In April 1950, it is Fr. Pianazzi, the rector of Mawlai, who goes to choose some more boys and brings them up to the North, together with those who are in Tirupattur.

Five of those who are in Tirupattur and who have passed IV form in Kerala are taken directly to Sonada. Among them are: Thaiparambil Antony and Abraham Pinakatt, both Salesians today: Fr. Antony Thaiparambil, the founder of Ashalayam – a work for street boys – in Calcutta (1985) and in Delhi (1996); Brother P.M. Abraham, a printer, who in 1989 opts to be a missionary in East Africa.

Others who are in Tirupattur, such as, Isaac Puthumana, Ettil Jacob, and James Mampilly, and the new batch of boys chosen by Fr, Pianazzi are taken to Mawlai.[4]

2. The Military Authorities give back the Requisitioned Institutions

In 1946, the Gauhati technical school is given back in a dilapidated condition, but government pays compensation. Before long, Fr. A. Colussi

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[2] Cfr. Alessi, *Pionieri nel Cuore dell' India,* 22.

[3] The Chronicle of Salesian College, Sonada, 28th February, speaks of 12 boys who are sick a couple of days or more, on account of the altitude and change of diet. Some of these boys are Salesians today. Among them some have occupied and are occupying responsible positions in this Province or in the Delhi Province. Some are Rectors, Fr. A. J. Sebastian has been the Provincial of undivided Calcutta Province, Fr. P. P. Varkey has been Provincial Economer and Rector, Bro. V.D. Varkey has worked as local and Provincial Economer. However, the first Malayalee boy to enter Salesian College as aspirant is 13 year old Albert Thottunkal who arrives on 2nd November 1946 accompanied by his brother, Bro. Andrew, S.J. He will be ordained a Priest on 16.4.1963 and will be working in several schools of this Province in various capacities, especially as rector, principal and asst. principal.

[4] A number of them are today priests or salesian Brothers: Frs. A. Victor, J. Edakudam, K.M. Matthew, K. Gervasis, P. M. Paul, and Brothers E. Jacob (who dies on 31.8.'82) and Isaac Puthumana. Cfr. Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands,* 101.

opens a school for the Assamese and a hostel for the Cotton College students.

In 1946, St. Edmund's College is de-requisitioned.

Soon work can be resumed in Mawlai. Also in 1946, the military Authorities give back the *studentate* of theology, which had been requisitioned in 1942 as a convalescent house for the American soldiers. Eleven novices and 21 students of theology resume their regular life with Fr. E. Guttierez as novice master, and Fr. A. Pianazzi as rector of the Theological College.

In 1946, the technical school of Liluah, requisitioned in 1942, reopens with Fr. Buri as rector.

Fr. Buri succeeds Fr. T. Lopez as rector, already in 1941. On 19th June 1942 he sends a circular letter to the guardians of the boys informing them that the school would be closed down for the duration of the war. The building is taken over that same year. During the war years, when the school is closed, Fr. Buri acts as parish priest of Liluah and at the same time also as parish priest of Bandel with all the powers of a *Vicarius Aeconomus*, till Fr. Di Benedetto Fiori is made to succeed him in July 1942. In December 1942 Fr. Buri is given a helper for Liluah from the Cathedral house with the faculties of *Vicarius Cooperator*.[5]

Four years later in 1946 Fr. Buri once again enters the school and with the help of three other fathers, he gets it ready for the reopening. In January 1947 the boys are once again back in Liluah. After the rainy season the foundation for the workshop and dormitories is laid and so everything is in right course for the mechanical section of the school to burst forth and bear fruit. Of extreme importance in this regard is the arrival from Italy of the Salesian lay brother Silvanus Rettore.

In December 1949 Fr. J. Bacchiarello succeeds Fr. Buri as rector.[6]

1947

3. India's Independence

August 15th of 1947 is a historic day for India: India attains Independence. There is great joy in the air, and celebrations take place

[5] Cfr. *Provincial Archives*, Bandel file.
[6] Cfr. Silver Jubilee Souvenir, in *Provincial Archives*, Liluah Section, 12–13.

all over the country. But that happiness is marred by the partition that leads to much bloodshed. Soon peace is restored. Christians, a minority, wonder what their future will be in an Independent India. Some harbour doubts and fears; a healthy secularism is adopted, and all communities are given freedom and the protection of the law for their religious and educational activities.

Missionaries, however, feel that the attitude of the leaders towards them is fast changing: they feel they are welcome only as long as they limit their services to the educational, medical and charitable fields. Evangelization is resented;[7] it is the aftermath of the nation's partition on the basis of religion.

Over the years this new attitude leads the government to take steps against them:

- All missionaries have to be registered.
- They have to renew their residential permit yearly.
- They can return home but not for more than a year.
- They cannot leave the district where they reside without informing the police.
- Troubled areas, like the Northeast, are declared restricted areas and out of bounds to them. A specific permit is necessary to reside or enter there.
- Indian citizenship is not granted in the Northeast, apart from one or two exceptions.
- Inquiries are made regarding conversions and the number of Baptisms.
- The press accuses missionaries of having a hand in areas where there is trouble.
- Finally, all new missionaries are debarred from the country.

[7] Even the highest Authority in independent India, the President, Sir Rajendra Prasad, expresses this resentment in his first visit to Assam. The leader of the Garo tribe reads to him an address that comes from his heart: "The degree of civilization that our people has achieved is the fruit of the work of the missionaries, towards whom we nourish a great debt of gratitude. We ardently implore that no restrictions be imposed on them, because this would greatly hold up any further progress in all spheres of life..." In his answer the President praises the work of the missionaries for their great spirit of sacrifice, but at the same time, leaving full freedom to practise the Christian religion to those who have already embraced it, he insists that to proselytize is now something of the past. "Therefore, concludes the President, let the missionary accomplish works of charity, but let him stop preaching the Gospel of Christ." Cfr. Ferrando, *Nell'India Nord Est*, 166.

The restrictions are enforced, but without undue harshness. In free India, the Church grows by leaps and bounds and prospers.

During the first years that follow Independence, several missionaries can come from Europe, and among them we have Fr. B. Busolin, Fr. C. Guidotto, Fr. Herman Laarhuis, Fr. G. Mandeville, Fr. M. Peditto, all young priests who serve in the Northeast with zeal and love. Others come still as clerics and are eventually ordained in the Theological College of Mawlai: E. Albizuri, Joseph Verzotto, P. Piemonte, Raphael Maiquez, J. Larrea, M. Balavoine, J. Dieste, J. Rubio, N.Tuligi, Daniel Venia, G. Vanni, Dino Colussi, J. Zabizarreta, P. Schiavon, H. Turco, Julio Matteucci, Joseph Cilia, J. Fantin [8], F. Giraudo, A. Marzo, J. Armiñana, J. Gimenez, L. Heriot, Brian Diamond, brothers: J. Colombi, C. Muscat, N. Valeri, Santi, and others. They fill the personnel gap caused by the war years when no novices could come. Then the curtain falls: from abroad no one can come any longer. In the 1960s, the Provincial of England sends a few young clerics, who eventually are not allowed by authorities to remain in the Northeast.

4. Independence, Partition, and the Krishnagar Diocese

The 14th and 15th of August, 1947, witness the birth of two sovereign, independent States, India and Pakistan; the latter divided into West Pakistan and East Pakistan. Violent communal riots precede and accompany the process of partition, which cause a great loss of lives, of both Hindus and Muslims in the North (the Punjab, Delhi) and in Bengal. The result of the partition is a gigantic exodus: millions of Hindus leave Pakistan, which is now an Islamic State, and millions of Muslims leave India and opt for the new republic of Pakistan.

The partition deals a terrible blow, particularly to the diocese of Krishnagar, which finds itself cut into two parts. Of its eight million inhabitants, three and a half million remain in India and four and a half million come under Pakistan.

Msgr. Morrow, together with the confreres and the sisters, gives all possible help and assistance to the refugees, compelled by a cruel political decision to leave their lands and all their belongings, and to face the uncertainty of a new life in an unknown country. The biblical exodus

[8] J. Fantin comes to India to make his novitiate in Shillong (5.5.1951) and makes his profession on 8.5.1952. He is the last novice to come from Italy.

is accompanied by thousands of deaths on both sides, and, as it always happens in similar circumstances, the poor and weaker sections of society have to pay the heavier price.

The formation of East Pakistan (presently Bangladesh), which cuts into two the diocese of Krishnagar, forces the Holy See to erect the new diocese of Jessore on 16th July 1950, by taking away from Krishnagar almost all the mission residences and, thus, reducing the Catholics to just a few thousands. A new start has to be made.

One of the activities which brings the greatest admiration and esteem of the Authorities and of the people towards Msgr. Morrow and the Salesians is their constant help towards the poorest sections of the people, which form the majority of the population. This happens, especially on the occasion of the frequent, almost yearly floods. According to the report of Fr. L. Gobetti to the *Bollettino Salesiano* in 1956, the river breaks its embankment at Krishnagar and inundates the city in different places. The whole Catholic *para* is submerged. Water reaches the roof of the houses. The parish priest, Fr. Decaroli,[9] moves continually from house to house, or, better, from roof to roof. He remains three days in water, without caring for food or rest. Other confreres and boys of Don Bosco School give their utmost, one carpenter loses his life in the waters while he swims to bring help to a Hindu house. The Sisters of Mary Immaculate open their houses to give shelter to the homeless who come even from far away villages."[10]

One of the greatest merits of Msgr. Morrow is, no doubt, the catechetical apostolate and the ministry of the good press, something that he does throughout his life. He himself writes numerous catechetical works, which are adopted in English-speaking countries and are translated into various languages, from Chinese to Italian. Thirteen million copies

[9] Fr. Aldo Decaroli: born at Turin (Italy) on 5.1.1912, is in Ivrea from 1928 to 1931; makes his novitiate at Shillong in 1931–1932, makes his first profession on 8.2.1932; is ordained a priest in 5.6.1941, works in various capacities in Don Bosco School Krishnagar, but he is especially a hard working missionary as assistant parish priest or parish priest in various parishes: Bhoborpara, Ranabondo, Cathedral Parish, Behrampore. In 1983 he is back to the Cathedral Rectory without responsibilities, but active with chaplaincies and other spiritual ministries, particularly with the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Always punctual in the playground to be with the boys, supervising them at their games, exact and orderly in everything he does, keeping his room clean and orderly. He expires suddenly on 21.11.1985, aged 73. (Cfr. Obituary letter).

[10] *Bollettino Salesiano* (March 1957), 104, in Alessi, *Pionieri nel Cuore dell'India*, 63.

of such books are reckoned as printed by him. He uses the most modern means of communication to spread the Word of God: wall posters, filmstrips, and the cinema.

Another important work realized by him is the 'Young Women's Cultural Centre' (in 'Bishop Morrow Centre') opened in 1968, to satisfy the desire of many young women to acquire technical and practical skills."[11]

5. Other events in 1947

5.5.1 The XVI General Chapter

In his letter of 24th June 1944 Fr. Uguet informs the confreres that the Holy See is postponing the convocation of the General Chapter to the end of the present conflict, and in the meantime, confirms in office the Rector Major and all the members of the Superior Council.

In agreement with this disposition, the Rector Major, Fr. P. Ricaldone, convokes the 16th General Chapter for August 1947. On 16th May, Fr. Provincial leaves for the General Chapter, together with Fr. Pianazzi, the rector of the Theological College, the elected delegate of the Province. Before leaving, Fr. Uguet appoints Fr. Piasecki to be in-charge of the Province in his absence. He intends to come back by the middle of October, so as to be in time for the 25th anniversary of the arrival of the Salesians in Assam.

On 16th December 1947, writing to the confreres, Fr. Uguet gives some general impressions on the General Chapter, leaving the specific deliberations to the Acts of the General Chapter, which would be promulgated by the Rector Major at the proper time. He especially likes to share the impressions of Cardinal Fossati, Archbishop of Turin, at the election of the Rector Major: "Your unity is your strength," remarks Cardinal Fossati, "other Congregations admire you, and I can tell you that on it depends the success of your work."

This Chapter adds two more General Councillors to the traditional number, in the persons of Fr. Albino Fedrigotti and Fr. Modesto Bellido. Both these Councillors will have important dealings with this Province. Fr. A. Fedrigotti will be the extraordinary Visitor of the Province in the

[11] Cfr. Alessi, *Pionieri nel Cuore dell'India,* 60–64.

following year, and Fr. M. Bellido will be the extraordinary Visitor in 1959. The result of Fr. Bellido's visitation will be the second division of the Province.

5.2 The Silver Jubilee of the Arrival of the Salesians in Assam

The year 1947 is the Silver Jubilee Year of the coming of the Salesians to Assam. On 3rd April 1947, the Provincial Council sets up a Committee presided over by Msgr Bars with Fr. J. Foglia and Fr. I. Ricaldone as members to prepare for the Jubilee celebrations. The tone of the celebrations held in Shillong on 16th November 1947 is rather subdued. On this occasion Bishop Ferrando passes a remark which underscores the achievements, but also and even more so, the great difficulties and setbacks the Mission has gone through during the past 25 years, "These 25 years teach us to have unlimited trust in God." On the same day, as a fit conclusion to the Jubilee, the new Cathedral is blessed, a beautiful and spacious building, 60 meters long and 20 meters broad. The dedication is solemn and a large crowd turns out. The great fire is forgotten. The transept and the beautification of the church will come later.

1948

6. Sonada

In 1948, the chronicle of Salesian College Sonada, records some important events, which have a bearing on the material, academic, and Salesian growth of the College.

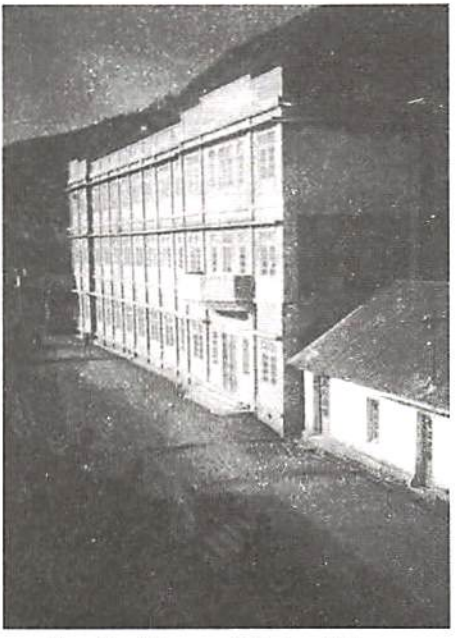
6. 1 Blessing of the First Portion of the New College: 21.5.1948

The first event relates to the *material* aspect of the College, that is, to the realization in stages of the plan conceived by Fr. Uguet and Fr. Piasecki of building the new College to take the place of the old brewery, which more than outlives its purpose for the first 10 years of its existence.[12]

[12] Before putting up the present building, the Provincial consults the superiors about the suitability of constructing a permanent building, as the place is found to be cold and misty. The Rector Major tells him to go ahead because the Father General of the Jesuits has mentioned to him that, though cold and misty, it is a healthy place. Bishop Morrow, whose missionaries are going there for the summer vacation, contributes Rs. 10,000 for the construction of the new building.

Preparations for the construction of the new building start already in January 1947. On 18th April 1947, the foundation stone is laid for the ferroconcrete building. There is no special ceremony for it, as the Archbishop of Calcutta has already blessed the stone. The work proceeds at a fast pace and on 21st May 1948, the blessing of the first portion of the College takes place. Fr. Provincial, Fr. Uguet, has for nearly two years used most of his resources on the construction of this ferroconcrete building to provide lodging and classrooms for the students of philosophy and the aspirants and a house of rest and Retreats for the confreres of Bengal.

After several months spent in demolishing the old buildings and in digging the foundations, work proceeds steadily and satisfactorily till it is completed. There is, however, still much furnishing work to be done, which takes some more months to be completed.



Sonada: The new Salesian College: The first half (140 ft.), blessed on 21.5.1948

On 12th September Bishop Morrow springs a surprise. He promises to donate to the Provincial a sum of Rs. 25,000 for the construction of the second part of the building. He likes very much the part of the building already completed.

On 4th October 1948 Fr. Piasecki, at the request of the Provincial, goes to Sonada to make arrangements for the building of the second portion of the College. There takes place a prolonged discussion between Fr. Piasecki and the prefect of the house in order to get the plans ready for it. After a few days Fr. Piasecki leaves for Calcutta. Nothing can be finalized for the new part of the building as no material is yet available and the signing of the contract is no more urgent.

6.2 The College is affiliated for B.A. Degree: 4.9.1948

On 8th May 1948 the Acting Inspector of Colleges and two other functionaries of Calcutta University come to inspect the College for 'affiliation up to the B.A. Degree'. It seems that the team is well impressed with our work and the Examination results so far. On 4th September 1948, affiliation is granted for B.A. in English, Alternative English, Latin and History.

6.3 A Miracle? If not a Miracle, it is a Singular Grace!

A miracle? If not a miracle, surely it is a very singular grace for the community of Salesian College. We take directly from the chronicle: "A big stone about four tons in weight is propped up on four girders above a deep hole in which it is to be buried. Three boys, Resto, T.T. George, and I. D. Joseph are imprudently under the stone removing the loose earth, when it starts raining. Bro. O'Hara, the assistant, orders the boys to get away due to the rain. As soon as the boys leave the pit, the girders snap into two pieces and the bolder drops heavily into the pit. Had the boys been still there where they stood a few seconds before... Evidently our Lady Help of Christians is there with her maternal protection!"

7. The First Home-visit of the Foreign Missionaries

The year 1948 witnesses for the first time some non-Indian Salesians, starting with those who have been longest in India, leave for a temporary home-visit. On 8th November 1948, the Provincial Council discusses the merit of a temporary repatriation of some confreres, either on health grounds or because of the repeated requests from their families. The decision is to allow this as soon as the journey by ship will be easier.

On 1st January 1948 Fr. Provincial writes to the confreres informing them that the superiors are receiving many letters from a number of parents repeatedly asking for the temporary repatriation of their children. He, who gives himself to God in the Missions, leaves behind parents and country 'for life.' But not always the parents are ready for such a sacrifice, nor can it be asked of them. The superiors, though not against this on principle, put the following facts for their consideration. Conditions in Europe are not yet normal and the Holy See finds it difficult to obtain passports for new missionaries who are urgently needed. They would get a poor impression, if they come to know that some missionaries are going back, even if temporarily, to their mother country.

Not withstanding this observation, some missionaries are allowed to go back home for a limited period of time. On 23rd July 1948, from Sonada Fr. Bacchiarello leaves for Calcutta on his way home after 25 years in India. He belongs to the first batch of novices who enter India towards the end of 1923. He returns to India on 30th October 1948. Fr. L. Arneodo leaves for Italy on 26th October 1948 after 21 years in India. Fr. J. Dal Broi, Fr. J. Foglia, Bro. G. Cid and a few others leave for Italy sometime in the summer of 1948 after more than 20 years in India. Bro. Cid, one of the first eleven to come to India in January 1922, goes for his home visit after 27 years. In the following years others will be allowed to go for their home-visit.

8. The Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate Help of Christians: 12th December 1948[13]

It is in 1922 that the then Bishop of Krishnagar, Bishop S. Taveggia, takes the initiative to start the Congregation of the Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate (the *Bhoginis*). However, he does not erect it as a Diocesan Religious Congregation.[14]

Bishop Stephen Ferrando, bishop of Krishnagar for just over a year from 1934, must have wished to give a canonical status to the *Bhoginis*. And this is also a preoccupation of the sisters of Charity, who love the *Bhoginis* as their own daughters, but they feel they cannot accept them as choir-sisters for the lack of sufficient instruction.

In May 1935, in a petition to Bishop Ferrando, the Provincial of the Sisters of Charity and her Councillors express the desire that their children, their collaborators for the extension of the Kingdom of God, should participate in all the goods and spiritual privileges annexed to their Institute. Therefore, they request that they be accepted into their Institute as *sorelle mandatarie* or 'lay sisters'.

At the bottom of the petition Bishop Ferrando writes in his own handwriting that he has no objection to the *Bhoginis* being accepted into the Institute of the Sisters of Charity as Sisters *mandatarie* in conformity with their Constitutions.

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[13] For this section, Cfr. L. Morrow, *Memoirs of Fr. Bishop*. Unpublished manuscript.
[14] Cfr. Narayan, *The Heart of Bengal*, 71. Also L. Morrow, *Memoirs of Fr. Bishop*, 11–12.

Later, perhaps because of the remarks and appeals of Msgr. Bars to establish a Diocesan Congregation, Bishop Ferrando evidently changes his mind. Before leaving Krishnagar, on 5th December 1935 he writes to the Cardinal Prefect of *De Propaganda Fide* begging him to do the needful so that the Congregation of the *Bhoginis* may become a canonically erected Diocesan Congregation.

Cardinal Prefect of *Propaganda* replies to this letter on 17th January 1936, but with a letter addressed to Fr. V. Scuderi, Apostolic Administrator of Krishnagar. To help the Administrator in preparing the required documents and information, the Prefect of *Propaganda* encloses a copy of the usual norms the Holy See follows for the approbation of new religious Congregations.

The Cardinal Prefect also suggests that as long as it would be required, the Superior and mistress of novices be chosen from the Sisters of Charity. The Administrator has also to see that the native sisters have a separate convent and dwelling well defined so as to avoid any danger that the sisters may feel or be considered as mere servants of the European sisters.

Upon receiving the letter of the Cardinal Prefect, Msgr. Scuderi makes up his mind to do his utmost to establish juridically the small Congregation of the *Bhoginis*. On 6th January 1937, Msgr. Scuderi gives the Decree of erection. He does not, however, send a copy of it to the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. The need of doing this does not occur also to Bishop Morrow when he will make his own Decree of erection of the new Congregation of the Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate Help of Christians in December 1948.

Msgr. Scuderi's next step is to prepare a set of Rules based on the Constitutions of the sisters of Charity. He approves them with a Decree dated 8th December 1938 and sends them for approval to the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.

With a letter dated 2nd May 1939, these Constitutions are returned to Msgr. Scuderi with a large number of corrections and changes to be made. Msgr. Scuderi shows the draft of these Constitutions with the corrections and changes to bishop-elect Msgr. La Ravoire Morrow during his first visit to Krishnagar in September 1939. The bishop-elect is on his way to Rome to be consecrated bishop by Pius XII on 29th October 1939.

Msgr. Morrow asks Msgr. Scuderi to sign the corrected text, which he does, giving the date of 24th May 1939, the day preceding the appointment of Fr. La Ravoire Morrow as bishop of Krishnagar (25th May 1939).

After his consecration and a protracted tour of USA and the Philippines in search of funds for his diocese, Bishop Morrow comes to take charge of the diocese on 27th October 1940.

Before long, the Provincial of the Sisters of Charity, Mother Ernestina Del Corno, and other sisters insistently beg the bishop to petition the Holy See for the fusion of the two Congregations. After obtaining the favourable opinion of Fr. Ricaldone, the Bishop, Mother Provincial and her Councillors, start discussion on the modalities to bring about the union. Nearly all the *Bhoginis* are willing to join, but not all the fathers and sisters are in favour of it.

With the approval of the Mother General of the Sisters of Charity, a first agreement is drafted and approved by Mother Provincial, her Councillors, and all the four sign it on 16th April 1945. The Sisters of Charity accept 15 of the 16 *Bhoginis*. Of the 15 accepted, 6 are to become lay sisters and not choir-sisters.

In 1945, after the agreement is signed, Bishop Morrow is requested to go to Rome for the *ad limina* visit. Mother Provincial and her Councillors ask him to settle the whole matter of the union with the Superior General, Mother Reali, and her Councillors in Milan. In Milan the bishop has several meetings to reconcile the different points of view of the sisters and of the bishop. Finally, Mother General and her Council tell the bishop that, for the love of Christ, they would accept all the 16 Bhoginis, including the one not accepted by the Provincial and her Council. The bishop sends this request to the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in August 1945. The bishop receives the letter-decree dated 19th December 1945 concerning the union of the two Congregations on the conditions agreed upon while he is still in USA.

Soon after his return in December 1946, Msgr. Morrow holds several talks with Mother Provincial regarding the plans for merger. Things, however, do not materialize as agreed upon before. In autumn 1947 the Sisters of Charity hold their General Chapter. As the opposition to the union of the two Congregations becomes more vocal, the Sisters of Charity refuse to execute the Decree of 19th December 1945.

Information regarding this decision is sent to the Holy See. *Propaganda Fide* asks the Mother General of the Sisters of Charity to give her suggestions on solving this issue. The Mother General sends a *Pro Memoria* with her suggestions. These are framed in such a way as to make the bishop responsible for the non-execution of the Decree, which is contrary to facts, and at the same time Mother General, puts forward conditions that are totally unacceptable to the bishop.

The Bishop thinks it best to go to Rome at the earliest opportunity available to settle the matter amicably, keeping in mind the needs of the diocese and winning the approval of *Propaganda Fide.* So he flies to Rome on 8th December 1948 and from 9th to the 12th holds a series of discussions at the office of *Propaganda Fide.* The Cardinal Prefect, an old acquaintance of his, receives him most cordially. After expressing his disappointment at what has happened and listening to all that the bishop has to say, the Cardinal Prefect gives him all the necessary faculties to do what he thinks best in the Lord, that is, to start all over again a new Congregation with the present *Bhoginis* who wish to join, and to allow those who so desire to return to the secular state.

There and then Bishop Morrow answers the Cardinal that in view of his suggestion he will begin anew. This requires a new Decree of erection, with that day's date. He also assures the Cardinal that as soon as possible he will prepare the new Constitutions and submit them to *Propaganda Fide.*

On the evening of 12th December 1948, on his way to the Salesian Institute of the Sacred Heart, he enters the first church he passes through and before the tabernacle begs for God's blessings on the new Congregation that he intends to start on the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, a date very dear to him. It will have the same name as 'Sisters of Mary Immaculate' (SMI), and the Patroness will be St. Therese of the Child Jesus. The Titular Patroness is 'Mary Immaculate Help of Christians'. In his mind the bishop formulates the Decree of erection, which on his arrival in Krishnagar he will put in writing. In view of the ample faculties given to him by the Cardinal Prefect, he sanctions the vows made by the 15 *Bhoginis,* as members of the new Congregation.

From Rome he goes to Turin and then to USA to collect funds for the various works in Krishnagar, especially to provide a suitable building for the new Congregation. He returns to Krishnagar on 21st December

1949. In January 1950 he attends the first plenary Council of India in Bangalore. On his way back from Bangalore he makes up his mind to try to get vocations for the new Congregation from the South.

As a result of the partition of India and Pakistan, 7 of the 15 sisters, former *Bhoginis*, are transferred to a new Congregation of sisters of the diocese of Dinajpur. Of the remaining 8 sisters, 5 leave the Congregation in 1952 and only 3 are left of the original group: Sr. Bartolomea, Sr. Santina, and Sr. Anna Biswas. The first group of 10 novices begins the novitiate in 1950.

In 1954 the new Constitutions of the Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate Help of Christians are drawn up and approved. Together with the Constitutions and the Directory of Rules, the bishop prepares a new prayer book and introduces a new habit. English is adopted as the official language of the Congregation.

On 7th June 1966 *Propaganda Fide* grants the *Decretum Laudis* (Decree of praise), by which the Institute of the Sisters of Mary Immaculate Help of Christians becomes a Congregation of Pontifical Right, and approves the text of the Constitutions for a period of 7 years.

By 1969 the Congregation will have 34 pre-novices, 34 novices, 127 temporarily professed and 74 perpetually professed sisters.

In agreement with the dispositions of the Decree of Vatican II, *Perfectae Caritatis,* and the *Motu Proprio, Ecclesiae Sanctae* of Paul VI, the Constitutions are revised and renewed *ad experimentum* by the General Chapters that follow. The final text, approved by the General Chapter of 1987, receives the approval of *Propaganda Fide* on 29th January 1990.

On 10th June 1992 the Rector Major of the Salesians, Fr. E. Viganò, with the consent of his Council, officially recognizes the Institute of the 'Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate Help of Christians' as a member of the Salesian Family: "It is evident from your Constitutions that you share the Salesian Spirit. This is in fact explicitly stated in detail in the Second Chapter on the 'Spirit'."[15]

On 31st May 2003 the strength of the Congregation is as follows: Provinces 4, Delegations 2, Houses 56 (in India 47, Tanzania 3, Italy 3,

[15] Cfr. *Acts of the General Council* (October-December 1992), 65–67.

Germany 2, and U.S.A. 1). There are: 70 aspirants, 14 postulants, 34 novices, 95 temporary professed, and 428 perpetually professed sisters.

9. A Strategic Withdrawal from Saharampur

On 6th December 1947, a few days after his return from Europe, where he has been for the General Chapter, Fr. Uguet writes to Fr. Dal Zovo, rector of Saharampur, telling him what he already knows from Fr. Piasecki about the Salesians withdrawing from the Saharampur mission.[16] "On my arrival in Turin," he writes, "the Rector Major tells me that the superiors have decided to withdraw the Salesians from Saharampur. The mind of the superiors is that we leave Saharampur before the end of 1947, but they have no objection that you stay till April 1948, since you are asking for it."

In a letter to Msgr. Vanni Fr. Uguet gives the reason why the superiors are taking this decision: "We are passing through a very serious crisis of personnel and means in the Province, and the further development of the Assam Mission forces us to concentrate all our efforts on the needs of that Mission."

Msgr. Vanni, in his reply to Fr. Uguet on 21st December 1947, expresses in strong terms his disappointment at the superiors' decision: "It makes me sad to think that all this good work may soon come to an end

[16] On 10.7.1947, Fr. Piasecki writing to Fr. Dal Zovo, Rector of Saharampur, tells him that Fr. Uguet from Italy is asking the two of them to go and meet the Archbishop of Agra, Msgr. Vanni, and inform him that the major superiors have decided the withdrawal of the Salesians from the Saharampur Mission. In a letter to Archbishop Mathias dated 11.8.1947, Fr. Piasecki writes about the visit to Msgr. Vanni and the resentful reaction of the Archbishop. "Msgr. Vanni is stunned at hearing this," he writes. "Lowering his head he remains speechless for three or four minutes. Then raising his head, he asks: 'Why?' I tell him that the reasons are not known to me. He answers that he is not prepared to accept such information, as the decision has been taken without consulting him. I suppose, I add, that the reason is what I have heard, that the Capuchin fathers are not happy with our presence there." "Well," he says, "there have been disagreements and discussions in the Concentration Camp, and some individuals imprudently continue to discuss on such matters which do not belong to them. Your Provincial has not reported any complaints to me. I have always appreciated your work. Yes, probably I have expressed some disappointment that the Salesians have entered the diocese to put up a technical school, but nothing has been done till now. I realized your difficulty due to the war, and have not insisted too much. It is up to Fr. Uguet to write to me about the decision of your superiors." He concludes asking that we stay till the end of April, as he is not prepared for such an eventuality, and Fr. Dal Zovo tells him that the school year ends by the end of April. I have already informed Fr. Uguet about my visit to the Archbishop. Cfr. *Archivio Generale*, File 176.

on account of an unwise and uncalled for decision taken by your superiors. May God forgive them!"

From a letter of 27th March 1948 by Archbishop Vanni to a certain Mr. Cordel we come to know that the latter has sent an appeal to the Rector Major. However, Msgr. Vanni is not pinning any hope of success on that. In the letter the Archbishop once again expresses to his friend "the very unpleasant surprise and great pain" at the Salesians' decision to withdraw from Saharampur. "I must say the same," he continues, "regarding the Sisters with whom my earnest pleading has brought no success." The Archbishop's intention is to keep open at least the convent school even after the departure of the (FMA) Sisters.

In all his subsequent correspondence with Fr. Dal Zovo, Fr. Uguet gives him opportune directives regarding the division of what belongs to the Congregation and what belongs to the diocese, how to leave everything in order, and how to dispose of all what belongs to the Congregation.

In his letter to the Archbishop on 27th March 1948, Fr. Uguet writes about the financial adjustment with the archdiocese after disposing off the property of the Salesians in Saharampur. "As our souvenir," he continues in the same letter, "we have the pleasure of donating to the archdiocese the beautiful church of Landsdown, which, as your Grace knows very well, is built by the Congregation. Believe me, your Grace, that it is a very painful thing for us to leave a place where we have worked with great love and interest for the last 18 years, and that, if our superiors have come to this very painful decision, it is only for the reasons which I have given you in my previous letter."

Without any previous understanding with the Provincial, the Archbishop fixes 1st April 1948, as the date for the Salesians to return the parish to the archdiocese. On that day, Fr. Gabriel takes charge of the parish and all the activities of the Salesians cease. Soon after Easter, four confreres, two fathers, Fr. V. Vigada[17] and Fr. A. Del Col,[18] one brother,

[17] Fr. Vittorio Vigada: born at Alpignano (Turin – Italy) on 24.2.1896, comes to India in 1927, makes his first profession on 6.1.1929, is ordained a priest on 26.6.1935, returns to Italy in 1949, dies in Turin on 18.10.1962.

[18] Fr. Antony Del Col: born in 1915, comes to India in 1932, makes his first profession on 11.12.1933, is ordained a priest on 30.1.1944 (in Dehra Dun), dies in a car accident on 18.10.1960. He is remarkable for his youthful enthusiasm, spirit of sacrifice, and interest in the apostolate of the press (in Assamese Christian literature).

Bro. Silvio Vitali,[19] and a cleric, Bro. Borghi,[20] leave for Calcutta. Fr. Dal Zovo, Fr. Fossati [21] and Fr. Bili [22] remain for some more time to do all the packing and the dispatching of what belongs to the Salesians.

From the month of May to August, Fr. Uguet writes a number of letters to Fr. Dal Zovo on what to do with the property the Salesians have in Saharampur. The desire of the Provincial is to sell everything, but as there seems to be the possibility of the government requisitioning the house, he also tells him how to meet this eventuality, if the need arises, by leaving some capable and responsible person to be our representative in dealing with the government.

Fr. Uguet's last letter to Fr. Dal Zovo is on 16th August 1948 in which he gives further directives regarding the sale of the property and tells him to allow Fr. Gabriel to occupy part of the house without charging any rent, but reserving the right of selling it at the first opportunity. When he goes to Agra to meet the Archbishop, Fr. Uguet tells him to convey his regards, assure him that the Salesians will always be grateful to His Grace for his kindness towards them, ask his blessing and also his forgiveness, if in any way they have not always been able to fulfill their duties to his satisfaction. As regards Fr. Bili, Fr. Uguet tells Fr. Dal Zovo to send him immediately to Assam, while he is to go to Sonada for the Spiritual Retreat, bringing with him all the documents of the property. Thus ends the Salesian experience at Saharampur.[23]

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[19] Bro. Silvio Vitali: born At Pietracolore (Bologna – Italy) on 29.7.1910, makes his first profession on 13.9.1930, comes to India in 1936, goes to Burma in 1960, goes back to Italy in 1966, dies at the PAS (Rome) on 8.9.1981, aged 71.

[20] Bro. L. Borghi: born in 1915, comes to India to make his novitiate in 1937, makes the first profession in 1938, is ordained a priest on 3.10.1948, works in various houses and mission centres of the Province, dies in Arese (Milan) on 1.7.2001, aged 86.

[21] Fr. Francis Fossati born at Monza (Italy) on 5.3.1897, comes to India in December 1924, makes his first profession on 25.12.1925, is a priest on 26.4.1931. He works in North Arcot (1931), Krishnagar (1941), Bandel, Roorkee, Digboi, Bombay, where he dies on 7.1.1973.

[22] Fr. Constantine Bili is born at Lombardore, (Turin – Italy) on 1.9.1913, makes his first profession on 8.12.1932, is ordained a priest on 8.12.1944 (Dehra Dun), dies in Shillong on 5.5.1967, aged 53. He works at Saharampur, Dibrugarh, Doom Dooma, Sonada, Sunnyside, and in the parishes of Jowai and Shillong Cathedral. Industrious and enterprising, his patience and optimism bring to light his dogged determination to become a priest. Jovial, he brings joy wherever he goes. He is a good singer and cornet player. Always ready to help where help is needed.

[23] For all the letters referring to the closure of Saharampur, Cfr. *Provincial Archives*. "General (ordinary) correspondence of the Provincial (on Saharampur), 1924–1948", B.6.

1949

10. Roses and Thorns for the Salesians in Burma

10.1 Revival

As normality returns after the atrocities of the war, the four confreres who are interned in India re-enter Burma. In 1946 two confreres from England, Fr. O'Brien[24] and Fr. W. Cole, join them. Fr. Cole remains in Burma only a few months. He returns first to India (South), then goes to Australia, and finally to Ireland, where he dies on 10th September 1975. Fr. O'Brien is liked by the boys and is a good Headmaster of the Lafon High School. He remains in Burma until Fr. Balocco arrives in 1951, when both he and Bro. Bongiorno[25] return to India.

In a very short time all the works are rebuilt; the church, renovated and beautified, becomes the most welcoming and frequented church in the City; the schools, both the primary and high school, are the first schools to reopen and function regularly. Soon after, a beautiful technical school is inaugurated. The future looks very bright and promising. The seed sown at the cost of so many sacrifices begins to bear fruit.[26]

10.2 The Storm

Peace in Burma, however, lasts only for a short time: the internal struggle for power soon degenerates into open civil war, rendering the life and activity of the confreres hard and difficult.

In the course of two months, from March to April 1949, the city of Mandalay is conquered and retaken by opposing factions no less than five times: a cruel, savage war fought on every street, with indiscriminate slaughtering of people!

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[24] Fr. John O'Brien: born at Shrewsbery (GBr) on 23.9.1915, makes his first profession on 8.9.1934,comes to India in 1936, is a priest on 15.7.1945, goes back to England in 1955, dies at Bootie (GBr.) on 20.1.1990, aged 75.

[25] Bro. Angelo Bongiorno: born on 31.1.1917 at Brugnera (Italy), comes to India in 1936, makes his first profession on 8.12.1937, goes to Burma on 27.1.1939, is interned from 1942 to 1946, in 1952 he is in Rebaudengo Institute (Turin) to specialize in the art of tailoring, then back to Shillong to head the tailoring department, dies in Turin (Valdocco) on 11.10.1998, aged 81.

[26] Cfr. Alessi, *Pionieri nel Cuore dell'India,* 71.

"The most dangerous air-raid," relates Fr. Alessi, "and from which I am miraculously saved, takes place in 1949. The rebels of the Karen tribe, many of whom have embraced the Christian Religion, occupy the city. Probably this is what makes the central government suspect that our institution, the most influential in Mandalay, is the centre of the rebellion, and orders it to be bombed. The day after the occupation I feel very nervous. By cycle I go to meet the bishop."

"What is the matter with you?" he asks, "I see you quite agitated."
"I don't know," I answer, "but I am not at ease."

"As I enter the house, I sit in my office. By my side, Oscar, an aspirant, is setting some books in order; another boy, Norman D'Souza, is doing the same in the next room. Suddenly the roar of planes is heard, but, this being a daily occurrence, no one pays attention to it. I do not even notice it. Suddenly, as if pushed by a mysterious force, I jump to my feet and, flinging against the wall the book I'm holding in my hand, I make a dash for the door. I hardly cross the threshold, when a big 500-pound bomb, breaking through the two floors above, bursts right on my table smashing it to smithereens."

"Poor Oscar is riddled with splinters. An iron beam protects Norman, in the adjacent room, but his right arm gets mushy and its amputation becomes necessary. I find myself covered by the debris and the wreckage of my office. I manage to free myself and run to save poor Norman. For dear Oscar there is nothing I can do, only a final blessing and retrieving the corpse. The bomber has all but destroyed the building. I alone, I do not know how, am miraculously unhurt."[27]

The bombing and the serious damages suffered do not discourage these intrepid missionaries, ready to serve at any cost the youth and the people of this battered city.

"We have to start all over again," writes the Provincial, Fr. A. Pianazzi, the successor of Fr. Uguet, "the civil war is raging, no building material is to be found, the orphans have to be supported...and no money is available. It is almost unbelievable what terrible anguish, the efforts and the superhuman sacrifices our confreres have to undergo in these last two years. And yet the incredible takes place: the house is rebuilt, the workshops start functioning again, the orphanage now gives shelter to

[27] Ibid. 72. (*Bollettino Salesiano*, October 1949, 233). Cfr. Also Alessi, *Una Vita*, 177-180.

118 boys and the day school gives accommodation to 500 boys, the maximum number it can take in.

"But what impresses me most is the spirit of the Salesians, of the boys and of the people of the Don Bosco colony. They all form a big family. The boys who have experienced the love of the Salesians exhibit a touching affection towards them, and the depth of the education received is confirmed by the numerous Salesian vocations, two of whom are already giving their contribution in the school in which they have been formed."[28]

Thus, the Salesian apostolate in Burma continues amidst all kinds of difficulties, and the Salesians spread their influence through new initiatives.

"After closing this ugly chapter of the civil war", continues Fr. Alessi, "we think that it is now time to expand: we have already a group of Burmese confreres, others are getting ready to join us. My dream is to open a house in the capital, Rangoon. Already at our arrival in 1939, the bishop has said that he will never call the Salesians into his city, but then many things happen...we become great friends! A visit of Msgr. Mathias touches him deeply and it is he himself who implores that we open a house in Rangoon. But others will start the work which I cherish so much." In fact, the house of Rangoon is opened in 1954 and it consists of a parish and a flourishing school capable of imparting education to 800 pupils.[29]

During the last period of his stay in Burma, twice Fr. Alessi is compelled to enter a hospital. Thirteen years of difficulties and suffering of all kinds have made him extremely weak. The confreres have this to say about him, "it is a miracle that he survives so many vicissitudes."

In 1948, unable to stand it any longer, he himself asks to be admitted in the hospital of Maymyo. The tests reveal an ulcer in the stomach, but the doctors cannot operate on him, because he is too weak. "Stop here, they tell him, and we will restore you to your former health." After a few days the city is occupied by a band of rebels and Fr. Alessi makes use of the confusion that ensues to go back to his work.

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[28] Alessi, *Pionieri nel Cuore dell'India,* 73; Also Alessi, *Una Vita*, 79.
[29] Cfr. Alessi, Una *Vita per l'India,* 180. Alessi, *Pionieri nel Cuore dell'India,* 73.

Knowing the disastrous condition in which Fr. Alessi finds himself, Fr. A. Pianazzi, his companion during their student days, convinces him and fraternally compels him to go back to Italy for a period of rest.

On 25th July 1951 Fr. Alessi leaves Burma for good. He tells every body that he will be back in three months' time, but he has a strong foreboding that he will not come back again. More than 1000 people accompany him to the Mandalay station, "to bear witness to their affection and gratitude." He is deeply moved and can hardly hide the pain of the separation. Only the conviction of doing God's Will can soothe his suffering at leaving that country he has so much loved and for which he has also suffered so much.

He stops for a few days in Calcutta. The chronicle of COP has this entry on 5th August 1951, "Fr. Alessi arrives after 13 years of absence. He is very weak and rundown in health, he looks like a bundle of bones, but his spirit is always high and serene." He makes another stopover of three days at Bombay, from where he sails for Italy.

In November 1951 Fr. Alessi is made the Provincial of the North Indian Province, to succeed Fr. Pianazzi who is transferred to the Province of Madras. He is the last Provincial nominated by Fr. Ricaldone before his death on 25th November 1951. Fr. Alessi is present at the funeral to represent Salesian India, which has received so much from the mind and heart of Fr. Ricaldone. He will return to India in the following year to take charge of one of the largest Provinces of the Congregation at the time.[30]

11. Nagaland Opens the Door to the Catholic Missionaries

Nagaland is a picturesque region, endowed with an enchanting landscape of green hills, valleys, and rivers. It is surrounded by the states of Arunachal Pradesh in the North, Manipur in the South, Assam in the West, and Myanmar in the East.

Nagaland remains isolated from the rest of the country for many centuries. The state of Nagaland comprising the former Naga Hills district of Assam and the former Tuensang Frontier Division of the North East Frontier Agency is made a centrally Administered Area in 1957,

[30] Cfr. Alessi, Una *Vita per l'India*, 177–180, 187–191.

administered by the President of India through the Governor of Assam. In January 1961, the government of India confers Statehood on Nagaland. It is formally inaugurated on 1st December 1963 as the sixteenth State of the Indian Union.

The population of Nagaland is entirely tribal. The sixteen odd tribes and sub-tribes that inhabit this colourful State have their own distinctive dialects, customs and traditional dress. The prominent tribes among them are Angami, Ao, Sema, Lotha, Rengma, Chakkesang, Konyak, Phom, Chang, Yimchunger, Khiamungan, Zeliang, Kuki and Pochury. The state of Nagaland is divided into eight districts of Kohima, Wokha, Mon, Phek, Zunheboto, Mokokchung, Tuensang, and Dimapur.[31]

Bishop Ferrando is urgently in need of sisters for three centres: Kohima, Tura and Raliang. Fr. Uguet, then Provincial, informs the bishop about a missionary congregation that has been founded recently in Spain in 1944, by Mother Camino Sanz Orio, known under the name of *Missioneras de Cristo Jesus*. The bishop writes to them inviting them to come and help. They accept the invitation, and on 25th November 1948, five of them, among whom is the Foundress, Mother Camino, arrive in Shillong.

The destination of two of the sisters, Sr. Margaret and Sr. Guadalupe, is the Kohima Hospital. Sir Akbar Hydari, the then Governor of Assam, asks the help of Catholic sisters to run it. At that time the Naga Hills District is out of bounds for the Catholic Church. The bishop is happy to accept this invitation: it means another breach in the Religious Monopoly Wall. Accordingly, on 29th December 1949 the two sisters, with Msgr. Bars as their chaplain, leave for Kohima.

Their presence there is objected to by a section of the Christian leaders. But the contract specifies five years service: so they stay on. In 1951 Fr. H. Marocchino replaces Msgr. Bars. By and by, the sisters and their chaplain are allowed to visit the Kohima Village, the sisters to tend the sick and the priest to meet friends. With due authorization, they can also move further afield. A small group of Naga admirers discuss religion with them. This leads to the formation of a tiny Catholic community. The term of office over, the sisters have to leave, much to the sorrow and disappointment of the doctor, patients, and the military. Their service has been excellent.

[31] Cfr. Mattappally, ed. *A Chronicled History of the Houses of the Province of Dimapur*, 96.

Fr. Marocchino is issued no order to quit. The considerate Deputy Commissioner, Mr. Carvalho, who is a fervent Catholic, has reasons to allow him to stay. There are native Catholics in Kohima in need of a priest and besides them certain government employees are Catholics, not to speak of the Catholic servicemen in the security forces.

Fortunately Fr. Marocchino has a few friends with whom he stays after he leaves the hospital premises, until he manages to put up a little hut of his own in a corner of the village. That hut is burned down during the political disturbances in 1956. In 1957 he builds a small chapel in the centre of the village. In 1963 when he leaves Kohima, there is a small but fervent group of Angami Naga Catholics in Kohima area. Among his first converts is also Mr. John Bosco Jasokie, a future Chief Minister of Nagaland. Fr. Joseph Felix and later Fr. P. Burnik succeed him.[32]

The Lothas too open the door to the Church. On 28th December 1950 5 Lothas from Lakhuti come to meet Fr. Bollini in Golaghat.[33] A group has been cut off from the Baptist communion and seeks to be admitted into the Catholic Church. Fr. Bollini is in Golaghat from 1946. In 1941 Fr. Neyens buys four acres of land from a tea-planter's wife for Rs. 20,000. Fr. Bollini is sent there to help Fr. Mellino[34] who succeeds Fr. Neyens. Fr. Mellino works in the Khasi Hills, in Tezpur, Golaghat, and in Gauhati as rector. He serves with zeal and love the people entrusted to him, in spite of much suffering, until 1966. He breaks down in health and returns to Turin where he recovers.

When Fr. Mellino withdraws from Golaghat in 1952, Fr. Bollini continues to work there until 1969. He builds up the mission, the boarding school, the convent and a beautiful church. They are on the border of the forest. To defend his Christians from the depredations of tigers, leopards, and panthers, he traps dozens of them with a cage he devises. *Adivasis*

[32] Ibid. 114–118.

[33] Fr. Felix Bollini: born at Castellanza (Varese Italy) on 1.4.1910, comes to India in 1932, makes his first profession on 11.12.1933, is ordained a priest on 30 January 1943 (Deoli). He works at Saharampur (1944), Barpetta Road (1945), for 24 years at Golaghat, Umran, Sacred Heart College, Sunnyside, Don Bosco School Shillong, where he dies on 20.11.1999 aged 89.

[34] Fr. Fiorenzo Mellino: born at Alba (Italy) on 26.10.1900, comes to India in 1929, makes his first profession on 6.1.1931, is a priest on 27.6.1937. He works at Gauhati, Golaghat, Tezpur and other places in Assam. Due to ill health goes back to Italy in 1966 and dies at Varazze (Italy) on 14.11.1992, aged 92.

make up his flock. But now, with the coming of the Lothas, his people include also the Nagas. He instructs them and forms a new community. In 1954 Fr. Larrea takes care of the Lothas and visits them, whenever he can get an entry permit into Nagaland, and opens a boarding school for their children in Golaghat.

The second centre that Bishop Ferrando wants to give to the Spanish sisters is Tura. He himself accompanies them on 31st December 1948. In Tura, the government has a leper asylum in a dreadful state: hardly any medicines are available, rarely are the patients' wounds dressed, no one visits them. The lepers are in a pitiable condition. Now the sisters offer their service on their behalf. A new era dawns on them. The loving and heroic care of the sisters changes their lives completely. In addition to spiritual care, Fr. A. Buccieri can offer relief in their misery. In Tura, the sisters open St. Xavier's for the girls of the town.

On 20th July 1950 another batch of missionaries of Christ Jesus arrives. They go to staff the Raliang convent. They replace the RNDM (The Queen of the Missions) Sisters, who have zealously worked there for nearly 28 years.[35]

12. A Third Extraordinary Visitor: Fr. Albino Fedrigotti

As early as 12th February 1946 Fr. Uguet asks the Rector Major for a Visitor. "It would be very convenient, he writes, if you could send us a Visitor". Again on 7th June he begs for a Visitor. "Please, send him soon", he writes. To his requests the Rector Major answers on 17th July 1946 saying, "At the moment it is not possible to send either personnel or a Visitor."[36]

On 13th August 1948, Fr. Uguet again expresses the need of a Visitor to solve the various problems that crop up due to the division of the diocese of Krishnagar between India and Pakistan. But it takes another year before Fr. Ricaldone on 18th July 1949, can give him the good news that soon the Visitor would come to see them. In fact, on 19th August 1949,[37] Fr. Uguet can at last write a circular letter to the confreres announcing the coming of the Visitor and gives to all the rectors clear guidelines on what

[35] Cfr. Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands,* 102–105; also Fr. J. Puthenpurakal, "Evangelization among the Nagaland Tribes," in Karotemprel, *The Catholic Church in Northeast India*, 226.
[36] Cfr. *Provincial Archives*, A.1.1.
[37] Cfr. Circular Letters of Fr. Uget, *Provincial Archives*, F.B.5.

to prepare for the coming Visitation, and on how to receive the representative of the Rector Major.

Fr. Albino Fedrigotti,[38] appointed Extraordinary Visitor of the Indian Provinces, leaves Rome for Calcutta on 20th August. On 25th he starts the Visitation of the North Indian Province by visiting Shillong (parish, Don Bosco, and Mawlai), then he goes on to visit Cherrapunjee, Gauhati, Barpetta, Sonada, and from there back again to Assam. He concludes the Visitation of the Assam communities on 16th October by presiding over the meeting of the rectors in Assam.

From 17th October to 12th November he visits all the communities in Bengal and concludes by presiding over a second meeting of the rectors in Bandel.

The topics of the two meetings of rectors are the same: religious life, missions, schools, personnel and vocations. The two reports are merged into one and printed under the title 'Souvenir of the Extraordinary Visitation – 1949'. Fr. Uguet sends this Souvenir to all the confreres together with a circular letter dated 24th November 1949.



V. Rev. Fr. ALVIN FEDRIGOTTI, SDB
Extraordinary Visitor in 1949

On 28th October 1949 Fr. Uguet writes a long letter in Spanish to Fr. Ricaldone in which he gives news about the on-going Visitation and the good it is doing to all the confreres and communities visited so far. At the end of the Visitation on 17th December 1949, he writes again expressing his great joy at the great amount of enthusiasm and desire of renewal the Visitation is arousing among the confreres and thanks the Superior for

[38] Fr. Albino Fedrigotti: born on 21.10.1902, at Tiarno (Trent – Italy), is ordained a priest on 9.7.1928, member of the General Council from 24.2.1948, elected Prefect General on 1.8.1952, dies in Turin (Italy) on 25.8.1986, aged 83; for 5 years he is a member of the General Council and for 22 years Prefect General.

having sent Fr. Fedrigotti as Extraordinary Visitor. "It (the Visitation) is a great grace from the Lord, all the Confreres are satisfied and happy."

Fr. Fedrigotti visits Sonada from the 17th to the 27th September. On 25th he gives the concluding conference to the Salesians in the chapel. The main idea in all his conferences and good nights is 'Fidelity to the Rules and to Don Bosco, and faithful observance of the vows.' On the last day of the Visit he gives a conference each to the students of philosophy and to the aspirants in their respective study halls. To both he speaks on vocation, and tells the aspirants how to behave in the world, should they leave the *aspirantate*. The very pertinent recommendations of the Visitor given to the House Council on the formation of the aspirants are contained in the Visitors' book.

Writing to the Rector Major on 11th December 1949, Fr. Fedrigotti gives his impressions on Sonada. "Sonada," he writes, "is in the clouds; the sun is a rarity, but the climate is healthy. Humidity makes everything mouldy. But the internal climate is excellent". At the end of the Visitation Fr. Fedrigotti gives to the Rector Major his impressions on the whole Province. "My impressions on the whole Province (after completing the Visitation) are positive. Notwithstanding the inevitable difficulties and defects, there exists serenity, cheerfulness and good will. I'm learning a lot of things concerning the prevailing atmosphere and the environment in which the confreres live. Indeed, it is a New World for me!"

As a remembrance of the Extraordinary Visitation, Fr. Fedrigotti gives also the Souvenir and the Motto for the Retreats in 1950: "Know, love, defend the Pope. If you cannot always walk cheerfully, do walk at least courageously and faithfully" (St. Francis de Sales). *"Un pezzo di Paradiso aggiusta tutto* – a piece of paradise settles everything." (Don Bosco).

After visiting the Communities in Assam and Bengal, Fr. Fedrigotti visits also Mandalay in Burma, but not immediately. The Extraordinary Visitation of the three Communities of Mandalay, Anisakan and Rangoon (Thyngangyun) he will make from 30th July to 7th August 1959. The main problems he will point out then are the dearth of personnel (in particular the lack of confessors), and the studies of the aspirants.

After visiting the Northern Province, Fr. Fedrigotti visits the Southern Province. He leaves for Italy on 26th February 1950.[39]

[39] Cfr. Chronicle of the Province 1949-1960 in *Provincial Archives*. B.10.1.1, B.11.1; *Archivio Generale*, 177.

1950–1951

13. Changes of Personnel and other Events Affecting some Houses and the Province as a whole

13.1 Sonada: Change of Personnel, the Cyclonic Storm, and the Landslides[40]

On 13th and 14th June 1949 the North Indian Province celebrates the silver jubilee of the Priestly Ordination of Fr. Provincial, Fr. M. Uguet. The celebration, at which confreres from the various houses of the Province take part, is held at Salesian College Sonada. Msgr J. Careño, Provincial of the South Indian Province and Vicar General of Msgr. Mathias, is also present and he is well impressed by the fact that the young Salesians can do both philosophy and college studies at the Salesian College, affiliated as a private College up to B.A. to the University of Calcutta, and goes down South with the resolve to try to have something similar at Tirupattur.

On 14th June Fr. R. Dal Zovo arrives from Calcutta and he is announced as the new Prefect of Studies in the place of Fr. A. Arneodo[41] who is made rector in Gauhati.

On 26th December 1949 Fr. Balocco,[42] the prefect of Salesian College, is confidentially informed that Fr. Dal Zovo is the new rector of Salesian College in the place of Fr. J. Bacchiarello who is appointed rector of Don Bosco School, Liluah. Fr. Dal Zovo takes charge on 5th January 1950.

On 24th and 25th January 1950, all the non-Indian confreres at Salesian College go to Darjeeling to deposit a declaration that they intend to acquire Indian Domicile. They swear an affidavit before a first class Magistrate. They are told to keep the affidavit with themselves. In force of the declaration of domicile, under section 5 and 9 of the new Constitution, they become *ipso facto* citizens of India on 26th January 1950.

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[40] Cfr. Salesian College Sonada Chronicles.

[41] Fr. Louis Arneodo: born on 28.1.1909 at Saluzzo (Italy), comes to India in 1927, his first profession is on 6.1.1929, is ordained a priest on 27.6.1937. He works in Krishnagar, Sonada, Gauhati, Shillong, and Calcutta. He dies in Turin on 17.7.1987, aged 78.

[42] Fr. William Balocco: born on 21.9.1911, comes to India in 1929; his first profession is on 5.1.1931, is ordained a priest on 23 May 1939, goes to Burma in August 1951, is expelled from Burma in 1966, dies in the Philippines on 1.12.1998, aged 87.

Eventually, nothing of the sort takes place, at least for the non-Indian confreres of Salesian College.

On 2nd May 1950, a telegram from Msgr. Careño, Provincial of the South Indian Province, announces the death of Fr. Peter Berruti, the Prefect General of the Congregation. The Salesians in India owe him a great debt of gratitude for what he did for them as one of the Extraordinary Visitors in 1937–38, and for his prudent and wise guidance through his letters as Prefect General of the Society.

On 16th May 1950, Fr. John Topno arrives at Salesian College accompanying Bro. V. Venturini who is very sick. On 31st May Brother is taken to the TB Sanatorium at Kurseong. However, as Brother's sickness is in an advanced stage, nothing can be done and he breaths his last on 2nd July, aged 39, and is buried next day in the Salesian College compound on the slope under the pine trees at the back of the College building. When the playground behind the house is dug up, his grave is later (1954) shifted to the present graveyard built for the purpose.[43]

In the evening of 3rd June 1950 ten newly professed young Salesians arrive from Kotagiri in the Nilgiri Hills of Tamilnad, four belonging to the Northern Province and 6 to the Southern Province. During the night of 8th June a violent storm with torrential rain causes landslides on the northern side of the Chapel and other places. On the 9th the railway line and the road are blocked for several hours. Early morning of that day, Bishop Morrow, who is in Sonada for his Retreat and some days of rest, leaves for Krishnagar.

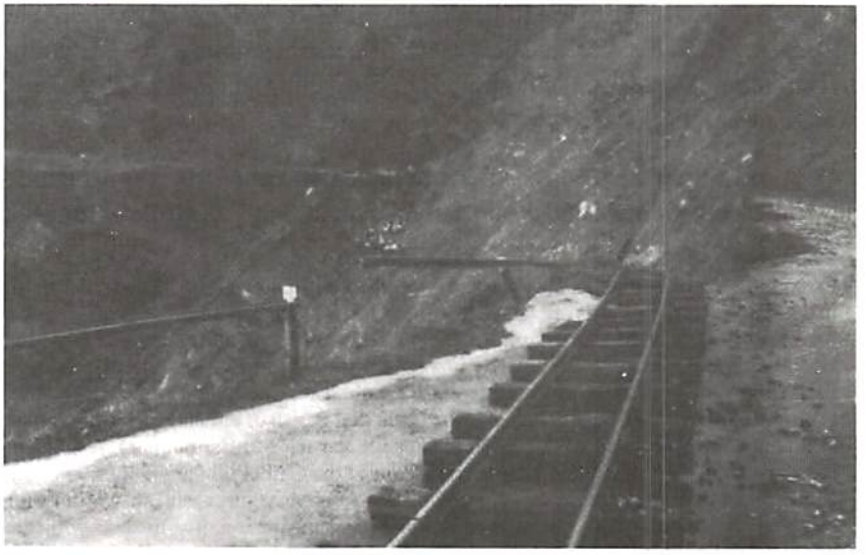
On the night of the 10th and during the day of the 11th heavy rain lashes the place. Landslides block railway and road, a fully crowded jeep rolls down the valley, of all the people in the jeep one dies and seven are wounded. A Hindu gentleman and his family ask and receive shelter. A telegram from the traffic department in Kurseong asks the rector to give

[43] Brother Volfango Venturini, born on 1.10.1911 at Frascati (Italy), is a late vocation. He serves in the Italian army during the Abbissinian war. When the war is over, he asks to become a Salesian and makes his novitiate in Italy. Soon after his profession (1939) he comes to India in December 1939 and works very hard for 10 years in Krishnagar as domestic to Bishop Morrow and as *factotum* in the Bishop' house. He is a man of prayer, totally dedicated to his work. He is also the zealous animator of a flourishing Oratory and the inspirer of some vocations to the Salesian life. Fr. Cajetan Biswas is one of them. He dies at Kurseong (TB Sanatorium) on 2.7.1950, aged 39, and is buried at Salesian College Sonada.

shelter to some of his drivers whose vehicles are caught up in between two landslides.

Again, the whole of the night of the 11th and during the day of 12th the rain continues accompanied by strong winds. Seven B.A. students set out in rain-coats for Darjeeling to write the last paper of Latin (III paper), but are forced to come back, as half a mile away from the College the road turns into a veritable torrent and makes crossing impossible. The College is already without light and without drinking water, as a portion of the pipe has been washed away and cannot be found. North of the chapel some soil continues to slide down. Behind the house, the drain is blocked and the water gets under the building. The brothers go out in pouring rain to clean the drain. Behind the house a big pine tree sliding down, barely misses the corner of the house. The kerosene stock is all but finished and this compels the community to anticipate supper and night prayers. At 6 p.m. the rain stops.

The morning of the 13th reveals the immense damage caused to the road. Half way to Sonada both road and railway and a good strip of the mountain have gone down the valley. Sonada is entirely cut off. It is possible to reach it only by going several hundred yards up the mountain.



Sonada: The Landslide (1950)

Bishop J. Fernandez, who has been at the College for the Ordinations on 10th and 11th (Bro. Rapati, Deacon, Bros. Duca and Stroscio, Subdeacons) and is caught up in the rain, decides to go on foot to Kurseong accompanied by Deacon Rapati. To help them get across a place where mud is more than knee deep, some of the boys go down with planks that are set on the mud. They manage to reach St. Mary's Kurseong safely.

Some of the classes are interrupted and the boys work at cleaning the drains behind the house and some brothers and fathers work at reconnecting the pipes of the water system.

Some more Nepali families, whose houses are in danger, come to ask for shelter and it is given. Telegraph and telephone connection with Kurseong and Darjeeling are cut off. The road is breached or completely washed away in many places.

The worst havoc is in Darjeeling: many houses collapse, report of victims is varied and contradictory, but the death toll seems to run into hundreds. An English planter with his family and friends coming on foot with great difficulty, reports that Darjeeling looks like a town after an air raid. A railway guard says that it will take at least a year before communications are restored fully.

On 14th June Fr. A. Doro[44] and Bro. Turco go to Darjeeling on foot. Fr. Doro hopes to write his Italian paper III of B.A. They return home at 6.15 p.m. without success. The stream of persons coming from or going to Darjeeling increases. Panic spreads in Darjeeling: there is no electricity, water, and food is scarce.

For a number of days after the upheaval caused by the landslide several groups of nuns and Jesuit fathers halt at Salesian College to rest a

[44] Fr. Antony Doro: born at Lobia di S. Giorgio in Bosco (Padova – Italy) on 27.11.1916, in 1931 is an aspirant at Ivrea, comes to India in 1933, makes his first profession on 8.12.1934, is ordained a priest on 8.12.1944 at Dehra Dun Internment Camp. He is Headmaster of Don Bosco School, Krishnagar, from 1945 to 1960, Rector of Don Bosco Park Circus in 1963, and from 1965 to 1976 Headmaster of St. John's School, Bandel. From 1976 till his death he is attached to the Cathedral Parish of Krishnagar. He is wanted as a confessor all over the diocese. He makes regular trips to Behrampore, Azimganj, Palsonda More, Ranaghat and Kalyani. His days at the Cathedral Parish are filled with conferences to Sisters of various communities. He is very successful in working for boys in the schools where he works. A very pleasant personality to deal with, he has mastered both English and Bengali. He dies of a massive heart attack on 2.4.1984, aged 68.

while on their journey on foot from Darjeeling to Kurseong.[45] The District Controller of Supplies repeatedly asks for more and more space to store up provisions to be sent to Darjeeling. From Salesian College the goods are carried by coolies to Sonada where cars are plying. The Controller of Foods tells Fr. Doro that the DC had actually suggested the requisition of the College to be used as a store house, our building being the nearest (and the only one) to the yet unbridged landslide. Electricity is at last restored on 13th July. "We seem to be coming out of the catacombs," the chronicle reports.

On 22nd September, the College receives the first B.A. results.[46] Out of 8 who sit for the exams, 6 pass and 2 fail. Clerics O'Hara, Thomas D'Souza, and Dominic War just manage to pass, Fr. P.J. Sheehy[47] and Fr. A. Doro pass with distinction; cleric R. Stroscio gets honours second-class in History. Fr. Lobo fails in English, but is allowed compartmental. Fr. Balocco, who sits for the exams in Krishnagar, is first given as failed with no compartmental. Later a special letter from the Controller informs that he too passes. This is the first group of students appearing for B.A. from Salesian College. Another remarkable feature of these B.A. exams is that all the 8 students who sit for the exams pass out of 200 in Latin and Italian. Due to the cyclone of June they are physically unable to write

[45] When Father Rector shows the Nuns round the house and takes them to visit the Chapel up to the Altar, one of the Nuns asks him, "Do you have a special devotion to St. Pacificus here?" "Where did you see him?" asks the Rector. "There, in the Sanctuary on the left side." "Oh, there is St., Joseph and St. Francis de Sales." She has read on the book held open by St. Francis de Sales, *Beati Pacifici*, which means 'Blessed are the peacemakers', and she understands it as 'Blessed Pacificus'.

[46] On 1st July (1950) a letter from the University informs the Principal of Salesian College that the College has been granted affiliation in Mathematics up to the I.A. and in Economics up to B.A. Pass.

[47] Fr. Patrick J. Sheehy born on 17.12.1919 at Clonakilty in Cork, a Salesian aspirant at Shrigley, his first profession is on 31.8.1939. He comes to India on 7.2.1940, is ordained a priest on 7.8.1949. His great desire is to work for the poor in the Garo Hills, particularly for the children of lepers. But his dream remains only a dream. He is sent to formation houses and other institutions in the Province: 9 years in Sonada as Catechist, Prefect of Studies, Prefect, and Rector; Rector of Bandel, Liluah, the Catholic Orphan Press, the newly opened Provincial House at Tengra, and Don Bosco Park Circus. He is all things to boys, loves their company, is with them during break time, games time, and other places: dormitory, study hall and church. He loves what boys love: games, sports, walks, acting, and music. He works hard at recruiting vocations during the holidays. He is outstanding in the three Salesian Devotions: the Blessed Sacrament, Mary Most Holy and the Church (the Holy Father). He dies of malignant melanoma of the liver on 19.5.1997, aged 78.

the III paper of Latin and Italian. The University is kind enough[48] to grant this exception instead of canceling the whole examination.

13.2 A Change of Guard: Fr. A. Pianazzi, the New Provincial

Towards the end of June 1950, the various communities of the Province receive a circular letter of Fr. Uguet announcing that from 1st July, Fr. A. Pianazzi will succeed him as Provincial.

The Rector Major writes a letter to Fr. Pianazzi on 22nd May1950, in which he communicates to him his appointment as successor to Fr. Uguet. In the letter the Rector Major anticipates and answers the possible objections and difficulties of Fr. Pianazzi. "I know," he writes, "what you will tell me. I don't have the necessary qualities, you will say. Well, I strongly recommend that you make this conviction take deep roots in your heart, because the more convinced you are of your incapacity, the more you'll pray and will obtain from God all that you need. You will say, again, that you have no experience. It is true, but you will get it by and by. You will add that the times are difficult. This will teach you to embrace generously the cross and to have filial confidence in Mary Help of Christians and in Don Bosco. Courage, go at the feet of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and ask what you need...whatever else I could tell you (in the way of advice), you will find in the Constitutions, in the Regulations, and in the Circular letters of Don Bosco and of his Successors."

On 1st July 1950 Fr. Pianazzi takes charge of the Province, and Fr. Uguet goes to Spain for a well-deserved rest and to regain his health.

The Rector Major writes again to Fr. Pianazzi on 15th July in reply to his letter in which he notifies the date of his assuming office as Provincial. In this letter the Rector Major offers some precious pieces of advice to the new Provincial. "Be a Father, always a Father. Don't be too much in a hurry, think seriously before acting, praise the work of your predecessors, and make no innovations, especially in the first year. Allow the confreres to talk and unbosom themselves, correct them in a fatherly manner."[49]

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[48] Cfr. Alessi, *Pionieri nel Cuore dell' India,* 22.

[49] For the above two letters and following letters to and from Fr. Ricaldone, Cfr. *Provincial Archives*, A.1.1.

14. The 1950 Earthquake

On 15th August 1950, towards evening, a terrible earthquake devastates upper Assam. It is felt as far as Calcutta. It is the fifth greatest earth convulsion in man's recorded history of earthquakes. It is tectonic in nature and lasts several minutes. Its epicentre is on the mountains of Arunachal Pradesh. Those who experience it at close quarters, like the confreres of North Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Golaghat... for months take fright at the least tremor they perceive. The Arunachal hills opposite Dibrugarh undergo severe devastation: they split and swallow up whole villages. The forests are uprooted and roll down the valley. A huge landslide dams up the Subansiri River, which, four days later, breaks through with a roar, flooding the Brahmaputra plains, causing havoc everywhere. Several rivers change course, carrying along people, animals and trees. The number of victims is not known: what is known is that whole villages have disappeared either swallowed up by chasms in the ground or swept away by the floods caused by the earthquake.

Our Upper Assam missions suffer severely. In North Lakhimpur, our mission is razed to



V. Rev. Fr. ARCHIMEDE PIANAZZI, SDB
Provincial (1950–1951)

Fr. Pianazzi is born on 30th September 1905. He comes to India in December 1925, exactly two years after he becomes a Salesian. He is ordained a priest in 1930. In the following year he goes to the Garo Hills (Meghalaya) together with Fr. Rocca.

In 1938 he is appointed the first rector of Salesian College, Sonada, and it was he who gives this nascent enterprise the requisite impetus. In February 1940 he begins his higher studies in theology at St. Mary's, Kurseong, and gets his doctorate in 1941.

In 1942 he is again a missionary in Tura. In 1946 he is appointed rector of Sacred Heart College, Mawlai, where he endears himself to the young Salesians who are in their immediate preparation for priesthood.

In 1950 he is appointed Provincial of Calcutta and in August 1951 he is transferred to Madras as Provincial.

At the General Chapter in 1958 he is elected as the Prefect General of Studies (the present office of Councillor General for Formation).

the ground. Fr. Cerato[50] nearly loses his life in the yawning crevices that open under his feet. The roads look as if the earthquake has ploughed them. Bridges cave in and the railway track is severely twisted and torn away. In Dibrugarh, several walls collapse. The new church in ferroconcrete is severely damaged. Bamboo houses, instead, withstand the shock.[51]

From 1972 he is at the UPS (Salesian Pontifical University) in Rome and dies on 10th December 2000. Fr. Pianazzi was a man as acquainted with the depths of the Summa Theologica as with the hardships of living in a primitive Garo village.

15. The activity of the New Provincial (1950–1951)

Fr. Pianazzi does not allow the grass to grow under his feet. In the first six months as Provincial he visits the whole Province and keeps the Rector Major informed by writing detailed letters to him. Through his circular letters to the confreres he makes known dispositions received from the major superiors, important decisions of the Provincial and his Council, and his own dispositions and guidance to the Province.

On 1st September 1950 he writes a letter[52] to the Rector Major in which he gives detailed news about the earthquake in Assam. He anticipates his return from Burma in order to visit Assam. While confirming the gravity of the disaster, he assures the Rector Major that there are no victims among the Salesians, but the house of Dibrugarh has become uninhabitable and the church is also badly damaged. The school of North Lakhimpur is totally destroyed. Regarding Sonada, he writes that repairs are going on to make good the damages caused by the cyclonic storm of June. A wall has been raised to protect the church.

Regarding Mandalay he writes that the purpose of his visit was to convince Fr. Alessi to go to Italy to regain his health, but he failed to do that. It is important to change him, because he is extremely tired, but has

[50] Fr. Aloysius Cerato: born at Fonzaso (Italy) on 24.8.1911, comes to India in 1925, makes his first profession on 1927, is ordained a priest on 6.12.1934. He spends most of his missionary life working in the Brahmaputra Valley. The 1950 earthquake demolishes his new mission centre in North Lakhimpur, which he bravely sets out to reconstruct. In the sunset of his life he serves as confessor in Matunga and Kurla, where he dies on 24.5.1976: aged 65. As a person he is calm and gentle, amiable, and outgoing.

[51] Cfr. Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands,* 107–108.

[52] Cfr. This letter and the following letters to and from the RM in *Provincial Archives*, A.1.1.

nobody in Burma to substitute for him and those whom Fr. Uguet was planning to send from India (Dal Zovo, Cogliandro[53]) have been sent elsewhere. The confreres are totally discouraged and all are asking for a change, as they find it impossible to continue. In Burma all are greatly afraid of an invasion by Communist China.

On 19th September 1950 Fr. Pianazzi writes again to the Rector Major after having visited all the missionaries in Assam. He mainly confirms what he has written in the previous letter, but he also corrects certain exaggerated impressions of the previous letter, for instance, it is not true that due to the earthquake the Brahmaputra has changed its course at Dibrugarh.

He feels also the need to give a fuller report of his visit to Burma. In a letter of 29th October Fr. Pianazzi describes at length the physical, social, religious, and political condition of Burma, the history of the first eleven years of Salesian work in Burma, and highlights in a particular manner the work, the sacrifices, the perseverance and courage of the confreres, especially of Fr. Alessi, when confronted with incredible difficulties and setbacks.

On 1st December 1950, writing to the Rector Major, Fr. Pianazzi reports on his visit to Krishnagar, gives an appreciation of Bishop Morrow's work and tells him of having put Fr. L. Gobetti as rector of bishop's house.[54] He continues to give his impressions on his visit to

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[53] Fr. Alfred Cogliandro: Born in Genoa (Italy) on 16.5.1911, comes to India in 1932 and makes his novitiate in 1932–33, is ordained a priest on 30.1.1943 in the Concentration Camp of Deoli. After being released from the Camp in 1945, he is appointed administrator in the Salesian *Theologate* of Mawlai. In 1948 he is made Novice Master at Kotagiri. In 1950 he is made Provincial at San Francisco USA, in 1964 he becomes the first Provincial of the Manila Province (Philippines). He dies on 11.9.1992, aged 81, 59 years a Salesian, 49 years a priest and 19 years a Provincial.

[54] Fr. Louis Gobetti is born on 8.1.1921 at Tarcento (Italy). On 27.9.1932 he joins the Salesian Missionary Institute at Ivrea. In 1936 he leaves for India. On 24.11.1936 he begins his Novitiate at Bandel, and makes the first profession on 8. 12.1937. On 2.4.1938, he is one of the first batch of students opening the Salesian College at Ghorabari (Sonada). On 12. 6. 1940, after Italy enters the War, Louis together with other Italians is temporarily interned in Fort William (Calcutta), then at Ahmednagar, Deolali, and finally at Dehra Dun. Freed from the Camp on 22.1.1945, he goes to Tirupattur, where he is ordained a Priest on 23.3.1945. Through the good offices of Bishop Morrow he can come up to Krishnagar in November 1945. Till June 1948 he is posted in Don Bosco School, Krishnagar. In June-July '48, he is made assistant parish priest in Bhoborpara. But soon Bishop Morrow brings him back to Bishop's house, first as Secretary and

Don Bosco School and to the various mission centres. In this report Fr. Pianazzi also deals with the work of the Salesians outside Krishnagar, such as, COP, Liluah, and Bandel.

At the end of the letter he also makes his 'manifestation' to the Rector Major writing about his health, his work, and his spiritual life. "Till now," he writes, "I feel that the new office has done good to my life of piety, also because the realization of this responsibility has given me a shake up. I have good will, so I think. I want to be in everything a docile instrument in the hands of the Lord and of Don Bosco. Please help me to remember and practise my resolutions better."

The Rector Major answers to this letter on 20th December 1950 by touching briefly, *telegraficamente,* all the points dealt with in it. Regarding his personal life, the Rector Major has his own fatherly recommendations to give. "Please don't work too much, take care of your health and of that of the confreres. Take for certain that the more holy you will be, the easier will be your work for the sanctification of your children. Live a life of union with God, and keep before your eyes Don Bosco and his spirit."

On 8th December 1950 Fr. Pianazzi sends a letter[55] to the confreres enclosing some urgent instructions of the Rector Major to the Salesians regarding the renewal of the Consecration of the Congregation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus to be made in all the houses of the Province to commemorate

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Episcopal Delegate, later as Vicar General. On 26.1.1950 Louis becomes an Indian citizen. In December 1950, the Provincial, Fr. A. Pianazzi, makes him Rector of the Salesian community of bishop's house. When Bishop Morrow gives his resignation in 1969, Louis is made Vicar Capitular. After 25 years of fruitful work in Krishnagar, in 1971 he is transferred as parish priest to Begopara (Ranaghat), where he will work for 18 years. His main preoccupation is to establish at Begopara a fervent Christian community by helping many of the Dacca Christians from Bangladesh to settle down in their new Parish. He will also express his great love to Our Lady by building a new beautiful Church in honour of our Lady of Guadalupe completed in 1984. In 1988 Fr. Louis is made Prior of the Bandel Shrine, now raised to the rank of Minor Basilica, where he is still working untiringly today at the age of 82. He has totally renovated and beautified the four centuries'old Bandel Shrine to make it worthy of its title of Minor Basilica. Together with the material Church he is also building the Church made of living stones, a growing Catholic community. Cfr. Julian Sunil Martin Roy, *Louis Gobetti – Italy's gift to India* (Calcutta: Roy Sumusty Publications, 2000).

[55] Cfr. Circular Letters of Fr. Pianazzi, *Provincial Archives*, B.5.

the one done by Fr. Rua on 31st December 1900. The renewal of the Consecration done 50 years before is to be done on 3rd December 1950. The Rector Major also gives very detailed guidelines to the rectors on the modalities of the preparation to be made leading to the 3rd of December and the actual way of solemnizing the Consecration itself on that day.

15.1 Bandel Becomes an *Aspirantate* for a Second Time

The Provincial Council presided over by Fr. Pianazzi meets in Shillong on 2nd October 1950. An important point of discussion is the question of the houses of formation consequent to the division of the *studentates* (of philosophy and theology) of the two Provinces. Regarding the *aspirantate*, all agree that Bandel is the more suitable place for the *aspirantate* even better than Shillong or Tirupattur.

In January 1951 Fr. P. Doro, the Prefect of Salesian College Sonada, is sent down to Kerala to recruit vocations. He comes up with over 80 boys, of these about five boys are from Tirupattur. As the boys are too many for either Bandel or Sonada, they are split into two groups. The bigger group of about 60 boys is settled in Bandel. The beginnings in Bandel are very tough, as the facilities are very meagre. The boys are made to sleep in the choir-loft and in the sacristy of the church, and in a small dormitory on the top floor of a small two-storey building, adjacent to the Quantin house, which has been built for the purpose by Fr. Piasecki, the Prior of Bandel. The ground floor of the small building is used for offices and rooms for the fathers and in the Quantin house there is one room and two classrooms. In the beginning the meals are taken under the trees. The staff consists of Fr. W. Balocco, who is in-charge for some time till Fr. E. Cinato comes back from Italy as rector, Fr. J. Wollaston, Prefect of studies, Fr. Del Nevo,[56] catechist and confessor, Bro. Michael Cahoj, and two clerics, Bro. M. Baroi, and Bro. U. Turco, assistants and teachers.

The second group, 2 old boys from Tirupattur and 21 new boys, reach Sonada on 17th February. For them a special class is arranged, as they cannot fit into any other class.

[56] Fr. Aloysius Del Nevo: born at Piacenza (Italy) on 17.10.1907, comes to India in 1936, makes his first profession on 8.12.1937, is ordained a priest on 27.7.1947, dies in Turin on 19.7.1955 aged 48.

15.2 Fr. Pianazzi is Transferred as Provincial of Madras

As noted above, Fr. Pianazzi takes his new assignment as Provincial seriously. In a short time he visits the whole of his large Province, gives long reports of these visits to the Rector Major, and decides with his Council to reopen the *aspirantate* at Bandel. He makes Fr. Uguet rector of the COP and Provincial Economer, in the place of Fr. Piasecki, and presides over a Rectors' meeting after the first Retreat at Mawlai in June 1951.

However, his stint as Provincial of the Northern Province is of a short duration. On 22nd August 1951, Fr. Pianazzi writes the last circular letter to the confreres informing them that obedience is sending him as Provincial of the Southern Province in the place of Fr. Careño who has gone back to Spain. As his successor has not been appointed yet, and as it is the desire of the superiors that he should proceed at once to the Province he has been transferred to, he appoints Fr. I. Ricaldone to take his place until the new Provincial is appointed.

16. The Shillong Diocese Mothers the Diocese of Dibrugarh

In 1947 Bishop Ferrando writes to the Rector Major saying that the time has come to split the diocese of Shillong: its development, the great number of mission stations and Christian villages, the vastness of the Northeast, the areas not yet evangelized, etc. all call for the division of the diocese. The Rector Major approaches Rome on the matter.

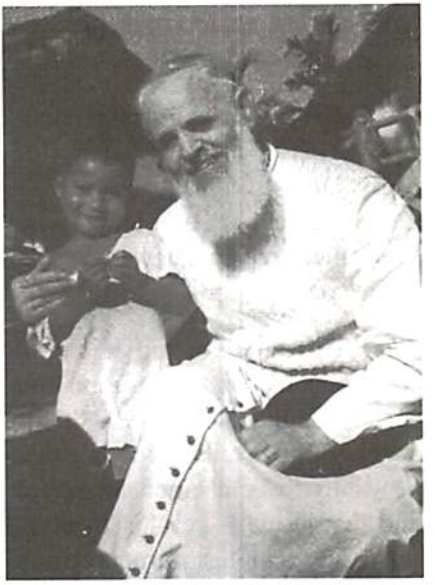
On 25th July 1951, news reaches informing that the Holy See has accepted the bishop's proposal for the division of his extensive diocese and has erected the new diocese of Dibrugarh. It is a great blessing: in the vast Shillong diocese there are 19 mission centres, manned by 56 priests, with a total of 86,511 Catholics. The new diocese comprises the Dibrugarh and Sibsagar districts of Assam, the Lohit and Tirap districts of NEFA (Arunachal Pradesh), Nagaland, and Manipur.

Fr. Orestes Marengo, a beloved and experienced missionary, is nominated as its first bishop. All rejoice at the wise choice, except the new bishop himself. It is not easy to get him to accept. He comes to the Northeast on 23rd December 1923, as one of the first batches of novices. He never returns home after that not even to visit his mother and relatives.

He does well as missionary, rector, and master of novices. He is loved by all, because of his courtesy, zeal, and self-abnegation.

At the time of his appointment, he is working among the Adivasis of Nowgong district. There are Mikir (now called Karbi) Catholics in the Khasi Hills. But no work has been done among them in Nowgong, then their District and home. One day in 1949 a deputation of Mikirs of the Sojong village comes to him and invites him to go and visit them in their homes. He goes and Mikirs begin to enter the church. He brings a few boys to the Gauhati boarding school to learn the Christian way of life and eventually to help their people. He starts learning their language and prepares prayers and hymns for them.

Fr. Michael Devalle, who founds the first mission station in Nowgong, Salana, and works there for several years with zeal and dedication, succeeds Fr. Marengo. By 1959, the Salana parish has nearly 4000 Catholics scattered in 28 communities. On withdrawing in 1960, he hands over the mission to the diocesan priests. Fr. Donato Fernandes is its first diocesan parish priest, assisted by Fr. K.C. Chacko. Fr. M. Devalle stays 9 years alone



Rt. Rev. Bishop ORESTES MARENGO, SDB
1st Bishop of Dibrugarh (1951–1964)
1st Bishop of Tezpur (1964–1969)
Episcopal Vicar and Administrator of Tura (1972–1979)

Bishop Orestes Marengo is born on 29th August 1906 at Diano D'Alba (Cuneo-Italy). He does his high school studies and Latin at Valdocco, close to the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians from 1919 to 1923. Here he has the rare chance of coming to know personally Fr. Paul Albera, Fr. Philip Rinaldi, Fr. Ricaldone, and other eminent Salesians.

His ardent desire is to be a missionary in Equador, but Fr. Bartolomeo Fascie, the General Councellor for Studies, does not give his approval. At the end of his high school studies, he again asks his Provincial to go to the missions, forgetting to apply for the novitiate. Told of his mistake, he makes a fresh application. He is admitted to the novitiate on 19th July 1923 at Foglizzo. But his heart is not there, but somewhere far away in some missions. His novice master understands him and looks for an opportunity to help him out. One of the boys from the group meant for

in Salana in the midst of difficulties and privations.[58]

Msgr. Marengo is consecrated bishop in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians on 27th December 1951. His mother who is advanced in years now is present at the consecration.

He is accorded a grand welcome in his diocese on the second Sunday of May 1952. In his first homily he tells his people that he wants to be a Good Shepherd and that he will seek his flock as far as the remotest corners of the vast diocese, thus living up to his motto, 'To Seek Souls'.

17. Death of Fr. Peter Ricaldone

On 3rd December 1951 Archbishop Mathias sends a letter to the Salesians in India, breaking the news of the death of "our beloved and venerated Rector Major, Fr. Peter Ricaldone on 25th November 1951, at 3.38 p.m."[59]

On 15th November Fr. Ricaldone feels indisposed and goes to bed early. At the beginning, it is thought to be a normal flu, which he usually gets every year in November, but soon

Assam drops out and another dies. Eligius Cinato asks permission from Fr. Ricaldone and advises Orestes to do the same. The first group of novices, led by Fr. Stephen Ferrando and Bro. Joseph Foglia, leaves on 2nd December 1923, reaches Bombay on the 18th. Orestes starts his novitiate on 20th January 1924 and makes the first profession on 21st January 1925. He does his philosophy studies in Our Lady's House, Shillong. His practical training is in Don Bosco Orphanage, Gauhati. At the beginning of 1929 he goes back to Shillong to do his theological studies, which he crowns with the ordination to the Priesthood on 2nd April 1932.

Gauhati is the place of his first priestly mission. He is the prefect of studies, but he is only too happy to move out to the villages and tea gardens and leave the work at the centre to Fr. Scuderi, the rector and parish priest. After a short missionary experience at Dibrugarh, when Fr. Scuderi is appointed Provincial, Fr. Orestes becomes the rector of Don Bosco Gauhati. In August 1935, Fr. Antony Alessi is made rector of Don Bosco School, and Fr. Marengo is now freer to work in the villages. Towards the end of the year Fr. Scuderi calls him to Calcutta and to Bandel and makes him novice master of the new batch of novices just arrived from Italy. In February 1940 he is also made rector at Sonada in the place of Fr. Pianazzi, and there he remains till December 1946. He is sent to Tezpur to tour in Nowgong, starts working for the Karbis (formerly Mikirs), for the Garos, immigrants from the Sylhet, for the Oraons, and other tribes.

On 23rd July 1951, Fr. Marengo is nominated bishop of Dibrugarh. He resists all attempts from every quarter to accept the nomination; finally he gives in to the advice of Fr. Ricaldone. His Episcopal Ordination is on 27th December

[58] Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands*, 105, 108–109.
[59] Cfr. *Provincial Archives*, A.1.1

complications set in, which alarm doctor and superiors. On 22nd all hope is practically lost. His exceptionally strong constitution is undermined. When Fr. Ziggiotti, the Prefect General, tells him the seriousness of the case, Fr. Ricaldone asks immediately for Viaticum. He receives Holy Communion and asks to be left alone. Even in this instance he maintains great serenity and equanimity.

For some time, Fr. Ricaldone has been asking God to grant him to finish his last work, a lengthy study on *Don Bosco Educatore* in two volumes. On 16th August, the

1951, in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians. The solemn installation is on 18th May 1952. His Episcopal motto is 'To save souls', a motto he scrupulously lived for the rest of his life. On 17th July 1964 he is transferred to Tezpur as the first bishop of that diocese. Realizing that the government is not happy to have a non-Indian as bishop of Tezpur, Bishop Marengo submits his resignation to Rome, which Rome accepts on 25th January 1969. From 1972 to 1979 he is made Episcopal Vicar and Administrator of Tura. In 1979 the new bishop of Tura, Msgr. Mamalassery asks for his help, something which he does till his death. He dies on 30th July 1998, aged 92. Bishop Marengo is considered to be the greatest missionary of the Northeast, a seeker of souls, an exemplary religious, a lover of Christ and of his Blessed Mother, a man of prayer, a very warm and loving person, a loving 'Pastor', a polyglot, cheerful and optimistic.[57]



The Cathedral Church of Dibrugarh, built by Fr. Piasecki and dedicated to the Sacred Heart. In it lie Fr. Piasecki's mortal remains.

[57] Cfr. Joseph Puthenpurackal, *Bishop Orestes Marengo, Northeast India's Unparalleled Missionary* (Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publications, Sacred Heart College, 2000).

anniversary of Don Bosco's birthday, he writes the preface, which can be considered as his Spiritual Testament. A few days before falling sick, he finishes correcting the proofs of the second volume.

The funeral takes place on Tuesday, 27th November at 10.30 a.m. in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians, where hundreds of Masses are celebrated for the repose of his soul. Cardinal Fossati, the Archbishop of Turin, assists at the Solemn Requiem Mass celebrated by Fr. Renate Ziggiotti.

The funeral procession to the cemetery starts at 2.30 p.m. One cardinal, ten bishops, hundreds of priests and religious of various Orders and Congregationsm and more than one hundred thousand people form the funeral cortege. Fr. A. Alessi, the recently appointed Provincial of the Northern Indian Province, who is present at the funeral, writes that it is more 'a triumph' than a funeral procession.

His Holiness Pius XII, through Msgr. Montini, sends immediately his condolences. Telegrams are received from the President of the Italian Republic, the Prime Minister, Members of Parliament and Senate, and by the Hierarchy. All the civil and military authorities are represented at the funeral.

Fr. Peter Ricaldone has been a great Salesian, in love with Don Bosco and his spirit, a great leader, an organizer, a man of vision, and a wise Superior. The Salesians in India, the Salesian works, especially the Salesian Missions, owe him a great debt of gratitude for his wise and timely guidance, and his fatherly and firm exercise of authority.

CHAPTER IX
FORGING AHEAD IN THE FACE OF SETBACKS AND OPPOSITION 1952–1959

1. The Hectic Life of the New Provincial 2. Forging Ahead in the Dioceses Entrusted to the Salesians: 2.1 Diocese of Shillong: 2.1.1 The Return of a Pioneer 2.1.2 New Mission Centres: Damra, Baghmara, Nongpoh, Tangla, Pynursla, Dalu, Dhekhiajuli 2.1.3 Dedication of the New Cathedral to Mary Help of Christians 2.1.4 The Passing away of Two Pioneers 2.1.5 More Trials for the Church 2.2 Diocese of Dibrugarh: 2.2.1 New Mission Centres: Doom Dooma, Golaghat, Naharkatya, North Lakhimpur, Digboi 2.2.2 The New Mission of Manipur 2.2.3 The Mission Among the Thankuls 2.2.4 The Great Leap Forward 2.3 Diocese of Krishnagar: 2.3.1 Mission Centres: The Cathedral of the Most Holy Redeemer (enlarged and embellished), Ranabondo, Berhampore, Maliapota, Ranaghat, Chapra, Raghabpur, Kalyani, Bongaon, Thakurnagar, Monsadah 2.3.2 Centenary of the Mission of Krishnagar 3. The Rector Major's First Visit to the Indian Provinces 4. Life in the Institutions 4.1 Sonada 4.2 Don Bosco Liluah 4.3 The New Novitiate at Sunnyside 4.4 Burma: Mandalay, Anizakan, Thyngangyun 4.5 A New Don Bosco School at Calcutta - Park Circus 5. The Fourth Extraordinary Canonical Visitation 6. The Second Division of the Province: September 1959.

The years from 1952 to 1959 are marked by a great dynamic thrust in the dioceses of Shillong, Dibrugarh and Krishnagar, and in the Salesian institutions of the Northeast, West Bengal and Burma. This all round progress, however, is not always painless and free from setbacks and, at times, open opposition from various quarters.

However, under the leadership of zealous, determined, and totally dedicated persons like Fr. A. Alessi, the Provincial, Bishop Ferrando, Bishop Marengo, Bishop L R Morrow, and other enthusiastic Salesians, the already established institutions and mission centres are consolidated and developed and new mission centres are established. Setbacks and difficulties of various kinds do not dampen the enthusiasm and the enterprising spirit of the missionaries.

Two events contribute greatly in this process of growth and expansion serving as inspiration and giving a sense of direction. They are: the visit of the Rector Major, Fr. Renato Ziggiotti in 1955, the First Rector Major to visit the Indian Provinces, and the Extraordinary Canonical

Visitation of Fr. Modesto Bellido, General Councillor for the Missions in 1959, which results in the second division of the Province.

1. The Hectic Life of the New Provincial

After overcoming the initial bureaucratic tangles to get a visa to enter India, Fr. A. Alessi reaches Calcutta to take charge as the new Provincial on 15th February 1952, received with great enthusiasm and joy by all the confreres.

In his first circular letter he invites the confreres to be faithful to Don Bosco and the mission entrusted to them. He then makes a quick visit to all the houses and on 18th March 1952, meets the Provincial Council at Shillong. On 7th March he leaves for Burma to visit the confreres there. He is back on 18th April. On 20th April he holds a second meeting of the Provincial Council and on 22nd he leaves again for Gauhati and Shillong to be back at the Provincial office at Calcutta on 27th April.

On 13th June, his name day, he has the joy of giving the cassock to 14 novices, makes a quick visit of all the houses, and on 4th July he leaves for Italy to take part in the XVII General Chapter that elects Fr. Renato Ziggiotti as Rector Major on 1st August 1952.

On 13th October Fr. Alessi is back again in Calcutta. Till 7th



V. Rec. Fr. ANTONY ALESSI, SDB
Provincial (1951–1959)

Fr. Alessi is born at Nove (Vicenza-Italy) on 27th April 1906. He makes the *aspirantate* at Faenza and the Novitiate and philosophy studies at Castel De' Britti near Bologna. He makes his first profession on 16th September 1923. Fr. Archimede Pianazzi is his companion.

On 12th December 1925, he leaves for India and reaches Shillong on 5th January 1926. In March 1926 he begins his course of theology that he completes in Bandel with the priestly ordination on 26th April 1931. In August 1931 he is in Gauhati together with Fr. A. Pianazzi and Fr. V. Scuderi, who is rector and parish priest of a parish as large as the Brahmaputra Valley, practically the present Tezpur diocese. On 1st June 1932, together with Fr. A. Ravalico, he goes to establish the new mission of Tezpur. After three years of arduous and fruitful missionary activity, obedience sends him to Gauhati

November he visits all the houses once again. This hectic schedule cannot but have an adverse effect on his health. "His ulcer must be causing him acute pain, but he tries to hide it from everyone," notes the Chronicle.

On 12th November Fr. Provincial leaves for Burma, where the confreres are facing some great difficulties from the local Authorities. He is back on 25th, and on the 27th he leaves for Shillong to visit all the mission centres of the Northeast. For Christmas he is in Tura, where he has the joy of administering 32 baptisms.

Fr. Alessi continues such visits to all the centres throughout his term as provincial. His secretary, Fr. Joseph Dal Broi[1], keeps informing the readers of the chronicle about the poor health of the Provincial, "he appears to be very tired, his health is not at all good."

Before the year 1952 draws to a close, some important changes of personnel take place, which are also indicative of the vision that the Provincial has for the Province. On as rector. Here he builds up a professional school for about 300 apprentices and expands the orphanage to accommodate 200 boys.

On 28th January 1939 he takes charge of Fr. Lafon's works in Mandalay (Burma), a small orphanage, a school, and a parish church. He has to reorganize the orphanage, practically closing it and starting it all over again. When in 1941 the Japanese occupy Burma, the three remaining Salesians find themselves flooded by a wave of refugees. The British bombs raze the Salesian house to the ground. In 1945 there is the second battle for Mandalay. Fr. Alessi rebuilds the church, the school and the orphanage, which are bombed again and partly damaged during the political unrest that follows.

In August 1951 Fr. Alessi goes back to Italy for a rest, but in November of the same year he is nominated Provincial of the North Indian Province where he will work indefatigably till August 1959, when the Province is divided and he is nominated Provincial of the new Province of Gauhati.

After 13 years as Provincial, when his term is over he asks for a quieter job. He is asked to join the Bombay Province. He is made rector of the Apostolic School of Lanavla, whose building he enlarges and completes.

In 1968–1969 he is at the Provincial House, Matunga, and in 1969-70 he is the acting rector of St. Joseph's Technical school, Kurla (Bombay). In June 1970, Fr. Alessi is nominated first rector of the Missionary Apostolic School at Borivli

[1] Fr. Joseph Dal Broi is called down to Calcutta to be the Secretary to Fr. Alessi in April 1953. On 27 May 1950, 27 boys hailing from Kerala begin their *aspirantate* at Mawlai. On 5 May 1951, the novitiate is reopened at Mawlai with Fr. J. Dal Broi as Novice Master. The First Profession of this group of novices is on 8 May 1952. On 16 April 1953, a second batch of 14 novices makes their First Profession. With their profession the novitiate in Shillong is again suspended for a time, and the new novices are sent down to the South. On 24 May, Fr. J. Dal Broi reaches Calcutta to be Secretary to the Provincial.

20th February 1952, Fr. Wollaston is called by the Provincial to Shillong to take over as the principal of St. Antony's College, in the place of Fr. I. Ricaldone who has gone to Italy. Fr. Francis Cyril[2] takes his place in Bandel. Fr. Antony Duca leaves for Burma to be the Headmaster and Prefect of Studies of Don Bosco School Mandalay on 9th November 1952. On 14th October he receives the permit to enter Burma.

Other obediences are announced on 8th December 1952:

- Fr. R. Maiquez is proposed for Mandalay, but he will not receive a permit from the Burmese government to enter the country.
- Fr. A. Buccieri[3] becomes the rector of Liluah, in the place of Fr. J. Bacchiarello,
- Fr. Bacchiarello and Fr. Piasecki are appointed to Sonada as confessors,
- Fr. O. Paviotti[4] is the new rector of Salesian College Sonada in the place of Fr. R. Dal Zovo who goes to Mawlai as Prefect of Studies.

(Bombay). In 1974 he is transferred to what will be his last Salesian community, the Provincial House at Matunga. Here he continues his collaboration with Fr. Maschio, and is made responsible for the religious services in the Shrine.

All through his life, Fr. Alessi undergoes great physical suffering due to poor health, accidents with narrow escapes, and surgical interventions, especially in his last years. He never complains, trying to resist any attempts at medical assistance. On 18th January 1995, climbing the staircase leading to his room after celebrating Mass, he collapses on the landing close to the door of his room. The doctor who is immediately summoned by the rector, declares him dead. He is 89, 72 years a Salesian, and 64 years a Priest.

[2] Fr. Francis Cyril is born on 17 July 1923, makes his first profession on 12 February 1943 at Tirupattur and is ordained a priest on 7 December 1951. He works for a number of years in the Calcutta Province (Bandel, Park Circus), then in the Province of Gauhati, and from 1980 in the Province of Bombay, where he dies on 27 March 1995.

[3] Fr. Buccieri is born in Sicily in 1913, he comes to India after the practical training in 1934, is ordained a priest on 5.11.1938, he works in Sonada, Liluah, Shillong and then especially among the Garos, whose language he learns to perfection. He dies in Shillong on 3.11.1998, aged 85.

[4] Fr. Paviotti is born at Bicinicco (Udine-Italy) on 30.1.1911, comes to India in 1929, makes his first profession on 9.1.1930. In Gauhati, during practical training, he masters the Assamese language and later he publishes an Assamese Grammar. He is ordained a priest at Mawlai, Shillong, on 5.11.1938. At different times he teaches Theology at Mawlai, in the concentration Camp, at Yercaud, at Kristu Jyoti College. In 1952 he is made Rector of Salesian College, Sonada; in 1955 he goes as Rector to Mawlai. At the division of the Province he becomes the Provincial of the Calcutta Province. In 1964 he succeeds Fr. Alessi as Provincial of the Gauhati Province, but due to ill health he has to discontinue. In 1967 he attends courses in Missiology and Spirituality at the Gregorian University. Back in India, he is professor of Theology, Missiology, Spirituality and Indology at Mawlai, and a well-appreciated confessor and spiritual guide in the various institutions in Shillong. He dies on 11.10.1991 at Udine (Italy), aged 80.

– Fr. P. Bianchi goes to Bandel, and Fr. Tognocchi[5] from the COP, where he has been working at the Raffle, goes to Jowai.

2. Forging Ahead in the Dioceses entrusted to the Salesians

2.1 Diocese of Shillong

2.1.1 The Return of a Pioneer

To the delight of all in Shillong, Fr. C. Vendrame returns to the Northeast in 1951. When he is released from the Dehra Dun internment camp he is not able to return to the Khasi Hills, as Northeast is still a war zone. Msgr. L. Mathias, who knows and esteems him much, welcomes him in Madras and assigns him to the Wandivash parish in the North Arcot district in Tamil Nadu.

There he immediately reaches out to the people of his parish. He visits families of all castes and strata of society, introduces himself as the father of all without distinction. He endears himself to all. He has plans for a new church, school and oratory for the children, to bring back the lapsed Catholics since World War I, etc.

Before he can carry them all out, he is called back to the Northeast. As he reaches Mawlai, the bishop, the staff and the students of Sacred Heart Theological College, and the people give him a rousing welcome.



Rev. Fr. VENDRAME COSTANTINO, SDB
(1893–1957)

He is given the new assignment to establish the Mawkhar-Jaiaw parish. He reaches his parish quietly, unheralded; he has no house, no church, no office and no presbytery. He is happy to be back among his Khasi people. He gathers his little flock for Mass in the hall of St. Joseph's

[5] Fr. Mario Tognocchi is born in Italy in 1918, he professes on 19.9.1936, comes to India at the end of 1936 or early 1937, is ordained a priest at Shillong in 1944. He dies at Haverstraw (USA) on 7.12.1985, aged 67.

school run by the RNDM Sisters. He rents a small room as his office, and has his meals and residence at the Theological College. He often fails to turn up for his meals. He is so late to go to bed and so early to rise and be off that his presence is hardly noticed in the community.

In 1952 the church buys a plot of land and a house in Mawkhar and in 1953 Fr. Vendrame begins the construction of a hall cum chapel. He opens a school in the parish for over 400 poor children.

In 1957 Fr. P. Tonello takes over as parish priest of Mawkhar-Jaiaw parish. It is the desire of Fr. Vendrame that he should succeed him. The Mawkhar community has 3000 Catholics and the M.E. School has 600 pupils. The RNDM Sisters run St. Joseph's School efficiently and with great success.[6]

2.1.2 New Mission Centres

On 8th May 1946, Fr. U. Colzani[7] opens a centre at Kharkutta. When he finds it really inconvenient, he moves to Damra and becomes the founder of Damra mission in the Garo Hills in 1948. In the beginning he lives in a hut, on the wall of which he has pasted up a placard in large letters with the words 'Catholic Church'. Later he builds a better house in sal-wood. Fr. G. Stadler[8] efficiently helps Fr. Colzani. By 1959 the Catholics number 6000[9].

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[6] Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands,* 111–112, 119.

[7] Fr. U. Colzani is born on 4.1.1908 at Monza (Italy). He comes to the Salesians as a young man, after working two years in a bank. He lands in Bombay on 29.10.1931. He makes his first profession on 8.12.1932. He is ordained a priest on 5.6.1941. On being released from the Dehra Dun Camp he is sent to North Garo Hills. He founds the Damra mission, where he is from 1948 to 1962. In 1962 he is transferred to Calcutta to take care of the Raffle. In Calcutta he takes care of the finances of the Province, as Provincial Economer. In 1971 he goes to New Delhi to help, as an additional Secretary in the Papal Nunciature. When his assignment is completed, he stays on in Delhi. It is in the Don Bosco Technical School (Delhi) that he dies suddenly on 10.3.1982, aged 74. (Cfr. Obituary Letter).

[8] Fr. George Stadler is born in Holzkirchen (Germany) on 28.3.1917. At 18 he comes to India in 1935. He is a novice of Fr. Foglia at Our Lady's House and makes his profession on 8.12.1936. During the war he is interned at Deoli and Dehra Dun. He is ordained a priest on 20.9.1945 in the Camp. He is released on 18.10.1946 and is sent with Fr. Colzani to Damra, and from here to Tura as a touring missionary. In 1956 he is with Fr. Lopez at Baghmara. He has many adventures during his long journeys through forests teaming with elephants, tigers, bears, and serpents. He is indeed a pioneer missionary. He baptizes over 10,000 Garos. Gradually his heart condition deteriorates. In 1982 Fr. George leaves for Germany. He dies at Peisemburg (Germany) on 12.12.1986, aged 69. (Cfr.Obituary letter).

[9] Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands,* 119.

Fr. Francis Cowenbergh founds the Baghmara (Garo Hills) mission in 1949. At the beginning he lives in a tiny house. In 1955, due to the prejudiced report of a policeman, Fr. Francis has to leave the mission.

In 1952 Fr. Tonello and Bro. Mantarro complete the construction of the new church at Cherrapunjee, the Don Bosco Shrine. It is blessed that same year.

In 1953 the Nongpoh mission is opened. It is an important step: the Bhoi region of the Khasi Hills needs support and development. It has been looked after from Shillong and then from Mawlai, both parishes are distant from the centre of the Bhoi region. The extensive district of Nongpoh has Khasis, Karbis, and Tiwas within its boundaries. Fr. Victor Mauri[10] succeeds Fr. M. Botto,[11] the founder of the mission. From December 1958 Fr. Balavoine[12] helps him. In addition to his missionary activity, Fr. Balavoine devotes himself to the Karbi language, translates the New Testament, the liturgical books and catechisms, and compiles a dictionary and textbooks for schools. Later, he does the same for the Tiwas language, using the Roman script for the first time.[13]

Fr. Guido Colussi[14] and Fr. Marino Peditto[15] have been developing the mission of Tangla. They put up in a hut. In 1953, Fr. Guido begins the construction of a beautiful and spacious church. It is dedicated in 1954. A bigger boarding school comes up later. For the people he opens two banks, one is for financial transactions and the other is a rice bank.

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[10] Fr. Victor Mauri is born in Milan (Italy) on 23.4.1902, comes to India in 1930, makes his profession on 24.12.1931, and is ordained a priest on 30.9.1939. He dies at Bologna on 23.6.1978, aged 76.

[11] Fr. Mario Botto is born in 1900. He dies in Tezpur on 14.9.1965, aged 65.

[12] Fr. Michael Balavoine is born at Chartres (France) on 14.1.1922. He is a Salesian on 17.10.1945 and comes to India in 1949. He is ordained a priest on 24.5.1954. His Motto is "Going therefore...teach all nations" (Mt. 28, 19). His heart is in the missions, preaches the Gospel to the Karbis and Lalungs and establishes Christian communities. His zeal takes him to the remotest villages. He dies on 11.10.1989, aged 67. (Cfr. Obituary letter).

[13] Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands*, 118.

[14] Fr. Guido Colussi: born at Casarsa (Italy) on 26.2.1912, comes to India in 1929 and makes his first profession on 6.1.1931, is a priest on 23.5.1939, works at Barpetta Road, Tangla, Calcutta (Park Circus), New Delhi, Ranchi (Hatia, Kokar); dies at Ranchi on 24.2.1997, aged 85. "Fr. Guido is a visionary for his times. He could dream big things...his dreams brought cynical smiles to the faces of people, but today these very dreams have all come true. He is a hard worker; when he decides on something, nothing can stop him. And in fact nothing does stop him!" (Fr. K.A. Joseph, Provincial).

[15] Fr. Marino Peditto: born at Messina (Italy) on 19.12.1923, makes his profession on 1.1.1940, he is a priest on 15.6.1947, comes to India in 1948. He is now working in Sicily.

The Pynursla centre, wet and damp, is started in 1957 by Fr. E. Usai[16] and Fr. R. Toneguzzo.[17] In the village there are only 5 Catholic families. The number goes up to 88 when they leave.

The Dalu mission, situated 50 kms away from Tura, is opened in 1959 and is later enlarged by Fr. Costa in 1964.[18]

The Dhekhiajuli mission too is opened in 1959. Fr. Ermenegildo Boscardin[19] starts the construction of a big church, a three-storey building and boarding. At his death Fr. U. Turco is asked to take over Dhekhiajuli. He completes the construction of the building and develops the mission centre further.[20]

2.1.3 Dedication of the New Cathedral in Shillong to Mary Help of Christians

There is great joy in 1954 when the Holy See grants permission to dedicate the new Cathedral to Mary Help of Christians. Bishop Ferrando has been wanting for a long time to make the Cathedral a monument in gratitude of the diocese to the Mother of the Saviour for all the help she obtained for the Northeast, and to proclaim her as the patroness of Shillong and the diocese. He appeals to his flock for gifts to make two crowns and a sceptre in gold. Rings, bracelets, earrings, money, etc. are offered generously.



Shillong: The new Cathedral dedicated to Mary Help of Christians

[16] Fr. Ephisius Usai: born in 1912, comes to India in 1929, makes his profession on 6.1.1931, is ordained a priest on 23.5.1939 at Sonada, and dies in Turin on 10.5.1983, aged 71.

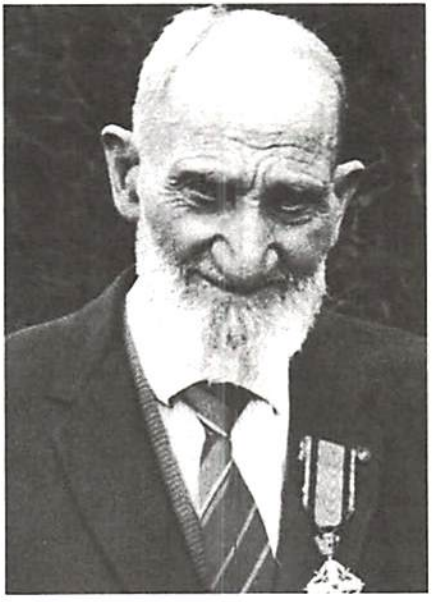
[17] Fr. Roger Toneguzzo: born in 1916, comes to India in 1938, makes his first profession on 22.12.1939, dies at Legnano (Italy) on 6.3.1994, aged 78.

[18] Puthenpurakal, *Bishop Orestes Marengo*, 352.

[19] Fr. E. Boscardin is born in 1906, comes to India in 1929, and makes his profession on 6.1.1931. He is ordained a priest on 20.5.1936, dies at Bassano (Italy) on 20.2.1966, aged 60.

[20] Puthenpurakal, *Bishop Orestes Marengo*, 319.

On 15th August, during a pontifical High Mass, the bishop crowns the statues of Child Jesus and Mary with the two golden crowns studded with 318 precious stones, while the sceptre is placed in the hand of Mary. The people that fill the Cathedral to capacity applaud joyously. In the afternoon, there is a Marian exhibition in St. Mary's Convent, Laitumkhrah. When darkness falls, a procession with flambeaux is taken out. The Marian year is on. In Bombay, it is solemnly celebrated by the whole of India from 4th to 8th December.[21]



Rev. Bro. SANTI MANTARRO, SDB (1890–1971)
The builder of the Cathedral and several other Churches

2.1.4 The Passing Away of Two Pioneers

In 1957 the mission in the Northeast loses two veteran missionaries: Fr. C. Vendrame and Fr. L. Piasecki.

Fr. Vendrame has been suffering from arthritis of the spine. By sheer will power, he hides his excruciating pain from others. But one day he finds it difficult to stand it any longer and goes to bed. He never recovers. He suffers acutely. Eventually he is taken to Dibrugarh Medical College, where the Sisters of Charity and the nurses give him as much relief as they possibly can.[22]

To all he is a source of edification in his concern for souls. "From his bed he continues to preach Christ," says Fr. Alessi, and he recalls a very touching scene of which he is an eyewitness. "One day while he is talking to Fr. Vendrame, one poor lady, whom he had brought to the faith, enters the room. She had eloped with a European gentleman and now she is living with him. Without saying a word, she looks at Fr. Vendrame and notices two big drops of tears falling from his eyes. The poor creature is

[21] Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands*, 114f.
[22] Ibid. 115.

not able to utter a single word, but suddenly bursts into tears. He calls her by his side, takes her by the hand and calls her by name: 'La sngewthuth' (I understood), she says and rushes out of the room."[23] Later Fr. Alessi comes to know that due to that meeting she returns to the faith.

"Fr. Vendrame," continues Fr. Alessi, "never asks anything for himself. He gives away everything to others. On that very day I give him a good sum of money. Three days after that, at his death, he has not even a *naya paise* left! He has given everything away, even his pants. To dress him up we are compelled to borrow a pair of pants from the bishop."[24]

"Assisted by Bishop Marengo he goes home to the Father on 30th January, 1957, on the eve of Don Bosco's feast. He is 63 and has laboured 33 years as a missionary in India. His funeral takes place in Shillong. The Cathedral is packed to capacity. Many have tears in their eyes."[25]

"At the funeral there are more than 5000 Catholics. Even a few hours after the funeral," reports Fr. Alessi, "the people continue to bring flowers from the forest to the tomb and remain there weeping and praying."[26]

On 23rd March 2001 the mortal remains of Fr. Vendrame are brought to Sacred Heart College from Laitumkhrah cemetery and interred in a specially prepared tomb in front of the college.[27]

On 10th September 1957 Fr. Leo Piasecki meets with an accident in Digboi, where he is sent temporarily to replace Fr. Francis Fossati, the founder of the Mission. While returning from the Post Office on bicycle, he is run over by a lorry. Taken to the hospital, he passes away that very evening. He is initially buried by the side of the Dibrugarh Cathedral he built in honour of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, but later his tomb is relocated inside it.

In a letter to Msgr. Mathias he writes: "Since my childhood, I have always asked for three graces: to be a priest, to be a missionary and to be a martyr." The Lord listens to his life-long prayer, and regarding

[23] Alessi, *Una Vita*, 224.
[24] Ibid. 224–225.
[25] Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands*, 115.
[26] Alessi, *Una Vita*, 225.
[27] Cfr. Chronicle of Sacred Heart College, Mawlai, Shillong.

the third grace it can be said that he lives a martyr's life and dies a martyr to duty and obedience.[28]

2.1.5 More trials for the Church

The attitude of the government towards missionaries hardens. Even their educational, medical and social services are no more welcome. "Leave that to the government," it is said.

A letter from Bro. Pancolini[29] in Dibrugarh in the Province Chronicle of 14th June 1953 gives an idea of the difficulties the missionaries are encountering, because of the new attitude taken by the government towards missionaries. "Forms to be filled up," he writes, "have reached Golaghat, to know how many missionaries work in that district, how many are the foreigners, how many churches there are, how many Christians and many other details." He mentions also about the visit to the bishop's house of Dibrugarh by a CID officer asking more or less the same questions.

On 30th April 1954 the chronicle again speaks of the "normal difficulties our Province is undergoing these last months", and of "the propaganda against foreign missionaries that is given vent to, especially in Assam. Recently Tezpur mission and St. Antony's College are the main targets." An article in the *Statesman* of 30th April speaks of a Committee appointed by the Madhya Pradesh government to inquire into missionary activities in the State. The same newspaper on 19th July has another article entitled 'Growing menace of missionaries' with the subheading, 'Hindu Volunteers to check Activities.'

All this venomous propaganda against foreign missionaries must be seen in the background of the political situation in Northeast. Insurgency surfaces in Nagaland. All the American Baptist missionaries of that region are asked to leave the country. When Mr. Katju is Home Minister, there are several attacks in the Press and other quarters against the Church.

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[28] Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands*, 116.

[29] Bro. Fausto Pancolini is born at L'Aquila (Italy) on 3.10.1916, comes to India in September 1939, makes his profession on 6.1.1941 at Sonada, from 1942 to 1946 he is interned in the Internment Camps of Deoli and Dehra Dun. In 1945 he is repatriated and till 1951 is working in the Mission Office at Valdocco. In 1951 he is back in India, for one year at the COP then he is with Msgr. Marengo at Dibrugarh and later at Tezpur. Expelled from Assam, he passes to Krishnagar to work for Bishop Baroi. Due to ill health in 1974 he returns to Italy and spends his last years at the Generalate. He dies there on 17.3.1978, aged 62. (Cfr. Obituary Letter)

Bishop Ferrando, the Anglican bishop of Assam, and the Assam Mission Council Secretary inform the government that for Christians the proclamation of the Good News is part of their Faith, and that they "cannot accept restrictions to the practice of their Faith."

In 1954 the government issues the following policy statements:

- New mission centres shall not be opened,
- Permission to open new schools must be sought,
- Data on conversions and baptisms shall be communicated to the Authorities.[30]

The *Statesman* of 7th April 1955 gives the details of the government 'Policy on Admissions of missionaries':

- Foreign missionaries coming as additional members of a mission or in replacement of xisting missionaries will be admitted into India only if they possess outstanding qualifications or special experience and if Indians are not available for such posts.
- Missionaries already in India will not ordinarily be disturbed unless they indulge in anti-national activities.
- Those who have been working in India for five years or more will normally be eligible for re-admission and to the granting of 'no objection to return to India' endorsement, if they leave the country with the intention to return to India.
- Foreign missions or societies working in India will not be able to open a new branch or institution in India without prior permission of the government.
- It has been decided that Commonwealth missionaries, like other foreign missionaries, shall also be required to obtain visas for India before proceeding to the Country.

In the month of October 1955 a bill is introduced in the Parliament seeking to regulate religious conversions in India. On 2nd December 1955, the Prime Minister opposes in the Lok Sabha a private member's bill seeking to regulate religious conversions. Though well intentioned, Mr. Nehru fears it would create opportunities for coercion and a feeling of oppression, particularly among Christians. The house rejects the motion

[30] Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands,* 116.

to consider the Bill, which contains provisions for registering converts and licensing persons aiding conversions.[31]

Again under the heading, 'Large influx of Missionaries is Undesirable', the *Statesman* of 19th July 1956 reports the 'Inquiry Committee's Recommendations'. A six member Committee is appointed by the Madhya Pradesh government on 14th April 1954 and is presided over by Dr. M. B. Nyogi, former chief justice of the Nagpur High Court.

Under the caption, 'Nyogi Report very Harmful', the *Statesman* of 6th September 1956, reports the 'Protest by Catholic Archbishops'. The Standing Committee of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of India protests against the Nyogi report on Christian missionary activities in Madhya Pradesh as seeking to 'impugn' the loyalty, not only of the missionaries, but of the whole Catholic community. In the same issue of the *Statesman*, the letters of two Hindu ex-students of two Christian institutions (one in Dacca, the other in Bombay) are published in defence of the missionaries. On 28th November 1956, the *Statesman* publishes a 'Tribute' paid to missionaries by three MPs and six other prominent persons in a joint statement issued on 26th November.

On 20th September 1958 disturbing news come from Manipur. Fr. Ravalico writes: "Dark clouds are gathering over Manipur. This State has been declared a *protected area* and 'no foreigners' (including those from the Commonwealth) can enter or reside here without a special Permit from New Delhi. Fr. Venturoli and two sisters are asked by the police to leave the country immediately, but the Chief Commissioner rescinds the order and says that they may stay and he will help them to get the special residential permit. ..."[32]

On first September 1956 the Chronicle of the Province reports about a vilification campaign that has been going on for some months by evil-intentioned people against Bishop Morrow and other missionaries in Krishnagar. They are only false accusations aiming at getting rid of the bishop. Things come to such a pass that order to leave India before the 31st of July and then before the 31st of August has already been issued.

[31] Cfr. *Statesman* newspaper cutting of 31.12.1955 in the Province Chronicle. The same article reports the subsequent discussion of the Bill. Only two spoke in support of the Bill. The above mentioned newspaper cuttings and those which follow are to be found in the Province chronicle, 1949–1960. *Provincial Archives*, B.10.1.1.

[32] Cfr. Chronicle of the Province 1949–1960. *Provincial Archives*, B.10.1.1.

The 'Quit Order' is quashed by the solicited intervention of the Prime Minister, Shri Jawaharlal Nehru and Dr. B.C. Roy, the Chief Minister of West Bengal. The latter orders a thorough enquiry into the case, which reveals the falsity of the accusation.[33] Around this time a newspaper from Calcutta has been suggesting the setting up of a Commission to inquire into the activities of the missionaries in Assam, a Committee on the pattern of the one that is set up in Madhya Pradesh. However, none of these threats has any damaging consequence.

2.2. Dibrugarh Diocese

2.2.1 New Mission Centres

"The establishment of mission centres is a sign of the vitality of mission work. Each centre becomes a powerhouse for further expansion. Hence, the new bishop takes special care of Dibrugarh, Doom Dooma, Naharkatiya, North Lakhimpur, Digboi, etc."[34]

As Dibrugarh becomes the headquarters of the new diocese, it stands on the missionary labours of great missionaries like Fr. Krick of the Foreign Missionaries of Paris who reaches Dibrugarh in 1851 and who along with Fr. Boury is killed in 1854 in the Mishmi Hills, of the first German Salvatorian Father who opens Dibrugarh mission in 1907, of Fr. Piasecki and Fr. Marmol who reopen it in 1931, of Fr. Marengo himself during his one year in 1933–1934, of Frs. Cerato, Visentin, Ayuso, Boscardin, and others.

As the new diocese is started, there is Fr. Visentin,[35] who, in the words of Bishop Marengo is "a real pillar both of Dibrugarh mission and of the Don Bosco School from its inception." When he is called to take charge of Don Bosco School, Fr. Righetto from North Lakhimpur replaces him in 1961 in the work of the Dibrugarh mission. Fr. Joseph Fantin takes over from Fr. Righetto in 1963.

In 1948 the MSMHC Sisters establish a convent in Dibrugarh, and in 1952 the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians set up their school.

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[33] We come to know the details of the aforesaid case from Fr. L. Gobetti, the then Secretary to Bishop Morrow. Cfr. *Provincial Archives*. Krishnagar (bishop's house), file 6/3: Bishop's Secretary, Fr. L. Gobetti SDB.

[34] Puthenpurakal, *Bishop Orestes Marengo*, 191.

[35] Fr. Achille Visentin is born at Padova (Italy) on 11.4.1910, comes to India in 1928, makes his first profession on 9.1.1930, is ordained a priest on 5.11.1938, dies at Este (Italy) on 8.10.1976, aged 66.

The history of Doom Dooma goes back to 1940, when Fr. H. Boscardin and Fr. L. Kerketta[36] begin work there as touring missionaries. October 1952 sees the opening of the Doom Dooma mission centre where Fr. Gerald Mandeville[37] is appointed parish priest in November of the same year. He will be labouring in this parish for over 15 years. Fr. C. Bili is sent as his assistant. Both of them go through many difficulties, especially in the first year when they have to live in two very primitive *bashas* (huts made of bamboo and thatch), of which one serves as the fathers' residence and the other a multi-purpose one, including church services. In 1959 the church and in 1964 the convent cum school are blessed by Bishop Marengo.

Fr. J. Neyens, a Belgian Salesian who joins the Shillong diocese from Congo, starts the mission centre of Golaghat in August 1941. Later Fr. Mellino comes to help him. Fr. F. Bollini reaches Golaghat mission in 1946.

When Mission work among the Lotha Nagas is in its initial stages under the guidance of Fr. J. Larrea, the Golaghat school and boarding serve to accommodate some 40 children from the Lotha area. The big *basha* serving as a school is completely destroyed by a storm in early 1953. Bishop Marengo puts up the new school, the first work of Bro. Michael Cahoj, Bishop Marengo's precious helper in Dibrugarh and later in Tezpur.

The Golaghat church and several chapels in concrete structure come up during the time of Fr. Bollini. He not only supervises the work, but also provides much of the finance. The vast mission of Golaghat would not have been what it is today, had it not been for 20 years of dedicated work of Fr. Bollini and Fr. H. Frassy.[38]

The origin of Naharkatiya mission goes back to the missionary tours undertaken by Fr. L. Kerketta, Fr. H. Boscardin and Fr. C. Bili from

[36] Fr. Louis Kerketta is born in 1910; is ordained a priest on 5.6.1941, dies at Gauhati on 31.8.1998, aged 88.

[37] Fr. G. Mandeville is born at Bruges (Belgium) on 16.8.1914, makes his first profession on 2.9.1933, is ordained a priest on 19.7.1942, comes to India in 1947. He later returns to Belgium, where he dies on 10.7.2002.

[38] Fr. Henry Frassy: born on 1.3.1920 at St. Christopher (Val d'Aosta – Italy), comes to India in 1938, makes his first profession on 22.12.1939, is ordained a priest on 11.9.1949 at Don Bosco, Liluah. In 1952 he is in Golaghat till he is transferred to Naharkatiya in 1964. He is asked by Government to leave the Northeast in 1969. In 1973 he is allowed to come to Meghalaya and work for the Garos, he dies on 22.1.1997, aged 77.

Dibrugarh. Fr. Boscardin takes charge of it as a mission centre in March 1950 and develops a systematic training centre for catechists. Later, Fr. Cerato, transferred to Naharkatiya, takes care of the centre for catechists in the place of Fr. Boscardin who is sent to the new mission of Dhekhiajuli. When Fr. Cerato has to leave Naharkatiya due to illness, Fr. Paul Taverna[39] takes charge of Naharkatiya mission. Here he works from 1951 until he is asked to go and help Bishop Marengo in the diocese of Tezpur, when the Bishop is transferred to Tezpur from Dibrugarh in 1964. Fr. Frassy replaces him in Naharkatiya. In 1958 Bishop Marengo blesses the MSMHC Convent. Naharkatiya mission gives rise to Jorhat, Moranhat, and Sonan.

The North Lakhimpur mission centre from which come several others (Silapathar and Doolahat, from Silapathar Dhemaji and Doolahat Harmuthy) is founded by Fr. Cerato assisted by Fr. Visentin and later by Fr. H. Boscardin. In 1955 Fr. S. Righetto replaces Fr. Cerato. He comes here after working in the Krishnagar diocese for more than 30 years. Fr. J. Svirnelis [40] and Fr. U. Turco assist him.

The Catholic community of Digboi consisting mainly of the employees of the Assam Oil Company is ministered to from Dibrugarh until it gets a resident priest in 1949 in the person of Fr. F. Fossati. Bishop Ferrando blesses a small chapel in 1947. In 1958 a small school run by a certain Mr. Bell is given to the parish. In 1966 the Apostolic Carmel Sisters come to look after the school.[41]

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[39] Fr. Paul Taverna: born on 10.2.1915 at Parabiago (Milan – Italy). After 6 years of working in a firm near Milan, he is an aspirant at Ivrea, leaves for India in August 1939, makes his novitiate and his first profession on 6.1.1941 at Sonada. He is ordained a priest on 7.1.1951. He works for over 12 years in Naharkatiya as a very zealous missionary. In 1965 he is the Vicar General of Bishop Marengo at Tezpur. In 1968 he is given a quit order and is asked to leave the country. Allowed to come back anywhere in India except the Northeast, he opts for the Province of Calcutta. In August 1970 he is sent to Siliguri and here he works till the end of his life. After a futile attempt to set up a farm with the help of Bro. Jacob Ettil, with the help of his benefactors he puts up the Siliguri complex: the Don Bosco School, the Savio Centre, the MSMHC Convent, the Shrine of Don Bosco, and helps the Province in setting up the Novitiate House. He dies in Woodlands hospital (Calcutta) on 26.1.1995, aged 80.

[40] Fr. John Svirnelis: born at Vilna (Lituania), makes his first Profession on 12.9.1934, receives the priestly ordination on 15.7.1945, dies at Frascati (Italy) on 30.1.1973, aged 59.

[41] For all the above section on mission centres of Dibrugarh diocese, cf. Puthenpurakal, *Bishop Orestes Marengo* 191–196.

2.2.2 Mission in Manipur

Bishop Marengo can never forget his first audience with Pope Pius XII in which Manipur, the 'land of jewels', and the neighbouring Nagaland are mentioned. The optimism of the Pontiff gives much encouragement to the bishop.

2.2.3 Mission Among the Tangkhuls

Four years after the historic visit of Fr. Attilio Colussi and Fr. Marengo to the Tangkhul area in November 1948, Fr. H. Marocchino from Kohima makes a visit to Hundung in February 1952 at the invitation of A.S. Dominic Shomi. Shomi first contacts Bishop Ferrando in Shillong, who in turn asks Fr. Marocchino to visit the area. Walking from Litany to Hundung, he reaches Hundung on 10th February 1952.

On the following day he celebrates Holy Mass in the house where he is put up. In the meeting held in front of the village chapel, he speaks about God's love for mankind, his sending Jesus as Saviour, and about the Church Jesus founded with Peter as its visible head. As a result of this some 350 people belonging to 33 families who are prepared by A.S. Dominic Shomi decide to join the Catholic Church.

Fr. Ravalico makes his maiden visit to Ukhrul in December 1952 in connection with the wedding of a past pupil of Don Bosco Gauhati. On the day following the wedding he comes to Hundung where about 30 families are ready to be received into the Church. He promises to return to baptize them, which he does coming back to Hundung for Holy Week in 1953. On that occasion he receives 30 adults into the Church. From there in course of time the faith spreads to the neighbouring villages. Fr. Ravalico returns to Imphal in December of the same year and makes a quick tour of several villages in the Palely area. He returns to Imphal on 2nd January 1954.

During Fr. Ravalico's absence, away in Europe and America for fund-raising for his work in Manipur, Bishop Marengo visits Manipur more than once. In December 1953 he reaches Imphal for a month long tour. On 26th December 1954 he sets out to tour the Tangkhul area that lasts for a month. In March 1955, he is back again in Manipur for a long

tour. In April 1955, Bishop Marengo and Fr. Peter Bianchi begin a prolonged tour of the Tangkhul area. On 31st August 1955 Fr. Bianchi sets out alone on a tour of the Tangkhul area. He trains catechists at Hundung. Again on 27th December 1955 Bishop Marengo and Fr. P.Bianchi leave for a tour of the Tangkhul area.

Back from USA, on Saturday, 11th February 1956, "almost miraculously", Fr. Ravalico arranges for the purchase of a place in the heart of Imphal. The date is significant and the story of *Nirmalabas* is interesting. A retired police officer at Imphal is planning to leave for Calcutta. What is today Nirmalabas is a small plot with a house in the centre of the town. When Fr. Ravalico comes to know that the plot is on sale, he jumps at the offer, buys it and christens the 'Palit Bhavan' of Mr. Palit, *Nirmalabas* or the house of the Immaculate.

2.2.4 The Great Leap Forward

On 5th March 1956 Fr. Ravalico and Fr. P. Bianchi set out from Dibrugarh for Manipur by jeep filled to capacity with provisions, medicines, vestments and even a cycle tied up on top of it, and with the blessing of Bishop Marengo. They reach Imphal the next day, 6 March, at 8.00 p.m. to stay permanently there to organize the mission work in Manipur.



Rev. Fr. ALOYSIUS RAVALICO, SDB
(1906–1967)
The founder of the Manipur Mission (1956)

On 6th May 1956 Fr. Ravalico makes his first visit to Dibrugarh from Imphal. He brings along with him a group of boys to study in Dibrugarh. The blessing and inauguration of *Nirmalabas*, Imphal, is on 9th May 1956.[42]

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[42] Puthenpurakal, *Bishop Orestes Marengo*, 254.

2.3. The Krishnagar Diocese[43]

2.3.1 Mission Centres

In the previous chapter we have seen how the partition following Independence deals a terrible blow, particularly to the diocese of Krishnagar, which finds itself cut into two parts as a consequence of it. We have also seen how Msgr. Morrow and the Salesian missionaries do not give in to discouragement, but answer to the challenge by realizing a number of brickwork chapels, opening new residences and parishes, and new Christian communities. In the 1940s to the early 1960s, we see the reorganization of the old parishes (the Cathedral parish and Ranabondo), the reopening of Behrampore parish (1955), and the opening of the new parishes of Maliapota (1950), Ranaghat (1953), Chapra (1962), and Raghabpur (1967). The Catholic population is trebled from 4000 in 1952 to 12,000 in 1964.

As we have seen earlier, the diocese of Krishnagar is erected on 1st September 1886 and Msgr Pozzi is appointed its first bishop. He builds the first Cathedral in the site of the old church, which is destroyed in the earthquake of 1897. The Cathedral of the Most Holy Redeemer is blessed in 1899. In 1952 Msgr. L. R. Morrow enlarges and embellishes the Cathedral. In 1953 he establishes the Cathedral Shrine. The purpose and main apostolate is to conduct the perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for the spiritual strength and support of the diocese. For this purpose the Franciscan Nuns of Perpetual Adoration arrive on 21st May 1953 in response to the invitation of the bishop and take up residence on the same day. The perpetual adoration at the Shrine begins on 11th October 1953. The Nuns withdraw in 1960. That same year this apostolate is entrusted to the Sisters of Mary Immaculate.

The Administration of the Cathedral Rectory and the Pastoral care of the Cathedral is officially handed over to the diocesan clergy on 24 Mary 1988.

The PIME fathers start the Ranabondo mission. Fr. Pezzoli from Fulbari is the first priest to come to Ranabondo. Fr. Joseph Macchi builds the first concrete church in 1892. Ranabondo is made a parish in 1906 and Fr. Alexander Berretta is appointed parish priest. There is no resident

[43] For this section, Cfr. Directory 2000 of the diocese of Krishnagar.

priest after him and the parish is looked after from Bhoborpara. Fr. Sanchez[44] is appointed as the first Salesian parish priest in 1933. The statue of Mary Help of Christians is brought to Ranabondo from Bhoborpara in 1937. The new spacious church that is blessed in 1981 is further enlarged and beautified by Fr. Thomas Peechat in 1998 when he is the parish priest. Fr. M. C. Francis is the last Salesian parish priest in the year 2000, when the parish is entrusted to the care of the diocesan clergy.

The PIME fathers found the Berhampore parish in 1855. It is reopened as a residential parish in 1955. Rev. Fr. Vincent Lazzaro is sent to be the first Salesian to reside in the town. Active missionary work is done from Behrampore by the assistant parish priest, Fr. John Topno, among the Santals, until the care of the Santal Christians is shifted to Azimganj in 1966. Since June 1978, evangelization work is being resumed in the Santal villages near Behrampore. On 29th October 1996, Bishop Lucas Sirkar entrusts the Behrampore parish in perpetuum to the Salesian Congregation.

The new parish of Maliapota is established in 1950 and Fr. Julius Ferretti[45] is appointed as the first parish priest. He builds the church, which is blessed in 1952. Fr. Julius Matteucci remodels it in 1982.[46] In 1989 the parish is given back to the diocese with a diocesan priest as its parish priest.

Fr. Siro Righetto, the parish priest of Krishnagar, establishes the first Catholic community of Ranaghat in 1939. The community consists of the families that have left Maliapota and Bhoborpara due to floods. Fr. C. Sergi is sent to Begopara in 1951 as chaplain. He builds a church and the presbytery. Ranaghat is erected as a parish in 1953. Later Bongaon, Raghabpur, Thakurnagar and Kalyani are separated from this parish. The present beautiful parish church and presbytery are built by Fr. Louis Gobetti.

On 1st January 1975 the bishop of Krishnagar and the Salesian Provincial sign a contract by which the Ranaghat parish is entrusted to the

[44] Fr. Cyprian Sanchez: born at Salamanca (Spain) on 26.10.1900, makes his profession on 12.9.1918, he is a priest on 22.12.1928, dies in Madrid on 18.12.1947, aged 47.

[45] Fr. Julius Ferretti is born in 1911, comes to India in 1931, makes his first profession on 8.12.1932, is ordained a priest on 5.6.1941, dies at Iseo (Italy) on 27.6.1984, aged 73.

[46] Maliapota is a Protestant centre in 1887 when the first missionaries visit the place from Bhoborpara.

Salesian Society in perpetuity. Later this contract, however, is rescinded and the parish is again given back to the diocese in May 1988 and a diocesan priest is made the parish priest.

Chapra is a sub-station of Krishnagar and later of Ranabondo until 1960. The first chapel is built in 1929. A new church dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is built in 1959 and blessed on 20th March 1960 by Bishop Morrow. Fr. Austin Guarneri[47] builds the parish Rectory at the same time. On 1st January 1962 Chapra is erected canonically as a parish with Fr. C. Sergi[48] as its first parish priest. A new spacious church with dome and belfries is built on the spot of the old one by Fr. Matteucci and is blessed on 18th October 1988 by Bishop Lucas Sirkar.[49]

Raghabpur is a substation of Ranaghat till 1967. Fr. Sergi, the first parish priest, builds the present church. The church is blessed in 1973. When Ranaghat is given back to the diocese in May 1988, together with it

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[47] Fr. Augustine Guarneri: born at Cremona (Italy) in 1912, comes to India in 1931, makes his novitiate in 1931–1932, his first profession on 8.12.1932, and is ordained a priest on 5.6.1941. He works all through his life in the Krishnagar diocese. He masters the Bengali language and translates several of the catechetical works of Bishop Morrow. In 1967 he founds the St. Joseph Training Institute of Printing to make good literature available to the common people and to provide training to the poor and abandoned. He has two terms as Rector of Don Bosco School Krishnagar (1944–1952 and 1961–1965), and later of the bishop's house, but on Sundays and Feast Days he is always out to lend the help of his ministry to various parishes and mission centres. He dies at Cremona (Italy) on 2.9.1986, aged 74.

[48] Fr. Cesario Sergi is born on 20.3.1900 at Montesardo, Lecce (Italy). He enters the *aspirantate* of Ivrea at the age of 26. He receives the cassock from Fr. Rinaldi on 29.9.1929, begins the novitiate at Shillong on 31.12.1929, and makes his first profession on 1.1.1931. He is ordained a priest on 20.6.1936. In 1937 he is already in Shimulia, is shifted to Bhoborpara in 1942, where he is till 1949. Due to unfavourable reports against him he is transferred as confessor to Sonada in 1949. From 1950 to 1955 he is at Ranaghat in charge of the district. For about six years he is attached to Ranabondo, but the tries to bring up Bohirgachi and settles down for 4 years at Chapra (1960–1964), then for a brief period he is at Don Bosco School Krishnagar. For the next three years we find him at the new mission of Azimganj. There he builds up the Don Bosco Welfare Centre and mission. He spends the last ten years at Raghabpur or Hobibpur. Besides caring for the parish, he builds the Church, the parish house, and the house for the Sisters of Mary Immaculate. The one dominant characteristic of Fr. Sergi's long life is his pastoral love for souls. No difficulty is too great and no sacrifice too dear to pay for his flock, no matter how ungrateful they may have been. He fights court cases to defend them. He is generous to the poor and needy. Fr. Luciano Colussi says that Fr. Sergi is definitely one of the greatest missionaries of India. He is a man of deep spiritual life. He dies in harness at Raghabpur on 30.4.1977, aged 77. (Cfr. A.Guarneri, Obituary Letter).

[49] For Maliapota, Behrampore, Ranaghat, Chapra, and Raghabpur, Cfr. Krishnagar Directory 2000.

also Raghabpur goes back to the diocese, but for some time it continues to be taken care of from Ranaghat by Salesians who are working there as assistant parish priests. Fr. Ignatius Ram is the first diocesan parish priest of Raghabpur.

Kalyani is separated from Ranaghat and established as a centre on 24th May 1979. The residence of the parish priest is blessed on 24th May 1981. Bishop Lucas Sirkar blesses the foundation stone of the new majestic church on 31st January 1990 and blesses it on 1st March 1992. The Kalyani parish is made into a Salesian parish entrusted to the Salesian Congregation in exchange for Ranaghat.

The parishes of Bongaon and of Thakurnagar, which belong to the Krishnagar diocese, are transferred to the Archdiocese of Calcutta on 8th May 1976. The parish of Thakurnagar is given back to the direct care of the Archbishop of Calcutta and of the diocesan clergy in January 1991.

The parish of Monsadah, under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Calcutta is erected in the year 1987.

2.3.2 Centenary of the Mission of Krishnagar

In 1955 the Catholic Mission of Krishnagar celebrates its first centenary (1855–1955). Fr. Aloysius Del Nevo Squeri, in a report appearing in the *Osservatore Romano* (May 1955), gives a detailed account of the immense work of evangelization and human promotion accomplished by the PIME fathers first, and then by the Salesians in the last 100 years.

The Holy See entrusts the Mission of Central Bengal to the Institute of the Foreign Missions of Milan (PIME) on 3rd June 1854 and they take charge of it in March 1855. The first three pioneers are Fr. P. Parietti (from Milan), Fr. Limana (from Trento), and Fr. A. Marietti (from Turin). To these three others are added and the activity of these intrepid missionaries grows in intensity and extension as the years go by.

To the first three centres of Behrampore, Krishnagar and Jessore are added those of Bhoborpara, Fulbari, Khulna and Malgajee, Shimulia and Jaganandokati, Gongra, Maliapota, Ranabondo, and others to the North of the Ganges: Dinajpur, Damanpur, Saldpur, Danjuri, Daulighat, Bogra, Rahempur, Banpara, and Andarkota. The missionaries of Central Bengal

work assiduously in this vast region occupying the important centres and approaching the people of the place.

The Bengalis are deeply attached to their traditions, civil and religious customs, and these factors do not allow the possibility of great success in the apostolate. No mass conversion among them, but only families or individuals through the assiduous care, the encouragement, and the loving support, material and spiritual, of the dedicated missionaries.

In the year 1928 the diocese of Krishnagar is divided from that of Dinajpur and entrusted to the care of the Salesians. Due to the new political conditions, the diocese of Krishnagar is again divided from that of Jessore. From that of Dinajpur the dioceses of Malda and Jalpaiguri are formed. For the last 28 years the Salesians of Don Bosco zealously work in the field first tilled by the heroic PIME fathers. The centenary celebrations find the number of Catholics in Central Bengal touching 40,000, of whom about 33,000 are north of the Ganges in the dioceses of Dinajpur, Malda and Jalpaiguri, and the rest in the diocese of Krishnagar and Jessore. The parishes or quasi-parishes, each having several sub-centres, are 40. The missionary personnel, priests and brothers, in the 5 dioceses at the time of the centenary number about 60, of whom 24 belong to the diocese of Krishnagar. The missionary work is validly supported in every field by the work of the Sisters of Charity of *Lovere* and other two native Congregations recently established, the Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate and the Franciscan Nuns of Perpetual Adoration who come into the diocese to take charge of the Cathedral Shrine, their main apostolate being that of having a perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for the spiritual strength and support of the missionaries. In 1955 they have 12 members.[50]

3. The Rector Major's First Visit to the Indian Provinces

Fr. Renato Ziggiotti, the Rector Major of the Salesians, lands in India on the 18th of December 1954. Elected Rector Major only two and a half years before, on 1st August 1952, Fr. Ziggiotti has already visited the Salesian works in Europe, except the houses behind the Iron Curtain, and is now on a seven-month tour of Asia, Australia, Canada and USA. Born on 9th October 1891, in North Italy, Fr. Ziggiotti is the eighth of eleven children.

[50] Cfr. A. Del Nevo in a cutting of the *Osservatore Romano* (May 1955), in the Chronicle of the Province.

It is no wonder that Fr. Ziggiotti wants to visit the Salesian Mission. From his very youth he feels an attraction for the foreign missions. Three times he applies to work in the mission field. For three consecutive years his name is placed on the list of those destined for the missions. Every time there is one obstacle or the other to his departure, as Divine Providence has other plans in his regard.

The aim of Fr. Ziggiotti's visit to India is two twofold:

- To give a greater impulse to our professional schools for the poor youth.
- To promote with special care the Salesian mission work.

On 15th January 1955 the Rector Major lands at Dum Dum airport at 8.40 p.m. from Madras, accompanied by his private secretary, Fr. Giovanni Furlanetto, and by Fr. A. Pianazzi, the Provincial of the Southern Province. Present at the airport to receive him are: Bishop L. R. Morrow of Krishnagar, Fr. Provincial, Fr. A. Alessi, Fr. Gobetti, rector of bishop's house, Krishnagar, and the rectors of COP and Liluah. After a light supper at the airport, Fr. Ziggiotti leaves for Krishnagar at 9.30 p.m. together with Fr. Alessi.



V. Rev. Fr. RENATO ZIGGIOTTI, SDB
Rector Major (1952–1965)

Fr. Renato Ziggiotti: Born at Campodoro (Padova – Italy) on 9th October 1892, as the eighth of eleven children, is ordained a priest in 1921, dies at Albarè (Verona – Italy) on 19th April 1983, aged 90, after having lived 73 year of Salesian life, and 62 years of priesthood; 6 years Provincial, 14 years General Councillor for Studies, 2 years Prefect General, 12 years Rector Major. During his rectorship, the Salesian Society reaches its highest membership: 22,000 Salesians, 73 Provinces, and 1400 houses. Important events during his Rectormajorship are: the church of Don Bosco in Rome, Don Bosco's Shrine at *Colle Don Bosco - Becchi* (Italy), the PAS shifted to Rome: "Don Bosco did not make the theory, it is your task to do this, studying him with humility, caution and the passion of children." (Fr. Ziggiotti to the professors of PAS (*Pontificio Ateneo Salesiano* –Pontifical Salesian Athenaeum.) He takes part in the first three sessions of Vatican II. He visits all the Provinces and the houses of the Salesians and almost all those of the FMAs (7 years of tiring journeys!) and

On 16th January the Rector Major starts his visit of the Northern Province in the following order: diocese of Krishnagar, houses of Calcutta, diocese of Shillong, diocese of Dibrugarh, and Salesian College Sonada.

talks, even if briefly, with all the confreres, except a few behind the iron curtain. The following are Fr. Ziggiotti's spiritual features as described by Fr. Viganò in the obituary letter: "To follow Christ; to witness goodness, self-gift, and joy; to live Don Bosco's motto: work and temperance; to wrap everything in simplicity."

From 16th to 18th January the Rector Major visits the diocese of Krishnagar according to a programme drawn up by the bishop of Krishnagar.

On 18th he leaves for Calcutta and visits COP on 19th. On 20th he is at Liluah, and on 21st he visits Bandel. He offers Mass in the Shrine, and in the afternoon he blesses the new convent of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

On 22nd after Mass in the convent, Fr. Ziggiotti leaves for Tezpur. He is in Tezpur on 23rd and 24th. In the afternoon of the 24th he leaves for Gauhati, where he receives a grand reception. On 25th and 26th he is in Gauhati.

On 26th morning he flies to Dibrugarh, and visits the various centres from 26th to 29th, according to a programme drawn up by the bishop.

On 29th the Rector Major leaves for Shillong, and arrives there at 6.30 p.m. Here he is given a solemn reception in front of the Cathedral that is concluded with the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament

Sunday, 30th January, kept as feast of St. Dominic Savio, is solemnized as Christians' Day. A solemn High Mass is celebrated in the morning. He joins the Past Pupils of Don Bosco School for lunch. In the playground close to the Cathedral, an entertainment is held in his honour, followed by a tea party hosted by various associations.

The feast of Don Bosco on the following day is kept as Salesians' Day at Mawlai. There is a solemn High Mass only for the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Lunch is for the Salesians present, followed by a short entertainment. At vespers the Rector Major gives a conference to the Salesians.

The 1st of February is set-aside for the Theological College. The following day he spends with the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

Thursday, 3rd February, is reserved for the two houses of Don Bosco and St. Antony's.

On 4th February the Rector Major visits Cherrapunjee, Marbisu, and Upper Shillong and joins for supper at the bishop's house. On Saturday, 5th February, the Rector Major offers Mass in the Grotto, and soon after that he leaves for Gauhati and proceeds for Calcutta.

On Sunday, 6th February, the Rector Major leaves for Sonada, where he reaches in the afternoon. The house chronicle compiled by the rector, Fr. O. Paviotti, gives us a detailed report of the 3 days Rev. Fr. Ziggiotti spends in Salesian College, Sonada, which houses the students of philosophy and the three higher classes of Our Lady's High School.

The official welcome is at 5.00 p.m. After a short welcome speech by Fr. Rector, there follow two beautifully rendered orchestra pieces, two addresses in Italian, songs in Italian and in Hindi, and a Latin playlet, 'Dominic Savio at play', composed by Bro. Silvanus Sngi. The Rector Major concludes in Italian, translated by Fr. Paviotti. He expresses his happiness at the fact that the entertainment had an international character: Italian, English, Latin, and Hindi. He has a word of praise for the orchestra. But what strikes him most is the Latin playlet. In all his tours nowhere has he seen a Latin playlet. He admires the Italian pronunciation of the two – a cleric and a boy aspirant – who read the addresses. In the 'good-night' he congratulates once again the students for the singing, especially the Gregorian Chant. "Music is an international language, many languages, but all meaning the same thing, provided," he adds, "we do not pray or sing only with our lips, but from the heart."

On 7th February the Rector Major presides over the community Mass, which he offers for the perseverance of all. In the morning and afternoon he receives all the members of the staff and other confreres who want to talk to him. At 3.30 p.m. there is a small tea party to which all the various communities of the men congregations are invited. He speaks with most of them in French. After supper there is the illumination of the house, a redisplay of what the brothers had prepared for the conclusion of the Marian Year on 8th December 1954.

On 8th February, early in the morning, the Rector Major makes a trip to Tiger Hill to watch the splendid sunrise over the Himalayas. He does not wish to go to Darjeeling, at that early hour of the day. By 7.00 a.m.

he is back again in the College for the Holy Mass. After breakfast he continues to meet the confreres, listens to the superiors at length, but cannot meet the brothers individually as they are too many. To the boys he gives 45 minutes talk on the beauty of a Salesian vocation, which he considers a great blessing of Mary Help of Christians and of St. John Bosco. "You cannot understand what it means to have a Salesian vocation. I too begin only now to have an idea of it during my travels. But, if our family is great, it is of greater importance to live up to it. What does it mean to be an aspirant? *Aspirare* means to breathe in fresh air, *respirare* means to breathe out the bad or foul air. Apply this to yourself. This morning I have gone to Tiger Hill. What a wonderful sight! This is the life of an aspirant, of a novice, of the philosophers, of all Salesians, to be always high to contemplate. Look at the mountains that you have to climb. We must exert ourselves to climb. It is fine to see the mountains, but have you ever tried to climb them?"

After a few minutes he goes to the brothers' study hall, where all the Salesians have gathered. "I am happy! I can tell you that the house is going on well, very well!" He then speaks on the importance of good foundations for our vocation, drawing a lesson from the mishap of the morning, when the dais, which is raised on benches, prepared for a group photo, crushes and a few get hurt, but none seriously! "In Rome," he says, "I went down the third storey below the pavement and what struck me most was the fact that the one who supervised stone-by-stone the building of the foundation was Michelangelo himself." He recommends the brothers to correspond to the work of God and of the superiors. He then recommends living the Rules, and speaks at length on it.

After supper, all gather around the Rector Major for the farewell. Fr. Rector speaks in the name of all, one brother and one boy speak or read out in Italian on behalf of the Salesians and of the boys.

At the good night, Fr. Ziggiotti compares the happy days he experienced in Sonada with the Salesians and the boys, to the joy he experienced at the view of the sunrise on Tiger Hill. He gives Fr. Rector a golden medal as a souvenir of the Canonization of St. Dominic Savio, as an expression of his appreciation of the excellent spirit he finds in Sonada. But this medal demands also the imitation of Dominic Savio's virtues. He gives this as a programme to be taken up by the sodalities. "God bless you, Good Night," he adds in English.

In the morning of 9th February the Rector Major addresses the House Council. Here are some of his recommendations:

- The House Council is a school where we learn to govern a house, a Province.
- Personal spiritual direction belongs to the rector, but the rest belongs to all.
- We must make the boys spend the best days of their life in this house.
- Cultivate music: the way they sing is a means to know the degree of discipline that exists in the house.
- Keep the Orchestra, teach Indian music. Music blends peoples and makes for national unity.
- Make them work and do everything by themselves, as scouts do
- Make our Society known, preserve morality among the boys.
- Take care of the lay brothers. I exhort you to continue. The future of our Society is in the formation houses.

At the end of the lunch, Brother Maurice, dressed as a Bengali Babu, cracks a few jokes, which all enjoy. "I cannot catch your jokes," says the Rector Major, "but I too would like to crack a few jokes, but too difficult to be translated. The joke I enjoy most is the way the Italian confreres speak Italian, and in this Fr. Provincial is the worst. On going back to Italy, I'll put on a beard and act as Fr. Provincial speaking Italian. Don't be sorry at my departure. Don Bosco is always with you. I leave Him behind. I leave you all under the protection of our Lady, Mary Help of Christians."

At the bottom of the staircase near the Grotto of Our Lady, he gives the blessing of Mary Help of Christians. After this he leaves for Bagdogra Airport to catch the flight to Calcutta, accompanied by Fr. Provincial and Fr. Furlanetto. Fr. Rector accompanies him up to the airport.

On 10th February the Rector Major gives a conference to the confreres of the COP. "It is providential," he says, "that I have postponed this conference to the end of my visit to your Province. I had thus a better chance to understand your work here in Calcutta and to appreciate it the more. Your work is salesian work, though it may be a tedious and wearisome one. Do not deprive therefore your work of its soul: the right

intention, doing it willingly, nay gladly, for God. Vivify your work with the practices of piety done well in common. Give great importance to the monthly manifestation. Practise the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Help your parish with your cooperation, prayers and sacrifices. A special recommendation for this house is that you treat your guests always, as well as you can." And here he gives two examples, that of a priest who is so well impressed by the cordiality he experiences in a Salesian house in Belgium, that, returning to India, he makes possible the opening of the house of Kotagiri. The second example is that of a group of women from Veneto on a pilgrimage. They arrive at 1.00 a.m. in the night. They find all the sisters, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, waiting for them and showing them the greatest kindness.

On 11th February Fr. Ziggiotti leaves for Rangoon and Mandalay. He visits the confreres of Mandalay on 13th and 14th. On 15th he is back in Rangoon and on 16th he leaves for Bangkok, accompanied by Fr. Provincial.

On 20th February 1955, from Bang Nok Khuck (Thailand), the Rector Major sends a letter to the 'dearest confreres' of the two Provinces in India. He makes the following exhortations to all of them. He briefly repeats all that he has already said in his exhortations given almost everywhere and wants to fix some fundamental points for a sound and stable development of all the works, without distinction between North and South, though there are remarkable differences in the development of the works in the two Provinces. The recommendations he makes are fitting and suitable for both Provinces. We present here only the main ideas of each point:

- The admirable material development of our Congregation in India in these last 30 years must go hand in hand with an increase in spiritual life and religious observance.
- A direct consequence of this common duty is a more accurate formation of the members, as more means are put at our disposal...It must be the task of all to see that both the number and the quality of our aspirants and novices should increase...(all) must cooperate towards the recruitment of new and selected candidates for formation houses and diocesan seminaries.
- But it is not enough to procure aspirants. In every house great care should be taken of our young clerics during their practical

training and of our lay brothers...If they are not assisted, encouraged, corrected and properly guided by their rector, immediate superiors, confessors and all the other senior confreres, they will not be able to persevere and will eventually be lost, after so much fatigue and expenses on their behalf.

- The running of a small school in mission stations is a providential work indeed. When in addition to it, boarding arrangements are made for the boys of poor families, among whom a few may be potential vocations, the superiors must bear in mind that while proper attention is given to their material needs, their moral and religious training is also attended to.
- Our professional and agricultural schools in India are acquiring great importance and are wanted almost everywhere. Do your best, therefore, to further their development and adapt them to the local needs.
- Let my last urgent recommendation to you be to live in a fraternal union of spirit. The country you live in presents such a vast wealth, such variety of races, languages and religions, as to greatly puzzle not only foreigners but also even Indians themselves. Let all earnestly study the languages that are necessary for teaching and preaching. Do your best to avoid every discussion regarding politics and nationality, and work together for the greatness, the unity and prosperity of India.

My dearest children and confreres, may each and every one of you live under the mantle of Mary Help of Christians and under the special protection of St. John Bosco, in the joy of your vocation and in the desire of being a powerful instrument of good in the body of the Salesian Congregation."[51]

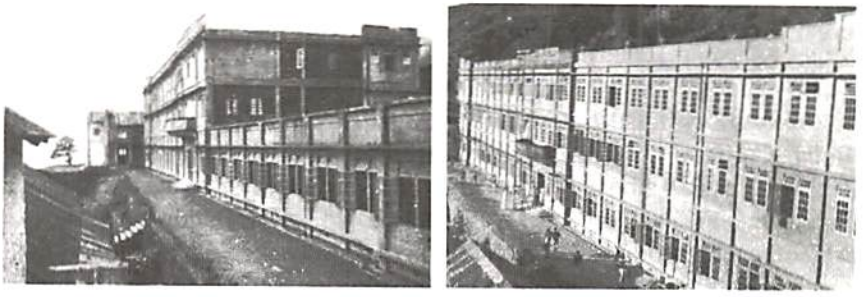
4. Life in the Institutions

4.1 Sonada[52]

During the years 1952-1959 a number of events take place, which mark the forward march of this institution as a formation house, as a University College, and also in terms of new material structures.

[51] Cfr. *Provincial Archives*. B.11.2, "Extraordinary Visitation of V. Rev. Fr. R. Ziggiotti, 1955."
[52] For this section on Sonada, Cfr. Chronicle of Salesian College.

After the blessing of the first 140 feet structure of a three-storey building on 21st May 1948, it is the intention of the Provincial and of the Economer to continue the work and have it completed without much delay. However, various circumstances do not allow the immediate resumption of the work. The signing of the contract for the ground floor of the second part takes place on 21st April 1952, and the inauguration of the two refectories is had on 1st March 1953. The contract for the completion of the building is signed on 26th October 1953, and the blessing of the still unfinished building by Msgr. Perier, Archbishop of Calcutta, is held on 6th June 1954.



Sonada: The New Salesian College
1. The ground floor of the 2nd half, blessed on 1.3.1953
2. The 1st and 2nd floor of the 2nd half, blessed on 6.6.1954

Another event that should not be forgotten relates to the playground below the road. On 28th March 1953, at the Darjeeling Court, the rector, Fr. O. Paviotti, and Mr. J.C. Clerk, acting Manager, Ringtong Tea Estate, sign the deed of sub-lease of a piece of land, 150 yards by 100 yards, for the exclusive purpose of making a playground. Fr. Paviotti signs on behalf of the Provincial, and Mr. Clerk, on behalf of the Tea Company. The conditions are:

- The College must pay a yearly rent of Rs. 25/- to the Company,
- The sub-lease is given in view of making a playground only,
- The sub-lease is subject to the conditions of the lease, which ends in 1978, and may be renewed. The College must set up and look after the boundaries by erecting pillars of stone and cement.

By the beginning of February 1954 the D.C. of Darjeeling sanctions the sub-lease of land.

Besides the Rector Major, Fr. R. Ziggiotti, there are other important Visitors who bring joy and are a source of great enthusiasm and renewed fervour in the heart of young Salesians and of the aspirants.

From the 25th to the 27th February 1954, the Founder of the Salesian works in Assam, Msgr. Louis Mathias, the Archbishop of Madras, visits the College. On the day of his arrival, at lunchtime he is welcomed with a band piece and an address. At 5.00 p.m. there is an entertainment in his honour. After the entertainment clerics and aspirants gather around him and a lively conversation follows. On 26th, after supper, *in circuitu*, as he used to do in Our Lady's House, he shares some Salesian news with the community. He closes the day with the 'goodnight'. On the 27th, after breakfast, he leaves the college, together with his companion, Brother Ambrose Cogliati.[53]

Another illustrious Visitor during this period is the first Cardinal of India, Cardinal Valerian Gracias, Archbishop of Bombay. On 3rd May 1954 the Jesuits, who are organizing the Cardinal's visit to the Hills, invite Fr. Rector, Fr. Prefect, and Fr. Piasecki to go to the Bagdogra airport to welcome the Cardinal. In the afternoon of 7th May at 2.15 p.m. the Cardinal reaches Salesian College, accompanied by Fr. Rector who has gone to fetch him at St. Mary's, Kurseong. On his arrival at the College, the Staff and the students welcome him cordially while the band plays a welcome march. At teatime he is delighted to notice that except for a few non-Indians among the staff and the brothers, all the rest are Indian Salesians and aspirants. After tea there is an entertainment in his honour during which Fr. Rector addresses a few words of welcome. The play 'Treasure Island' in 3 acts is staged with some orchestra pieces and choir pieces in between the acts.

The Cardinal joins the clerics and boys for recreation after supper while his Secretary, Fr. Lobo, takes a little practice with brothers and fathers for the Pontifical High Mass of the following day. After the night prayers he gives the 'goodnight'. He says that they are lucky to be in Sonada in reasonable comfort and able to attend to their studies. He reminds them of their spiritual and intellectual formation.

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[53] Bro. Ambrose Cogliati: born at Casatenovo (Cuneo – Italy) on 20.4.1914, comes to India in 1934, makes his first profession on 8.12.1935, for about 10 years he works in Shillong, then in Madras with Msgr. Mathias as driver and *factotum*, he works also at Liluah, Krishnagar, Calcutta, Saharampur, New Delhi. For the last 15 years of his life he is a guide at the Catacombs of St. Callistus (Rome), where he dies on 8.11.1987, aged 73.

The following morning, Cardinal presides over the Pontifical High Mass. Before lunch he gives an hour-long conference to the community. He talks about his recent visit to Australia, and praises the work the Religious Orders have done and are doing in India, by imparting education and by the spreading of the faith. After lunch, Fr. Prendergast, the parish priest of Darjeeling parish and Fr. Stanford, the rector of St. Joseph's, Darjeeling, come to fetch him. The cardinal is impressed by the 'exceptional kindness and friendliness of the Salesians'.

Another important person who pays a visit to the College during this time is the Governor of West Bengal, Dr. H.C. Mukherjee, who is given an invitation on 13th October 1952 by Fr. Rector to visit the College. He accepts the invitation and keeps his promise on 6th June 1953. On his arrival in the morning accompanied by a number of dignitaries and bodyguard he is accorded a warm welcome by the whole community with the band under the baton of Fr. H. Fantin.[54] An entertainment is held in his honour at the end of which he gives a short speech. He says that he is happy to be here, it reminds him of the visit to Shillong for the approval of St. Antony's College, several years before. He recalls the monument of Don Bosco in the square in Shillong with two boys clinging to him. He exhorts all to work like him for the uplift of the poor and for their education.

He visits the various sections of the college, and after joining for a cup of tea he declares a holiday for the College and leaves remarking that he envies those who are educated in the College.

On 12th November 1954 the Inspector of Colleges visits the College, a visit that has been postponed a number of times. The Inspector is thrilled with the warm reception he receives. He concludes with a great laudatory speech about the College and says that the University is 'proud' of the College.

Other events worthy of recalling are: The celebration of the Marian Year which concludes with a Marian Congress in 1954 and Exhibition,

[54] Fr. Henry Fantin: born at Casarsa (Italy) on 23.3.1923, makes his first profession on 31.8.1939, comes to India in early December 1939, and is ordained a priest on 7.1.1951. He works at Salesian College, Sonada, at Sacred Heart College, Mawlai, and especially in the missions of Jowai and Kliehriat, where he dies on 26.6.1997, aged 74. He publishes the 11th edition of *Ka Lynti Bneng*, the Khasi prayer book and hymnal, renewed, enriched and updated. The new Khasi Bible is the result of 7 years of hard work. The Khasi Bible is accompanied by the valuable Philological Notes that continue to serve as guidelines for writers.

the 'Sodality Congress" from 15th to the 18th September for which Fr. Provincial is present, a 'Missionary and Catechetical Congress from the 5th to the 8th December 1956, and an 'Academic Convention' on the lay brother on 30th April 1959.

On 25th September 1955 a discussion and a final voting is held on the Motto of the College: *Flamma Ardens et Lucens*, proposed by a member of the staff and approved by the community. On 10th October 1955, Fr. Provincial gives his approval to it.

During these years from 1952-59, the house of Sonada has a number of rectors. Fr. O. Paviotti takes over from Rev. Fr. Dal Zovo on 23rd December 1952. Fr. Paviotti, however, does not complete his first 3 years term, as he is transferred as rector of Sacred Heart College, Mawlai, in July 1955. Fr. P.J. Sheehy is made rector in his place. The change of rector brings with it also a change of principal. As Fr. Sheehy is only a B.A. Pass, the University does not accept him as principal. The name of Fr. N. Lo Groi, holding a Ph.D. in philosophy from the Pontifical Salesian Athenaeum (Turin), is presented to the University and is approved by it on 28th June 1957.

But even Fr. Sheehy does not complete a full six-year term as rector. On 27th December 1958, he leaves the College to be the rector of Bandel. Fr. Joseph Marchesi, the Prior and rector of Bandel reaches Sonada as the new rector on 30th December 1958. He, however, will have even a shorter stay in Sonada. The division of the Province in September 1959 will necessitate another change of rector.

4.2 Don Bosco Liluah[55]

Also for Don Bosco School, Liluah, the 1950s are a time of rapid expansion both in terms of structures and in the field of education. On 7th February 1950, Archbishop Perier blesses the new workshop of the mechanics department.

On 8th December 1952 Rev. Fr. Antony Buccieri is made rector of Don Bosco School, Liluah. It is during this time that the School comes into contact with a number of people who are of great help in many ways for the development of the school. Chief among them must be mentioned Mr. A. D'Souza, the Inspector of Anglo-Indian schools, whose

[55] Cfr. Silver Jubilee Brochure, Don Bosco School, Liluah, 13f.

encouragement and advice help in developing the Academic Section and in opening up the school to day-scholars.

When Fr. Buccieri takes over as rector, besides the technical school, there is also a small Academic Section up to class VIII, at the end of which the boys undergo a public examination conducted by the Board of Anglo-Indian Schools. Moved also by economic considerations, Fr. Buccieri opens this school to a limited number of day-scholars and admits into the boarding also a limited number of non-Catholic boys. This new policy and also the upgrading of the existing school to high school, necessitates some restructuring of the existing premises to provide some more and bigger class rooms. This work starts with Fr. Buccieri, but it will be continued in a much larger scale by his successor, Fr. Uguet, who comes in as rector in 1956.

On 8th March 1954 the Governor of West Bengal visits Don Bosco School, Liluah. The Governor, a Protestant, greatly appreciates the work of the Salesians and has only words of praise for what they do. Fr. Provincial too is present during the Governor's visit.

In May 1956 Fr. Buccieri leaves Liluah and returns to his dear Garo Hills. It is his successor, Fr. M. Uguet, the former Provincial, who sets on foot the gigantic building plan that has made Liluah what it is today. In August 1959 we see the inauguration of the Theatre Hall, and in February 1960, the opening of the new two-storey building takes place. The ceremony is presided over by Dr. D. M. Sen, Director of Public Instruction and Education Secretary, government of West Bengal. Two more storeys are added in the following years.

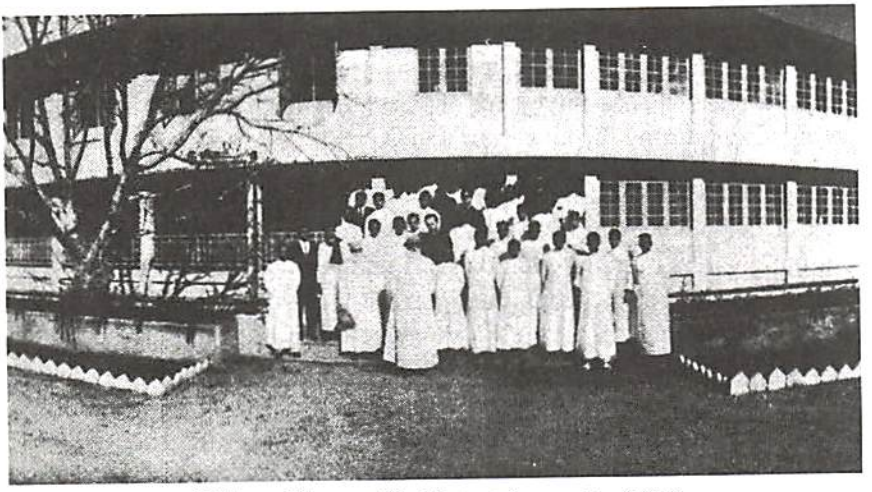


Liluah: General view of the new 4-storey building

4.3 The New Novitiate at Sunnyside

With the first profession of 14 novices at Mawlai on 16th April 1953, for the 5th time the Novitiate in the North is suspended and the few novices are sent to the South. But this is only a temporary solution. Immediately plans are made for a new Novitiate in Shillong.

On 3rd August 1953 Fr. Provincial gives the news of the purchase of a plot of land for the Novitiate at Upper Shillong. It is situated at the 4th mile from the Shillong Post Office. The signing of the contract is fixed for the 6th August. Fr. Provincial blesses the new house at Upper Shillong on 24th May 1956.



Shillong: The new Novitiate at Sunnyside (1956)

The opening of the Novitiate takes place on 4th April 1956. The house is dedicated to St. Dominic Savio. On 21st June 1956, sixteen clerics receive the Cassock and 2 lay brothers receive the Medal. The staff consists of Fr. Joseph Bacchiarello, the novice master; Fr. Ercole Fontana,[56] confessor; Fr. C. Bili, prefect; Bro. Varkey Punnukunil, assistant;

[56] Fr. Ercole Fontana: born on 7.1.1900 at Como (Italy), comes to India in 1930, makes his first profession on 8.12.1931, is ordained a priest on 5.11.1938, dies at Shillong on 6.11.1964, aged 64.

and brother Thomas Dungdung, *factotum.*[57] The first profession of the 18 novices at Sunnyside takes place on 10th April 1957.

4.4 Burma:[58] Mandalay, Anisakan, Thyngangyun

Independence to the country does not in any way cause hardships to the school of Mandalay; nay the latter develops more and more. New buildings are added, inadequate but sufficient to answer to the present need.

But soon new difficulties crop up, as the Karen rebels approach Mandalay. Due to false reports the government suspects that the rebels are already hidden in the school. In the first week of March 1949, about 300 heavily armed soldiers suddenly surround the school, take their position with guns pointing against it, then a few of them enter cautiously with revolvers in hand and start a thorough search. They find no rebels at all, but only a few boxes of the Head Police Officer, which have been put there by him to avoid them falling into the hands of the rebels, when they enter the city.

However, in the eyes of the government it seems that the school is guilty of some big crime which nobody knows, and on 16th March a military aircraft drops 3 bombs in succession on the school that cause enormous damage. One boy dies on the spot, another loses an arm, and the rector himself is thrown out of his office and buried under debris. In the end the government re-enters the city, but it never makes good the damages caused to the school.

Providence does not abandon the unfortunate Salesians. Repairs are done, new extensions are added and the school is transformed into one of the best schools in Mandalay.

In August 1951 Fr. William Balocco succeeds Fr. Alessi as rector. He adds a third floor (the dormitories) to the old school. He then erects a big ferroconcrete building, the theatre hall for over 1000 boys, and the carpentry and tailoring workshops.

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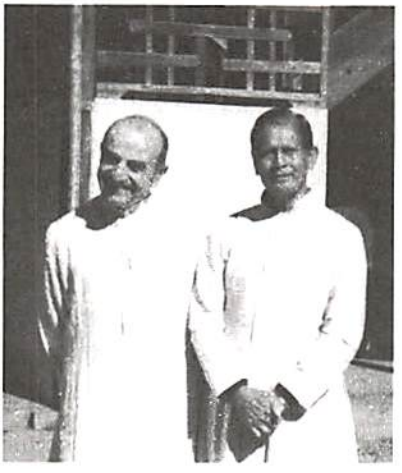
[57] Brother Thomas Dungdung: born in Bihar on 28.3.1924, makes his first profession in Tirupattur on 6.12.1944 and his final profession on 8.12.1950. He works at the COP, Sunnyside, and Sacred Heart College. He suffers acute pain due to his sickness and dies in Shillong on 25.12.1984, aged 60.

[58] Cfr. Leone Barattoni, *Relazione sulla situazione della Birmania*, 10–11, 14–18, in Provincial *Archives*. F.C. 51.

Fr. Fortunato Giacomin,[59] who succeeds Fr. Balocco, continuous the expansion programme: he builds the second floor of the school for the day scholars and a new spacious four-storey ferroconcrete building. Thus undoubtedly the Salesians come to have the best school in Mandalay, not merely for its buildings, but especially for the excellent results and discipline.

In 1958 Fr. Giacomin opens a small school for girls, which is entrusted to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Against all hopes, the sisters are allowed to enter Burma, with great zeal they start working and after three years they begin to put up a big three-storey school in ferroconcrete.

The activity of the Salesians in Mandalay is not confined merely to school work (middle and high school and technical school) and a boarding for poor Catholic boys, but also to the care of the parish, of a Catholic press, and to the care of vocations.



Fr. FORTUNATO GIACOMIN AND Fr. FRANCIS CYRIL, SDB

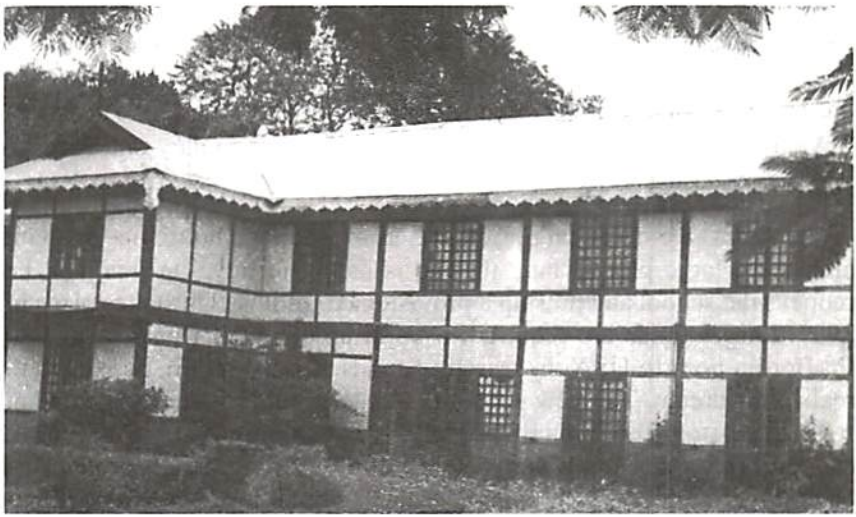
[59] Fr. Fortunato Giacomin: born at Fonsaso (Belluno – Italy) on 3.1.1920, comes to India in 1936, makes his first profession at Bandel on 8.12.1937. In February 1940 he leaves for Burma. He is ordained a priest at Dehra Dun Concentration Camp on 20.9.1945. In December 1945 he leaves the Concentration Camp and returns to Burma and there he remains till the end of his life. He dies on 7.2.2000. In Father Giacomin the delegation of Burma loses a valiant missionary, who sacrifices everything for the sake of the Salesian Mission in Burma. He keeps the Salesian dream alive in Burma when everything seems lost. He works in different roles for many years (not continually) at Mandalay, Lafon Memorial School. He is Rector and parish priest at Thyngangyun. In 1965 he is the founder Rector of St. Joseph's *studentate* at Anisakan, where he continues till the end of his life fulfilling various roles as need arises. When 8 of the foreign Salesians are expelled in 1966, only Fr. Giacomin and Fr. James Bertolino escape the expulsion order. Later on, however, the latter returns to Italy due to ill health. Thus Fr. Giacomin becomes the main link with the beginnings of Salesian work in Burma and with the outside Salesian world. Till 1975 he is Rector, teacher, inspirer, spiritual guide. In the latter years of life at Anisakan he is teacher, confessor and spiritual director. He is intelligent, dedicated to his work, a man of prayer and an example to all of living the salesian motto, 'Work and Temperance'. He is constantly inculcating to all with his example and with his insistence in season and out of season Salesian values, such as, love for Don Bosco and the Congregation, faithful observance of the Constitutions, the practice of the Preventive System and Salesian assistance.

It can be said that one of the first preoccupations of the Salesians on setting foot in Burma is to look for collaborators from the place. Two aspirants are sent to India even before the Japanese occupation. The war stops this initiative. After the war it is resumed by sending more aspirants to Sonada and to Bandel.

But it soon becomes clear that it is not possible to continue sending aspirants out of the country. The Burmese government is not in favour of students being sent to a foreign country. The only alternative is to open an *aspirantate* in Burma itself. Besides, the government becomes more and more rigid in not allowing new missionaries to enter the country.

On 19th March 1957 when a big group of boys who cannot go home for their holidays reaches Anisakan, a jeep of Army officers also reaches the place. They come to take possession of the house. Great is their surprise at finding it already occupied by our boys. They leave quite disappointed, but several times they try to get hold of that beautiful spot.

No doubt, the danger of losing everything should they postpone its opening further, forces the superiors to open the *aspirantate*. Fr. Balocco, the outgoing rector of Mandalay has already started teaching Latin to a group of boys, so here is at hand the first nucleus of possible aspirants. It is natural that Fr. Balocco becomes the first rector of the aspirants at Anisakan. From year to year the number increases and the original 20 becomes more than 80. To the old house, a bigger building in ferroconcrete is added and other additions are made.



Anisakan: The old Novitiate

In 1963 Fr. Duca succeeds Fr. Balocco. A year after this change of guard, it is realized that it is no more possible to send the aspirants to India for the novitiate, and so it becomes necessary to open the novitiate as well. The opening of the novitiate brings with it the need of having the *studentate* of philosophy as well, which is canonically erected in April 1964. The old house is no more sufficient to house novices and students of philosophy, therefore, a new two-storey building with the church is set up in 1965. Fr. Giacomin is its first rector. To the course of philosophy, Fr. Giacomin adds a course of theology for three clerics who cannot go to India for this purpose. Due to the government policy, Anisakan has also its share of setbacks. The novitiate is of short duration, as future events will tell.

Fr. U. Bordin starts a school in Thyngangyun when, as a parish priest, he takes care of a population of almost 2000 Catholics. The bishop of Rangoon, Msgr. Provost, takes serious offence at a negative remark passed by a Salesian Superior in Bangkok (Thailand) against French missionaries and promises that as long as he is alive the Salesians would not set foot in Rangoon. However, slowly he realizes that the Salesians are not that intrusive lot and so contemptuous of others as he imagines. As a consequence he changes his attitude, nay he is happy to invite them, and offers them the parish of Thyngangyun, about 10 kms. from the centre of Rangoon.

The place is not so very appealing to the Salesians, but at this moment there is no other place closer to Rangoon. For some years Fr. Bordin is in Rangoon in search of a plot of land on which to open a school, but he finds none. He has to be satisfied with taking on rent a house in Thyngangyun, which costs him a good amount of money and here he opens a modest school.

At last the occasion presents itself of finding a house on sale with attached a large plot of land that he is happy to buy. On this land he reopens the school and puts up a provisional building. This takes place in 1957. Larger funds are required to build up something lasting, and so Fr. Bordin goes to USA. in search of funds. On his return, he is able to realize his dream. The new school is the best building in Thyngangyun. It is a three-storey building with abundance of ample and airy classrooms, and a private chapel and rooms for the confreres on the third floor. This beautiful school, however, undergoes the common fate. On 1st April 1965 the government confiscates it.

4.5 A New Don Bosco School at Calcutta – Don Bosco Park Circus: 10.4.1958.

The Don Bosco School at Park Circus, comprising both the technical and the academic sections, which today offers education to over 2000 boys, owes its coming into existence to the happy combination of the mysterious working of Providence and of much human planning and dedicated service.

In the Province chronicle on 30th October 1952 we read the following entry: "Fr. Doro Pompilio[60] wins first prize (50,000 Pounds) in the Irish Sweep Stake held at Dublin. His horse 'Richer' yesterday reached first. We spoke the whole day about it, and hope the money would be employed to build a grand technical school in Calcutta."

The chronicle keeps us informed of the various steps taken towards the realization of this dream. The first thing is to find a suitable place to build the school. On 1st November 1953 we are told, "trying to find a suitable place for a house," and on 8th January 1954, "feverish search for a place." In early February negotiations start for a place in "Ezra lane", Kydd Street.

As negotiations for the acquisition of land and house at 3, Kydd Street fail, before the end of February 1955 new approaches are made to acquire land situated in Park Circus, Darga and Tiljala Road. What encourages the superiors in this 'feverish search' is the expressed desire of Fr. R. Ziggiotti reported in the chronicle, "It is the desire of the Rector Major that we should have a great Salesian institution (a technical school) in this metropolis."

On 14th September 1955 Fr. Provincial sends a formal application to Archbishop Perier to be allowed to open the new house at Park Circus. On 12th October 1955 the Archbishop grants his permission with a few additional clauses. This the Provincial communicates to his Council on 25th October 1955, together with the information that the land is bought

[60] Fr. Doro Pompilio: born in S. Giorgio in Bosco (Padova – Italy) on 10.12.1914, comes to India in 1931, makes his first profession on 8.12.1932, is ordained a priest on 5.6.1941. In 1942 he is interned at Mawlai, Deoli and Dehra Dun, he is released in 1945. He works at Tirupattur (few months only), Sonada, Calcutta (COP and Park Circus). At the end of 1964 circumstances force him to return to Italy and serve as a priest in his diocese. He is just about to come back to the Congregation, when death strikes him down on 28.5.1976. He bequeaths whatever he possesses to Calcutta Province.

already and that Fr. Doro is asked to deal with the Civil Authorities to get the required permission to build. On 1st February 1956, the Park Circus property is duly registered. On 13th March 1956, the Provincial informs the Council that also Turin and *Propaganda Fide* have granted the permission to open the school, that plans are ready and have been sent to Turin for approval, and that building operations would start in October.

On 12th September 1956 the Calcutta Corporation grants the permission to build the new Salesian institution at Park Circus and on 24th September start the building operations entrusted to Mr. Guyn and Co. Fr. Guido Colussi has the task to see that every thing goes on well. He reaches Calcutta on 4th October from Tangla, where he is the parish priest, temporarily lent for this purpose by Bishop Ferrando of Shillong.

On 31st January 1957 the blessing of the cornerstone takes place at about 5.30 p.m. It is performed by Archbishop Perier, in the presence of Bishop P. Tobar, of Cuttack, Msgr Barber, Vicar General, and a large gathering of distinguished persons. After the blessing there is a tea party for all those present, both Salesians and guests.

During the year 1957, several times the chronicle informs of the progress of the building operations, notwithstanding the difficulties in getting the necessary material. On 30th November 1957, we are informed of the nomination of Rev. Fr. Charles Dyer as rector of the new institution, and that the opening of the new school will take place on 15th January 1958. By the end of December works will be completed on two wings. The other wing will be completed in February or March. Difficulties to find material, especially cement, are delaying completion.

15th January 1958 is a red-letter for the Salesians of Calcutta. It is the day of the opening of the Don Bosco School at Park Circus. Though the members of the new community have not been able to fix their quarters in the new school, as polishing of the floor is still going on in the central block, still several Salesian fathers are there at 8.30 a.m. to help.

Fr. Dyer and Fr. Guido Colussi welcome the children to the school and assign them a seat each in the respective classrooms. With God's blessing, everything goes well and the parents of the pupils have only words of praise for the magnificent building and the kindly welcome that is given to them and to the children.

On 20th January Frs. Dyer, Guido Colussi, and Sasso[61] leave COP for good and take up their abode at Don Bosco Park Circus. As works at one of the three wings will take at least two more months to reach completion, Fr. Provincial decides to postpone the date of the blessing of the school to a later date around Easter. On 27th January 1958, the Secretary of the Provincial transfers his office to Don Bosco Park Circus. Fr. Provincial too will have his office transferred to the new school at some time in February. Don Bosco School, Park Circus, thus becomes the Provincial House.

The 10th of April is fixed for the blessing of the school. At 10.00 a.m. Archbishop Perier, accompanied by his Vicar General, Msgr. Barber, comes to bless the new institution. The ceremony is attended also by the Bishop P. Tobar of Cuttak, the vice-provincial of the Jesuits, the Provincial of the Irish Christian Brothers, the parish priest of Christ the King parish, Msgr. Kowen, the principal of St. Xavier's College, other Jesuit fathers, Loreto Nuns, Sisters of Notre Dame des Missions, Sisters of Charity of St. Bartolomea Capitanio, Sisters of Mary Immaculate, the Inspector of Anglo-Indian schools, Mr. A. D'Souza, a large number of admirers of Salesian works, and other friends. The boys are in their respective classrooms till the end of the Blessing.



Kolkata: Don Bosco School Park Circus (1958)
(Front view)

[61] Fr. Natale Sasso: born in Italy in 1929, comes to India in 1948, makes the novitiate at Kotagiri, and the first profession on 16.6.1949, is ordained a priest on 27.6.1957, dies on 4.11.1960, aged 31, as a result of a scooter accident in which he receives a double compound fracture of the right leg. He is on his way back from Liluah, where he has gone to hear the confessions of the boys. Bro. Rettore is driving the scooter.

The band, the choir, and the altar boys of Liluah are in attendance. The ceremony is followed by a short address by one of the pupils and a speech by Fr. Provincial. The visitors are then invited to go around and visit the school. The beautiful theatre hall with Don Bosco's bust (cut out of plywood and artistically painted) dominating from the stage, strikes a pleasant surprise on everyone. All have words of admiration and praise for the school.

The lunch is attended by Archbishop Perier, Bishop Tobar, Msgr. Barber, Msgr. Kowen, by Fr. L. Picachy, rector of St. Xavier's, and others. Some confreres from COP, Liluah, Krishnagar, and Ranaghat are also present. In his speech the Archbishop expresses his wish that soon the other two wings may be built and the technical department opened.

The year 1958 is indeed an eventful year for Don Bosco School Park Circus. It begins with the opening of the school on 15th January and it closes with the first solemn function, the prize distribution on 13th December 1958. The entertainment is short and interesting. It makes a deep impression on the parents. The school is already held in high esteem and the continual flow of applications for admission is a clear sign of it.

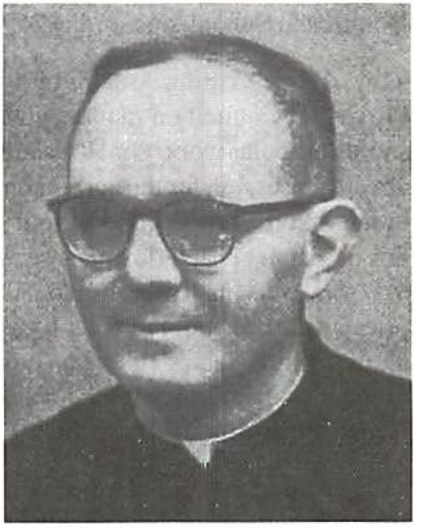
5. The Fourth Extraordinary Canonical Visitation: 2.2.1959–27.4.1959.

In the middle of October 1958, a letter by Fr. Provincial from Turin, where he is attending the XVIII General Chapter, informs the confreres that soon the Extraordinary Visitation of the Province may take place. In fact, another letter of 20th November 1958 announces that Fr. Modesto Bellido,[62] the Councillor for the Missions, is nominated as the extraordinary Visitor of the Indian Provinces. He will first visit the Southern Province. Towards the end of November, Fr. A. Fedrigotti, the Prefect General, makes a sudden visit to Don Bosco Park Circus. He also visits Don Bosco Liluah and gives a conference in the auditorium of Liluah, where he speaks of the good work Fr. Bellido has done as Provincial of Spain.

[62] Fr. Modesto Bellido: born at Pedro de Rozados (Spain) on 30.12.1902 is ordained a priest on 6.7.1930, is elected to the Superior Council on 24.2.1948, is elected Spiritual Director (Catechist General) on 3.5.1965, dies in Madrid (Spain) on 26.11.1993, aged 90. He is for 6 years Provincial, for 17 years Councillor for the Missions, for 6 years Catechist General.

In December 1958 Fr. Bellido is in the South visiting that Province. He is expected to be in Calcutta by the 10th of February 1959. On 14th January the Provincial informs the confreres that Fr. Bellido would arrive in the Province either on 2nd or 3rd of February. Eventually he arrives from Madras in the evening of 2nd February.

Fr. Provincial, the confreres of Park Circus, COP and Fr. Uguet of Liluah receive him at the airport and from there they all proceed to Don Bosco Park Circus, the Provincial House. On 3rd he visits the house of Park Circus and gives the first conference to the confreres. After a short prayer, there follows the reading of the Rector Major's letter appointing Fr. Bellido as Extraordinary Visitor. In the conference he speaks of the great grace of the Visitation to a Province and to the Confreres, of the great responsibility they have to lay good foundations to the new house, which is also the seat of the Provincial.



V. Rev. Fr. MODESTO BELLIDO, SDB
Extraodrinary Visitor in 1959

On the 5th Fr. Bellido obtains first an extension of the tourist visa that expires before the end of the month, so as to be able to visit the whole Province. From the 5th to the 22nd of February Fr. Bellido visits all the houses of Bengal, except Sonada. On 23rd February the Visitor accompanied by Fr. Provincial leaves for Assam and visits the houses and mission centres of Dibrugarh diocese, and the houses of Tezpur, North Lakhimpur, Chotapukri, Gauhati, Damra, Baghmara, and Tura. On 19th March he flies back to Calcutta. On 20th he flies to Imphal, visits Imphal and Hundung, and on the 24th he is again back in Calcutta.

From 25th to 29th March, Fr. Bellido visits the house of Sonada. He arrives at 1.55 p.m. A warm welcome is given to him in the Hall, followed by Benediction and tea. From 26th to 29th in between the various Holy Week services Fr. Bellido receives the confreres. On 29th, Easter Sunday, there is the blessing of the house and of the new Grotto. On 30th Fr. Bellido

presides over the meeting of the house Council in the presence of Fr. Provincial. In the afternoon at 2.30 p.m. Fr. Bellido gives the closing conference in the study hall of the clerics. Tea and departure of the Visitor and Fr. Provincial for Barpetta Road, follow the conference. He visits Barpetta Road on 31st and 1st April. On 2nd April, he visits Tangla. On 3rd he goes up to Shillong and visits Mawlai, the Cathedral parish, Sunnyside, Don Bosco School, and on the 25th he flies back to Calcutta.

While visiting Assam, on two occasions the Visitor speaks to the Provincial Council on matters concerning the Province as a whole or on some particular work. On 10th March 1959 in Gauhati he joins the Council already in session for the admission of aspirants to the novitiate, of novices to the first profession, and of four clerics to the perpetual profession. On this occasion Fr. Bellido touches several points, such as, the need of calling a rectors' meeting to plan out together in preparing a place for the diocesan priests who are about to enter the diocese.[63] He also tells the Council that their attention should not be on having more dioceses, but on the division of the Province, and that the present problem is the scarcity of personnel. Hence the need to increase the inflow of vocations.

A particular problem, which he touches upon, is the transfer of Don Bosco School of Krishnagar to the Congregation. We must reach a solution for this particular problem, which has been the subject of several inconclusive discussions, as several meetings of the Provincial Council testify.[64] The property of Don Bosco Krishnagar is already belonging to the Congregation (there is a civil document in which it appears that the Don Bosco institution belongs to Fr. Antonio Doro).

As regards the finances, Fr. Bellido has already spoken to Bishop Morrow and asked him to have confidence in the Congregation, which is

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[63] Diocesan priests are already working the in Northeast before 1959. The first group of three diocesan priests arrives in 1954. In 1956 another group of three arrives. Except for two, the rest work in areas belonging to the Tezpur diocese. The next batch of three comes in 1959, which includes the first diocesan bishop of Tezpur, now archbishop of Imphal, Fr. Joseph Mittathany. In 1960, five more diocesan priests arrive, among whom is Fr. George Malamassery, later first bishop of Tura. From here on, year after year, more diocesan priests join the work in the Northeast. Most of the pioneers are from Kerala. The first Khasi diocesan priest, Fr. Albinus Jawphniaw, is ordained in 1966. Cfr. Jacob Alukal, *Diocesan Priests in Northeast India,* Oriens Theological College, Shillong, 1985, 20–21; also Indian Missiological Review, special issue, Sept-Dec. 1990, Sacred Heart Theological College, Shillong, 116–121.

[64] Cfr. *Provincial Archives*. B.8.2: 26.8.'55, 2.7.'56, 5.10.'56, 21.10.'57

helping poor children every where. We will appeal to our Benefactors to help us; the missionaries will pay for their own children. Our boys will go to the Cathedral on Sundays and feast days. The technical school will accept and give preference to the bishop's requirements and he will pay.

In answer to some difficulties raised by the Council members regarding the property of the institution, the personnel and the expenses, Fr. Bellido recommends to accept the transfer without a written contract. He will leave in writing and with his signature the conversation he has had with the bishop. If there is any problem, let Turin be informed.

Fr. Bellido adds that the bishop is ready to give to the Congregation two or three acres of land together with the church in Berhampore. It can be kept for a possible future development of our work there. Tezpur, Dibrugarh,[65] and Jorhat are also discussed considering the possibility of their future development.

On 22nd April 1959 Fr. Bellido calls for a meeting of the Provincial Council at Mawlai. After visiting the whole Province, he deals with the following points:

- The real problem of the Province is the dearth of personnel. The present number of aspirants is inadequate to solve the problem. There is need of another *aspirantate.* The Province is to be divided and the modalities for division are to be worked out. The missionaries need greater care by the Provincial.
- Another difficulty is in the area of finance. But this must not stop our progress. The new *aspirantate* can be closer to Shillong.
- As regards Sonada, there are too many people in the house. Keep only the boys of the higher classes. You have to think also of a holiday house for Sonada. Barpetta Road is a little too far.
- The parish of Mawlai should be a Salesian parish. Prepare the deed of transfer to the Congregation. Make a gift of Rs. 50,000 to the bishop

[65] Fr. Piasecki starts a School at Dibrugarh, though it takes more than 20 years for the school to be known as Don Bosco School. During World War II the academic life of the School is disrupted and in 1941 the Italian confreres are taken to the Concentration Camp. Don Bosco School, Dibrugarh, is officially handed over to the Salesian Congregation in 1958. For a complete account of the Don Bosco School, Dibrugarh, Cfr. Mattappally, A *Chronicled History,* 16–24.

by canceling the Rs. 30,000 he owes to COP and later transferring Rs. 20,000.[66]

- St. Antony's College: Prepare the deed of transfer to the Congregation. Accept the present place for the hostel. When Fr. Joseph has prepared the new labs, you can offer B.Sc. Course to the brothers.[67]
- Gauhati: the bishop of Shillong makes the proposal of giving everything to the Congregation. Buy a plot of land for a future school.

On 25th April the Visitor and Fr. Provincial are back from Shillong. From the Dum Dum airport they proceed at once to Bandel where they spend the night. The next day they visit Liluah, Park Circus and COP.

In the evening of 27th April Fr. M. Bellido leaves for Beirut. Most of the confreres of Don Bosco Park Circus, go to see him off at the airport.

Fr. Bellido has spent almost three full months visiting the Province. Unfortunately he is not able to visit Burma, as he has to be in Rome at the beginning of May for the blessing of the Don Bosco's Shrine at Cinecittà, Rome. It is certain, however, that he has been deeply impressed by the vastness of this Province, as he has been often heard mentioning that it seems to him as if he has been visiting not one, but half a dozen Provinces. The number and differences of languages, customs, and climatic conditions of the Province impress him greatly.

6. The Second Division of the Province: September 1959.

When towards the end of August 1959 the first news of the division of the Province reaches the Confreres, for most of them it must have been

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[66] The problem of the Mawlai Parish Church is not a new one. The Provincial Council in its meeting held in Bandel on 9.2.'50, deals with the difficulties due to the fact of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus having to serve both as Parish Church of the Mawlai Parish and as Chapel of the *Theologate*. The difficulty is double: a) the timings of the parish services and those of the *studentate* are clashing; b) using the same Church for both communities brings too many people (especially women) in the formation house. A solution to both difficulties could be the building of a new Parish Church somewhere in Mawlai, which the Congregation could help building, and the Sacred Heart Church becoming the Church of the studentate of theology. The minutes of the Council meeting of 11.4.1953, mention that discussion of the transfer of the Parish Church of Mawlai to Sacred Heart College has been resumed (*Provincial Archives*. B.8.2). The question of making the new Parish Church of Mawlai a Salesian Parish comes in a number of other meetings of the Provincial Council. Cfr. *Provincial Archives*. B.8.2 (diary): 2.7.'56; 5.10.'56; 8.7.'57; 21.10.'57; 23.5.'58; 25.11.'58.

[67] The transfer of St. Antony's College to the Congregation has also been discussed at several meetings of the Provincial Council. Cfr. *Provincial Archives*. B.8.2: 3.5.'46; 11.4.'53; (diary): 26.8.'55; 25.10.'55.

unexpected news. However, for a long time the need of a division is keenly felt by those responsible for the government of the Province.

The first proposal of a division is already put forward by Fr. V. Scuderi in August 1938.[68] Due to the difficulties and length of journeys, the multiplicity and difficulty of languages, the remoteness of houses and of confreres, and the diversity of the works to be developed, the need of a divion becomes ever more compelling. The proposal of dividing the Province into two: one Province comprising the whole of Assam, and the other comprising all the rest, is sent by the Provincial Council to the superiors in Turin on 9th February 1950, through the then Visitor, Fr. A. Fedrigotti. We have seen how also Fr. Bellido recommends to the Provincial Council to fix their attention on the division of the Province and on its preparation.

But it is Fr. A. Fedrigotti, the Vicar General, who deals with this matter in an official and authoritative way. On 9th August 1959, on his way back from Burma, where he completes the extraordinary visitation that Fr. Bellido is unable to do in April, he stops in Calcutta for two or three days. He presides over a meeting of the Provincial Council at which a possible partition of the Province is discussed. Fr. Bellido also recommends it, as distances and the need for further development call for it.

On 29th August 1959 the superiors in Turin decide to split the Province into two: the North Indian Province of St. John Bosco with Calcutta as the seat of the Provincial, and the Northeast Indian Province of Mary Help of Christians with Gauhati as the seat of the Provincial.

On 24th September 1959 the news of the division is made known in Shillong together with the names of the two Provincials: Fr. A. Alessi, as Provincial of the new Province of Gauhati, and Fr. O. Paviotti, as Provincial of the Calcutta Province. The official Decree of the division of the two Provinces and of the erection of the new one by the Sacred Congregation of Religious is dated 7th October 1959. A similar Decree by the Rector Major, Fr. R. Ziggiotti, is issued on 17th October 1959.[69]

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[68] Cfr. His letter to the Rector Major in *Provincial Archives*. A.1.1

[69] In the request made by Fr. Ziggiotti to the Sacred Congregation for Religious to divide the Province and to erect a new Province, he expressly mentions Gauhati as the seat of the provincial. While Calcutta Province is still called Province of North India. For request and decree of erection, Cfr. *Provincial Archives*. F.B.1.1.

In the evening of 26th September the rector of Sonada gathers all the confreres in the study hall and announces the division of the Province and the visit of the two Provincials. The next day the Sonadians have the joy of welcoming both Provincials arriving from Shillong. At tea time the new Provincial of Calcutta, Fr. O. Paviotti, tells the whole community of both Salesians and boys that Fr. N. Lo Groi is the new rector of Salesian College, Sonada, and that Fr. Joseph Marchesi is the new rector of the *Theologate* at Mawlai.

On 10th October 1959 and on the days that follow meetings are held in Calcutta by the existing Provincial Council, presided over by the two Provincials, to discuss the problems arising out of the division: finance, division of personnel in formation, etc. All goes well and smoothly, as the principles of the division are laid down before and approved by the superiors.

On 17th October 1959 Fr. Alessi, after 9 years of arduous and self-sacrificing work on behalf of the undivided Northern Province, leaves for Gauhati, the seat of the new Province.

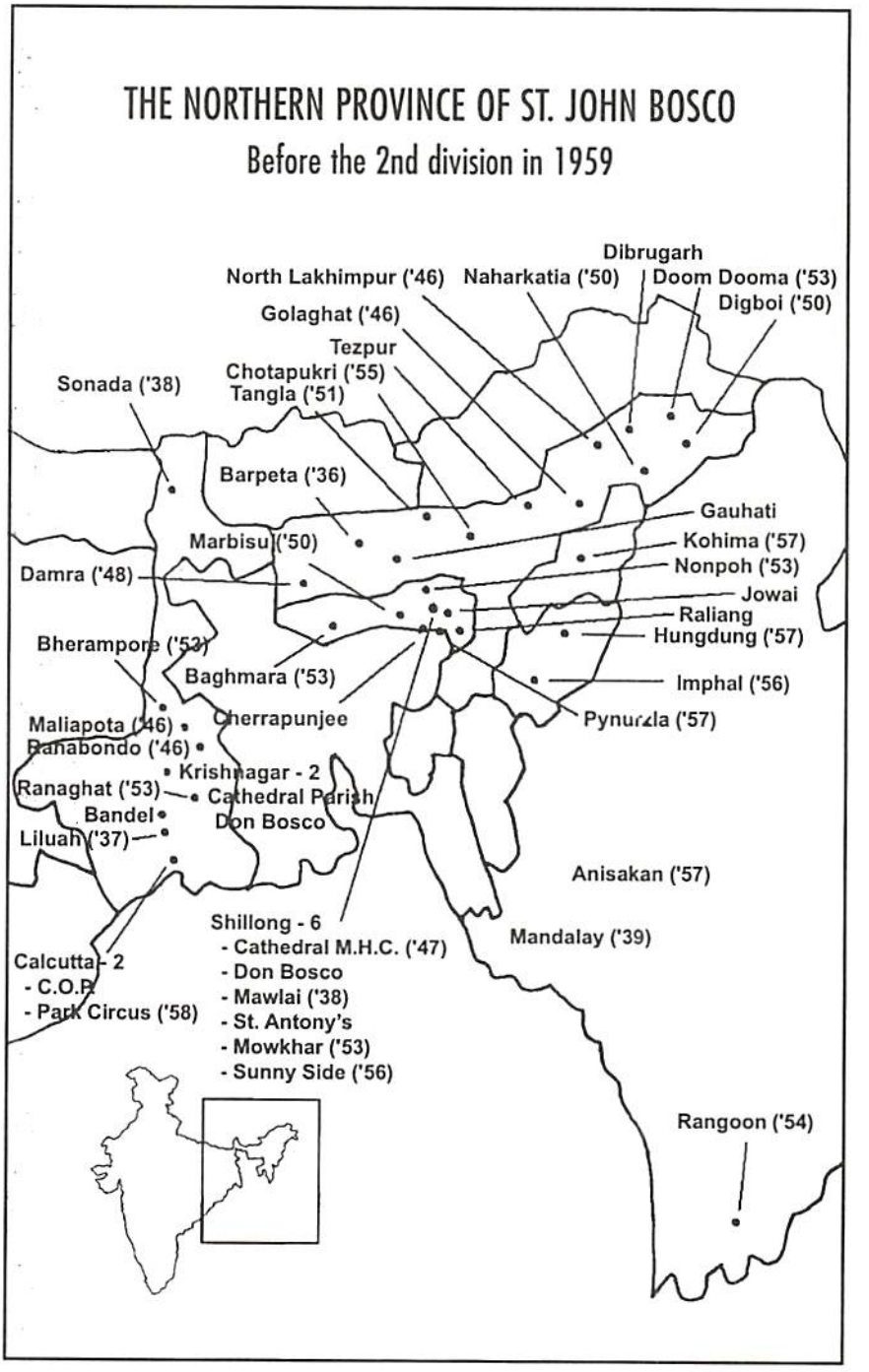
On 29th October the new Provincial, Fr. O. Paviotti sends his first circular letter to the confreres of his Province, and on 3rd November he announces the members of the new Provincial Council: Fr. M. Ferrario (Economer), Fr. M. Uguet, Fr. L. Gobetti, and Fr. P.J. Sheehy.

From the 13th to the 15th November 1959 a meeting of Fr. Alessi, Fr. Ferrario, and Fr. Uguet takes place, in which some common problems are still discussed, such as, the exchange of some confreres[70], the names of the B.T. students, the house of Delhi, the Calcutta Polytechnic, dates of retreats, recruitment of aspirants, and maintenance of the various houses of formation.

[70] One of the confreres who, from the Calcutta Province goes to the Gauhati Province is Fr. Philip Giraudo: born at Andonno (Valdieri – Italy) on 29.6.1928, his first profession is on 16.8.1947 in Italy, comes to India in 1948, is ordained a priest at Mawlai on 8.12.1955. After his ordination he works for a short time in Bandel and Park Circus. He does pioneering work in Bhutan where he learns the language very well. He is the first parish priest of Rangblang (Khasi Hills), dies at Shillong on 14.7.1988, aged 60.

THE NORTHERN PROVINCE OF ST. JOHN BOSCO

Before the 2nd division in 1959



Part III

The Kolkata Province
1960–1996

CHAPTER X
1960–1972:
PROGRESS AND SETBACKS[1]

A) New Presences: 1. The Don Bosco Polytechnic at Cossipore, North Calcutta 1.1 The Agitation in Cossipore 1.2 The Salesian Quarters 2. Don Bosco in Siliguri 3. A Salesian Presence in Delhi: The Don Bosco Technical School 4. The Santal Mission: Azimganj B) Life in the Established Institutions: 1. Don Bosco Liluah 2. Bandel: 2.1 Bandel Seminary Needs Expansion 2.2 Fr. A. Ricceri, Rector Major, Blesses the New Retreat House 2.3 Improvements in St. John's High School, Bandel 3. Don Bosco School Park Circus: 3.1 The Trade School 4. The Closure of the Catholic Orphan Press and the Withdrawal of the Salesians from the Cathedral Parish 4.1 The Closure of the Press. 4.2 The Cathedral Parish is given back to the Diocese 5. Krishnagar: 5.1 Don Bosco School 5.2 The Diocese of Krishnagar: 5.2.1 Life in the Mission Centres 5.2.2 From Entrustment to Mandate - A New Church Policy 6. Burma C) Three Other Events Affecting the Life of the Province in the years 1960–1972: 1. Visitors 2. In Search of Vocations 3. The Meeting of Superiors of Formation houses in India: Bangalore 26–28 April 1968.

The years from 1960 to 1972 give us a picture of the dynamic life of Calcutta Province, after the separation of the Province of Gauhati. Three Provincials provide leadership during this period: Fr. Oreste Paviotti (1959–1964), Fr. Maurus Casarotti (1965–1966), and Fr. Rosario Stroscio (1967–1972).

During this time a number of new institutions come into existence, such as, Don Bosco Polytechnic at Cossipore (North Calcutta), a Salesian Presence at Siliguri, Don Bosco Technical School at Okhla (Delhi), Don Bosco Welfare Centre and the St. John Bosco parish at Azimganj. Other existing institutions have their own share of progress and setbacks, such as, Don Bosco Liluah, Don Bosco Park Circus, Don Bosco Krishnagar, the Catholic Orphan Press and the Cathedral parish of Calcutta, and in Burma: Mandalay, Anisakan, Thyngangyun.

Another important event during this period is the visit of the Rector Major, Fr. Aloysius Ricceri, in 1968, accompanied by a few members of

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[1] For this entire chapter, Cfr. Chronicle of the Province 1949–1960, *Provincial Archives;* 1961–1968, B.10.1.1; B.10.1.2; 1967–1972, B.10.1.2a; and Minutes of Provincial Council Meetings, *Provincial Archives*, B.8.2, 28.3.1955–17.4.1967; B.8.2.1, 11.6.1967–23.9.1972.

the General Council: Fr. Tohill, the first Regional Superior of the English-speaking Region,[2] Fr. Ruggero Pilla,[3] the Economer General, Fr. Scrivo, Councillor for Youth Pastoral and Parishes, and Fr. George Williams, Regional Superior of the English-speaking Region. Fr. A. Ricceri is the second Rector Major to visit Calcutta, and that too, twice in the same year.

Other important events during this period are: the II Vatican Council (1962–1965), which results in a changed missionary policy; the XIX General Chapter in 1965; and especially the Special General Chapter from 10.6.1971 to 5.1.1972. All these events have their impact on the Church and the Salesian World, and therefore, also on the Province of Calcutta. The Special General Chapter is preceded by two Provincial Chapters and is followed by a Special Provincial Chapter.

A) New Presences

1. The Don Bosco Polytechnic at Cossipore, North Calcutta

It is at the invitation of the West Bengal government in 1958 that the Salesian Society begins negotiations to run a Polytechnic in Calcutta. The government puts forward the following conditions: the Salesian Society shall procure a suitable plot of land in North Calcutta at its own expense, while the government would subsidize all the building operations, furniture, and equipment for the polytechnic; the Salesian Society has to draw up the requisite plans and have them approved by government, shall see to the thorough execution of these plans and shall attend to the purchase and installation of the entire equipment. The Salesian Society would be entrusted with the full management of the polytechnic, subject, however, to specific directives from the Governing Body, in matters pertaining to it; the Salesian Society should prepare its own personnel and include them in the Management and staff for greater efficiency.[4]

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[2] That of the Regional is a new structure introduced by the XIX General Chapter in 1965.

[3] Fr. Rugggero Pilla: is born at Pesco Sannita (Benevento-Italy) on 27.4.1911, makes his first profession on 11.10.1927, is ordained a priest on 22.9.1935. He is for 11 years Rector, for 5 years Provincial, for 7 years at the General Procure in Rome, a helper to Fr. Giraudo for the realization of the Shrine of Don Bosco in Rome, of the Salesian University and of the Generalate at the Pisana. For 20 years he is Economer General. He dies at Caserta on 15.10.1987, aged 76.

[4] Cfr. Memorandum in Chronicle of the Province, *Provincial Archives*, B.10.1.2, after December 1967.

Fr. Alessi, the Provincial, takes up the matter, for the first time, in the meeting of the Provincial Council on 18th November 1958. The Provincial informs the Council that negotiations with the government are only at its initial stage. He tells it also that the General Council has given the green signal to go ahead with the negotiations and that they are ready to give three or four brothers. Fr. John Med, Provincial of the Southern Province, would give Fr. Henry Torra[5] and Bro. Ferrer. Since the government gives only promises so far, Fr. Uguet is authorized to negotiate further.

On 22nd and 23rd November 1959, the new Provincial Council presided over by the new Provincial, Fr. O. Paviotti, discusses whether to accept or reject the offer of the government and informs it that so far no suitable place has been found. The conditions presented by government with regard to the choice of the principal and of the teachers and admissions of pupils are found not satisfactory.

On 2nd January 1960 Mr. A.C. Sen, Chief Inspector of technical schools, a certain Mr. Das Gupta, and architect Chowdhury, are shown around a plot of land available in Cossipore for the purpose of setting up the Polytechnic. They declare the plot suitable, provided an outlet to the main road can be made. It is 18 bighas in extension with a big lake in it and would cost Rs. 350,000.[6] On 20th March, Rs. 20,000 are given to the owners, P. C. and S.K. Bose, as earnest money for the land.

During the Provincial Council meeting of 30th June 1960, the Polytechnic issue is again taken up



V. Rev. Fr. ORESTES PAVIOTTI, SDB
Provincial (1959–1964)

Fr. Paviotti is born on 30th January 1911 at Bicinicco, Udine, Italy. After reaching India, he continues the studies he began in Ivrea (Italy) and becomes a Salesian on 9th January 1930. During his practical training in Gauhati (1932–1934), he masters the Assamese language.

[5] Fr. Henry Torra: is born in Spain in 1920, comes to India as a priest and joins the Madras Province. He is lent to the Calcutta Province to be the principal of the Polytechnic. On 10.1.1971 he goes back to Madras Province and later to Spain, where he dies at Valencia in 1982, aged 62.

[6] Cfr. Chronicle of the Province, *Provincial Archives*, B.10.1.1.

for discussion. A number of difficulties present themselves that require urgent attention. It is not easy to get Fr. Torra and Brother Ferrer from the South. Even the thought of withdrawing from the project is given a consideration, but the Council realizes that negotiations with the government are already far too advanced to do so. The Provincial cannot think of having a non-Salesian as principal. However, the project continues to be pursued.

Soon after becoming a priest on 5th November 1938, he is appointed professor of Theology at Sacred Heart College, Mawlai. In 1942 during the World War II he is interned at Deoli and Dehra Dun. From 1944 to 1945 he is at Yercaud as professor of Philosophy and in 1946 he returns to Mawlai as professor of Theology. After obtaining his Master's Degree from the Gauhati University, he is back again in Sacred Heart College as professor. From 1952 to 1955 he is the rector of Salesian College, Sonada. From 1955 to 1959 he serves as the rector of Sacred Heart College, Mawlai, Shillong.

At the division of the North Indian Province in 1959, he is made the Provincial of Calcutta Provimce and in 1964 he succeeds Fr. Alessi as the Provincial of Gauhati Province. After two years he resigns due to ill health and undergoes treatment in Shillong and in Italy. While in Italy he attends also courses in Missiology and Spirituality at the Gregorian University. On his return in 1968, he is appointed professor of Theology and confessor at Kristu Jyoti College, Bangalore. From 1979 to 1990 he is in Shillong, teaching at Sacred Heart College and in other seminaries of Shillong. He passes away on 11th September 1991 at Udine (Italy), at the age of 80.

On 3rd August 1960 Fr. Provincial meets Mr. A. C. Sen again. He informs him that the government will finance the administrative and workshop buildings and pay the salary of the teachers.[7] On 5th August 1960, Mr. M. C. Chowdhury asks for two years to complete the construction. The plans presented by him are not acceptable to Fr. Doro and Fr. Ferrario, who in turn, present their own, which the contractor calls 'orthodox' but says he will adopt. On 13th July 1961, Mr. Chowdhury is asked not to draw the plans for the workshops. We will build them by ourselves and for this we choose Mr. Guin and Company.

On 24th July 1961 Fr. Provincial announces to the Council that Fr. Torra has been accepted as principal, and Fr. P. Doro as Secretary. What is left now is to discuss with the government the choice of a Contractor. The permission of the Archbishop is also to be sought for building. The blessing of the foundation stone is to be held on 31st January 1962.

[7] Rs. 12,78,000 for the building, Rs. 10,55,000 for equipment, Rs. 2,41,000 recurring grant every year. The Salesians will raise something like a lakh of Rupees in fees. Cfr. Minutes of the Provincial Council Meeting of 3.8.1960 in *Provincial Archives*, B.8.2.

On 31st January 1962 the Archbishop of Calcutta, Msgr. A. Dyer blesses the foundation stone of the Don Bosco Polytechnic. It will be a three-storey building with floor area of 1600 sq. metres each. The frame will be in ferro-concrete and the walls made of bricks for housing 720 students.

On 20th August 1963 the new Archbishop of Calcutta,[8] Msgr. Albert D'Souza, blesses the new Polytechnic in the presence of some 30 priests, mostly Jesuits, and a few lay people.

Classes commence on 9th September 1963 with 120 students on the roles among whom ten are Catholics. Mr. H.N. Chowdhury, Education Minister of West Bengal, holds the official opening on 12th September in the presence of officials from the education department and the students of the school. He exhorts the students to prepare themselves not only to eke out a living, but also to serve the country. He adds that Catholic schools are well known for their discipline. Later, on numerous occasions government Authorities visit the school accompanied by officials, especially of the Central government, who openly express their satisfaction with the whole administration.

In January 1963 the Provincial Council considers the need to provide a place of residence for the confreres working in the school. In December 1963, the decision is taken to begin construction. In March 1964, Bro. Isaac Puthumana is appointed to supervise the construction. The corner stone is laid on 15th April 1964, and on 20th October the five confreres shift to the newly built house. With Fr. Henry Torra, the principal and Fr. P. Doro, the Secretary, there are also three lay brothers, Bro. Joachim Mondol, Bro. Jerome Lyngdoh and Bro. Aye Maung.[9]

The end of December 1964 witnesses important changes among the leaders of the three Indian Provinces that have a bearing on the history of Calcutta Province in these twelve years under consideration. Fr. O. Paviotti is transferred as Provincial of Gauhati while Fr. A. Alessi goes to Bombay Province as rector of Lonavla. Fr. Maurus Casarotti, rector of Lonavla, becomes the new Provincial of Calcutta Province. Fr. Luigi Di Fiori becomes the Provincial of Madras Province in the place of Fr. John Med.

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[8] On 9.2.1962 there occurs the sudden death of His Grace, A. Dyer, Archbishop of Calcutta. His successor, Albert D' Souza, is installed on 10.12.1962.

[9] Cfr. Directory of 1963.

Fr. M. Casarotti has a short stint as the Provincial of Calcutta Province. On 21st January 1967, he leaves for Gauhati to replace Fr. O. Paviotti who falls sick. On 18th January Fr. Rosario Stroscio, the Provincial Economer, is appointed Provincial of Calcutta. It is during his term as Provincial that the Province goes through some of its darkest days due to the change of government in West Bengal. In 1967 the United Front government comes into power with the Communist Party as its most powerful constituent.

The Don Bosco Polytechnic and the Catholic Orphan Press become the first casualties in the following years. Even before the elections and the victory of the Left parties, all along the year 1966, West Bengal and particularly Calcutta, witnesses strikes and disruption of normal life. The Chronicle of the Province records:

13.3.1966	Riots in Calcutta and Krishnagar.
17.3.1966	Political situation uncertain.
10.8.1966	Strikes start in Calcutta – schools close down.
22.9.1966	*Hartal* in Calcutta for 48 hours.
29.8.1966	Schools closed in Calcutta.



V. Rev. Fr. MAURO CASAROTTI, SDB
Provincial (1965–1966)

Fr. Mauro Casarotti is born at Casalbuttano in the Cremona District of Italy on 17th May 1917. He arrives in India on 5th December 1939, and undergoes training to become a Salesian at Tirupattur. He spends three years in the internment camp at Dehra Dun during the World War II. He is ordained a priest on 7th August 1949.

Immediately after his ordination he is sent as Dean of Studies to Don Bosco School, Matunga. In 1952 he is made rector of the same Institute and remains in office till 1958. For the next 6 years he works at Yercaud. He is then appointed rector of the Salesian Institute at Lonavla. After that he is appointed Provincial of Calcutta Province in 1964. In 1967 he becomes the Provincial of Gauhati Province. In 1973 he returns to Bombay Province and is sent to Panjim.

In 1975 he is appointed the Provincial of the Bombay Province. Unfortunately ill health causes him to submit his resignation within a year of taking office. His resignation is accepted and he is sent to Goa, until he is appointed rector of the study house of Poona in 1978. After that, he is posted at Lonavla for three years. In 1984 he is appointed confessor at Nasik. In 1995 he is transferred to the Provincial House at Matunga where he is at present. Fr. Mauro is noted for his warm and humane approach to people and situations.

1.1 The agitation in Cossipore

In July 1967 some problems arise between Fr. Eugene Ojer, the acting principal in the place of Fr. Torra who is temporarily away in Spain, and the students, and at the end of August, between the acting principal and some of the staff of the Polytechnic.

The agitation that leads to the closure of the polytechnic begins on 2nd September 1967. On that day the acting principal holds a meeting with the teaching staff during which he reads out the circulars of the government relating to the election of two representatives of teachers to the government Bodies of Polytechnics. It is agreed at the meeting to hold the election on Sunday 9th September, by secret ballot and the election to be decided by absolute majority.

On Friday, 8th September 1967 a certain Shri Tapas Ganguli, although not an employee of Don Bosco Polytechnic, enters the principal's office and demands from the acting principal that the copies of the government Orders be circulated, that one of the staff members should propose a name, which would be seconded by somebody else and then nomination papers would be filed by the person whose name is proposed.

Without the permission of the acting principal, Shri Tapas Ganguli



V. Rev. Fr. ROSARIO STORSCIO, SDB
Provincial (1967–1972)

Born:	18.5.1922 at Furnari, Italy
Salesian:	1.09.1939 at San Gregorio, Catania (Italy)
Practical Training:	Bandel, Sonada, Tirupattur
Priest:	07.1.1951 at Shillong

APPOINTMENTS

1951–1953:	Secretary to Provincial, C.O.P. Calcutta
1953–1954:	Dean of Studies, Don Bosco Liluah
1954–1961:	Financial Administrator, Don Bosco Liluah
1961–1964:	Rector, Don Bosco Liluah & member of the Provincial Council
1964–1965:	Rector and Prior, Bandel Church
1965–1966:	Rector and Principal, Don Bosco Park Circus
1967–1972:	Provincial of Calcutta
1972–1975:	Parish Priest, Maliapota
1975–1979:	Vicar General & Rector of Bishop's House, Krishnagar
1979–	Assistant parish priest, Auxilium Parish, Calcutta.

holds a meeting inside the Polytechnic premises with several teaching and non-teaching staff members. This is forbidden by the official rules of sponsored Polytechnics.

Apprehending trouble, on 9th September 1967, the acting principal puts out a copy of the government Circulars on the notice board. Besides, he cancels the meeting fixed for that day and announces 16th September 1967 as the last date for filing nominations and 23rd September as the day of elections. He acts thus for two reasons: first, because, contrary to expectations, no reply has been received from the Office of the Chief Inspector of Technical Education, government of West Bengal, and, secondly, to provide the teachers with more time to consider their own candidates for the election.

The acting principal also places on the notice board a notice reminding all teachers not to attend meetings addressed by outsiders in the Polytechnic campus.

That same day, while the acting principal, with the religious staff of the Polytechnic and some students belonging to the Salesian Society, are having lunch in their own private residence, several teachers, instructors and peons, accompanied by the above-mentioned Shri Tapas Ganguly, go right inside the private quarters and, squatting near the dining-room, demand to see the acting principal. Fr. Eugene Ojer, the acting principal, goes to them and at once Shri Tapas Ganguly demands that he rescind the notice about meetings addressed by outsiders. When Fr. Ojer refuses to yield, Shri Tapas Ganguly declares that a meeting would be held there and then and 'Ojer' would preside. This, the latter refuses to do and succeeds in moving away from the group.

The meeting, which develops into a perfect *gherao*, is nevertheless held from 1.30 p.m. to 4.00 p.m. The party has snacks and tea brought to them from the Polytechnic Canteen. The meeting is addressed, among others, by Shri Tapas Ganguly, who is the main speaker, by other outsiders, and also by certain professors, demonstrators and other staff members.

Accusations against the members of the religious staff are loudly cheered. Fr. Marmol, who is 82, is confined from the beginning in the dining room and is not allowed to move to his own room for rest, despite repeated appeals.

The President of the Governing Body, Fr. M. Casarotti, is among those *gheraoed* but after an hour and half he is able to convince the group to allow him to move out to catch a plane for New Delhi.

The meeting closes with a resolution to carry on with a 'Sign-No-Work' strike until the demands are granted, although up to that moment no demands have been presented to the acting principal. It is further decided to hold a similar meeting on Monday, 11th September 1967.

In the face of this and fearing that the students also would be incited to agitate, the acting principal declares the Polytechnic closed until further notice. He then seeks the advice of the Chief Inspector of Technical Education, government of West Bengal.

As the Chief Inspector is not in his Office, the acting principal and the Provincial have an audience with the Education Minister at Writers' Building. The Minister calls Shri Tapas Ganguli, who has preceded them at Writers' Building, and asks the question be settled amicably. The contention is that Shri Tapas Ganguli has no say in the matter, as he does not belong to the Don Bosco Polytechnic. All the same it is agreed to have a discussion at Don Bosco Park Circus, where Shri Tapas Ganguli will bring a letter, with at least the signatures of half the professors.

The meeting is held on that same evening. Contrary to what is agreed upon, Shri Tapas Ganguli comes to the meeting not with two teachers, but with a large number of teachers and students, six of them attending the meeting. A letter is produced with only one name of a teacher, which is refused, but the discussion is held all the same, their main demand being to open the Polytechnic on the following day, and the removal of the acting principal. Finally it is agreed that Fr. Ojer will not go to the Polytechnic for a few days and that another Father will discharge his duties. The removal, however, of the acting principal is something that only the Governing Body can do.

On Tuesday, 12th September, Fr. Provincial goes to open the Polytechnic and addresses a few words to the students. A promise is made by the students that there would be no violence. Fr. Provincial calls Fr. A. Guarneri from Krishnagar to represent him to see to the continued running of the Polytechnic.

The aim of the agitators is not merely the removal of the acting principal, but the nationalization of the Polytechnic. If this is not granted

speedily, they threaten violence against Don Bosco Park Circus, Don Bosco School Liluah and other Don Bosco institutions.

At this juncture, the Deputy Secretary, Education Department, West Bengal, extends the term of the Governing Body till 30th November 1967. On 14th September the Governing Body at an emergency meeting passes the order to close the Polytechnic till further notice. The order is enforced from 18th September 1967. The closure of the Polytechnic is notified to the public through the press, posters, notices and handbills to the teachers and students on arrival at the Polytechnic. There is a strong reaction. Some students *gherao* Fr. Guarneri for three hours in the veranda of the private building. A few students try to scale the wall to the veranda of the second floor, but one of the students manages to stop them. Finally they are about to set fire to the private quarters, but one of the professors prevents them.

Their first victory instead of appeasing them makes the agitators bolder and leads them to indulge in unlawful acts and to loot the private quarters. Such are the threats and acts of violence that it proves imperative to remove at night the Polytechnic religious staff, the Salesian students, and the furniture from the private quarters.

On 20th September the Education Minister suggests that the Salesian Society accept an Administrator from the government. The Salesian Society makes it known that it will not accept any Administrator.

All of a sudden, without any previous discussion whatsoever, on 23rd September 1967, in the evening, a government Order, made operative that very day, is received imposing an *Ad Hoc* Governing Body of three persons (all government officials) to control the Polytechnic. The Salesian Society approaches the High Court, which on 26th September imposes an injunction restraining this *Ad Hoc* Governing Body from functioning in any way.

On 30th October 1967 Fr. H. Torra, principal of the Polytechnic, returns from Spain. On 3rd November an emergency meeting of the Governing Body is held at Park Circus to discuss when and on what conditions the Polytechnic can be reopened. It is decided to reopen on 6th November maintaining *status quo*: Fr. Ojer goes back to the Polytechnic and so also a student Priest, if he wants to. The principal and/or secretary are given power, to close the Polytechnic in consultation with the president

in case of new disturbances. And disturbances do continue for the whole of 1968 and a good portion of 1969.

On 16th July 1968 at about 11.00 a.m. Fr. Torra is *gheraoed* for over 2 hours. Tired and as a move to defeat the demands of teachers and staff, he writes a letter addressed to the Governor and declares the Polytechnic closed *sine die*.

On 17th July 1968 Fr. Provincial and Fr. Torra pay a visit to the Secretary of Education at Writers Building, to explain the case at Cossipore and explore ways and means of solving the knotty problem. They propose two alternatives: a) Let government, after due compensation, take over the management and ownership of the Polytechnic; b) Let government abolish the Polytechnic and allow the Salesian Society to pay back in instalments the Capital Grant for buildings on the system of a usual 20-year bond. According to Fr. George Alakulam, who since 4th December 1967 is the new rector of the Cossipore community, this seems to be also the desire of the people of the locality in order to have a school in its place.

Difficulties and opposition carry on during the last months of 1968 and the first eight months of 1969, especially in the months of July and August. The *coup de grace* is given by the students on September 5th when they *gherao* once more the principal, Fr. Torra, from 2.10 p.m. to 11.00 p.m., when the D.C. (Calcutta North) arrives with a truckload of police and goes straight to the Polytechnic. He approaches Fr. Torra directly and tells him that he is free. The students object, so he tells them to phone to the Minister, who seemingly tells them to allow Fr. Torra to go. They, however, remain in possession of the Polytechnic.

The next day, 6th September 1969, Fr. Torra, as principal and Administrator, has an Order published by the Statesman that the Polytechnic remains closed *sine die*. After this, things move fast towards the final conclusion, the nationalization of the Polytechnic. A letter to this effect is sent to the Education Minister. On 29th September, Fr. Sheehy, Fr. Torra, and Fr. M. T. Sebastian Manianchira, meet Mr. Jyoti Basu, Deputy Chief Minister, inform him about the affairs of the Don Bosco Polytechnic, and hand him a Memorandum containing details of the incidents which have taken place in the school and which are still continuing. They also mention nationalization of the school, if the government wants this to take place. The Deputy Chief Minister assures them that he would look into the matter as early as possible.

On 6th October, in the office of the Education Minister, Satya Priya Roy, a written agreement is signed for the Salesians by Fr. Sheehy and Fr. Torra. It is agreed that the Institute will be opened immediately and an Administrator will be appointed by government to take over the charge from the principal of the Institute.

The demarcation of the land is done in the following way: the Quarters of the Salesian Society along with the lake and the passage with approach road on the West will remain with the Salesian Society; the rest of the land with buildings and workshops with all the contents along with the playground will come to the government of West Bengal.

On 31st October 1969 Fr. Torra hands over the Polytechnic to Mr. D. N. Ghosh, who assumes the responsibility as Officer-in-charge. Fr. Torra will remain principal till the end of November, but he asks and is granted one-month leave with pay. Thus, ends a project which had started at the initiative of the government and which was offering great possibilities for the technical formation of the Salesian personnel, especially of our lay brothers. But the Marxist tactics have their way!

Fr. Torra has done marvelous work as principal of the Polytechnic. With his tact and determination, he keeps things going for so long, notwithstanding the organized Marxist opposition. On 10th January 1971 Father goes back to Madras Province. For a year he has been working as Economer at Don Bosco School, Liluah.

1.2 The Salesian Quarters

The Cossipore community remains in the private quarters and continues its apostolic activity by animating an Oratory for the boys of the locality. But eventually this also has to be abandoned due to the opposition from a group of the club boys themselves.

Twice the Chronicle informs us about trouble against the Salesian community. The first time, on 17th September 1969, a group of students and *goondas* comes at night, but the club boys awakened by the troublemakers come to the rescue of the Salesians and the students and *goondas* disperse.

On 23rd February 1971 Fr. George Alakulam comes to the Provincial House from Don Bosco Cossipore to say that the youth centre is not going well, that several of the boys have turned Naxalites, that three of them

have come in and one of them was carrying bombs ready to throw them at the fathers and brothers. He recommends the speedy closure of the Centre, as the Centre is not giving any tangible apostolic results.

On 26th April 1971 Fr. Provincial visits the community of Cossipore and the decision is taken to sell the property. Two days after this Fr. Sheehy goes to Cossipore together with an engineer to make a preliminary survey with a view to present to the government an estimate of the value involved.

On 6th August 1971 Fr. George Alakulam and Bro. V. D. Varkey leave the premises of the private quarters for good and the house is closed. The Youth Centre, however, will revive again and continue its apostolic activity, at least for some time, as we shall see in the following chapters.

2. Don Bosco in Siliguri

Till 1959 Siliguri is not found on the Salesian map. It is a transit station to Salesian College, Sonada. However, already by 1959 Siliguri begins to be a frequent topic of conversation as a possible place for a holiday house for the Salesian College community. A month at Nagrakata or at Barpetta Road are no solution, because by the end of January all have to be back again to Sonada when the cold is still very intense.

On 25th February 1959 the rector, Fr. Marchesi, the prefect of Salesian College, Fr. Cajetan Biswas, Fr. A. Arneodo, Bro. Tarcis Sona[10], and Bro. V. D. Varkey go to Gayaganga to see whether they can find a suitable place for a winter resort. They find a spot just opposite the Jesuit Mission on the opposite side of the main road. Price and conditions for sale cannot be known, as the owner is absent. The purpose of the visit is to present some concrete proposals to the superiors in Turin.

[10] Brother Tarcis Sona: is born in Kairabari (Fatemabad T. E. Assam) in 1922, makes his novitiate and his first profession at Tirupattur (South India) on 12.2.1943, spends three years (1955–1958) in the Rebaudengo Institute (Turin) to specialize in cabinet-making. On his return to India, we find him for a few months in Don Bosco, Park Circus, and for two years in Sonada. From 1964 until his death he spends the best time of his life as a religious in the house of Don Bosco School, Krishnagar. He is a skilled technician, but above his technical skill he is to be appreciated as a religious, as a Salesian apostle and educator. On the front page of his Spiritual Diary, he has written, "All for You, Lord." He dies on 6.6.1974 aged 52.

In the following month of March Fr. Modesto Bellido is in Sonada for the Extraordinary Canonical Visitation of the house and practically all, staff and students, present the common problem to the Superior and plead for a solution. The Visitor recognizes the need and tells the staff to look for a place in Siliguri where a holiday house can be established. A providential event comes to the rescue.

On 29th July 1959 the PIME fathers, after their Retreat at St. Teresa's Villa, Sonada, and before their departure the following day, are invited to Salesian College for a dinner. Fr. Rector mentions to Fr. Marcato, one of the fathers, about the desire to buy a plot of land in Siliguri. On his way back to his Mission, Fr. Marcato's motorcycle breaks down in front of Mc John's Garage at the fourth mile on the Sevoke Road. It is already evening and it is raining. The Father asks Mr. Mc John to put him up for the night, which Mr. Mc John does very willingly. During the conversation Mr. Mc John happens to mention his wish to sell a plot of land. Fr. Marcato then remembers Fr. Marchesi's request and gives Fr. Marchesi's name to Mr. Mc John. It is in this way that communication starts, which eventually leads to the buying a plot of land in Siliguri.

On 16th December 1959 Fr. Paviotti and Fr. Alessi go to meet Mr. Mc John for the purchase of the land belonging partly to Mr. Mc John and partly to the village headman. There and then they go to Jalpaiguri for the deed of purchase of some 10 bighas of land costing 16,000 rupees.

On 21st January 1960 another plot of land, consisting of 11 bighas, is bought for 17,050 rupees. Winter quarters for the Sonada community will be built on it as per advice of Fr. M. Bellido, the extraordinary Visitor.

The contract for the construction of the two-storey building is given to Mr. Guin. Fr. Provincial blesses the foundation stone and, by the end of 1961, the holiday quarters are ready to receive the clerics and the aspirants of Salesian College, who go down to Siliguri for the first three months holidays on 17th December 1961. On 31st January 1962, on the Feast of St. John Bosco, His Grace Dr. Perier blesses the new house. On 10th March 1962, in two batches, the whole community of brothers and aspirants goes up to Sonada to start the new scholastic year. The Siliguri house is closed and left in the custody of two faithful *chowkidars*, Mr. Lama, a Tibetan, and Mr. *Kancha*, a Nepali. But such a beautiful plot of land with a new

and empty two-storey building cannot escape the notice of the military who are looking for a place to establish a military hospital.

On 10th June 1962, the Provincial Council decides to buy 4 bighas of land adjacent to our land, to provide for future developments. The purchase is done by Fr. Cajetan Biswas, the prefect of Sonada and Fr. Villa[11] on 25th June 1962. The land belongs to a certain Mr. Pradhan. The Provincial Council discusses also the need and possibility of shifting the aspirants to the new house in Siliguri, as the house of Sonada is too overcrowded, about 180 persons between Salesian clerics, aspirants and staff for both groups, and cannot provide sufficient accommodation for these three groups and for about 40 retreatants in the month of May. But the lack of personnel refrains the Council from taking the decision to shift the boys to Siliguri.

The fear, however, of having the house of Siliguri being requisitioned by the Military forces the issue, and the decision is taken to transfer the aspirants to Siliguri. On 14th August 1962 Fr. Provincial announces the division of the community into two. The staff is divided, Fr. Lo Groi remains temporarily rector of both communities. Every two or three weeks he goes down to Siliguri, especially to meet the class XI boys. Fr. A. Doro is the acting rector of the Siliguri community.

On 15th August, the Feast of the Assumption and Independence Day, the boys stage a three-act play, *Russia Redeemed*, as a farewell to Sonada. On 16th August, the first batch of boys (23) and two superiors leave by train for Siliguri. Two brothers and two cooks leave by truck with the furniture. In the days that follow more furniture is sent down by trucks. On 20th the brothers of Sonada give a farewell to the boys. Next day, the boys leave by train. Fr. Rector goes down before them by truck. Thus, after 21 years, Sonada ceases to be also an *aspirantate.*

However, the joy of the new experience in Siliguri does not last long. On 27th October 1962, due to the Chinese attack in NEFA, a state of Emergency is declared in India. On 4th November the Military ask for the use of the building. It is decided to bring classes IX and X down to Bandel and take class XI to Sonada to prepare for the Higher Secondary Examinations. It appears that the Siliguri building will be used as a hospital.

[11] Fr. John Villa: born in 1907 in North Italy, comes to India in 1936, makes his first profession on 8.12.1937, is ordained a priest on 27.7.1947. He works for most of his life in Don Bosco Krishnagar, and in Salesian College, Sonada, and dies at Sondrio (Italy) on 23.11.1986 aged 79.

On 13th November 1962 Fr. Doro and other confreres of Siliguri and Classes IX and X leave for Bandel by train (Via Barauni). In the days that follow the boys of Class XI together with as much furniture as possible go up to Sonada by trucks. By 17th November the Siliguri house is in the hands of the Military and serves as a military hospital.

The Chronicle of the Province describes various steps taken by the Province to get back the Siliguri house from the Military or its equivalent in land and money.

In June 1963 the Military offer to pay the monthly rent of Rs. 2500 for the use of the house of Siliguri. The Salesians' answer is to return the house. In September 1963 the Military ask that the house be sold to them. In answer to this second request the Provincial Council decides to ask for another plot of land equivalent in size to the present one and to pay back the cost of the construction of the house.

On 22nd October 1963 Fr.Villa, the rector and Bro. Theruvil Mani go down to Siliguri to see the places the Military is willing to give in exchange for the land they have taken from the Salesians. They show three places, two of them on the Sevoke Road, two miles from Siliguri, and the third one at Bondubi, 8 miles from Siliguri on the way to Bagdogra. At Bondubi a military Cantonment is being set up. They want to entrust a school to the Salesians. A few days after this, the Provincial also reaches Siliguri to see what the Military offers.

On 2nd December 1963, in agreement with the Military, the price of the house is fixed at Rs. 405,000. For the land they offer another plot in exchange. In December 1963 the Provincial announces to the Council that the Military has accepted to give land in exchange and offer a good price for the house, subject, however, to the government's approval.

The search for a suitable plot of land continues during the first months of 1964. The Sonada confreres, Fr. Provincial and Fr. Colzani are shown several places, but no place is considered suitable.

At this juncture, when all hopes to find a plot of land in Siliguri seem to be lost, again Providence comes to the rescue. The rector of Sonada receives a post card from Fr. Augustin Panangath, a past pupil of Poonamallee Seminary, and now parish priest at New Jalpaiguri, telling him that there are two brothers in Siliguri who want to sell a big plot of land, two miles from Siliguri, on the Sevoke Road, a little away from the road towards the forest.

On 13th June 1964 the Provincial Council meets to discuss the purchase of 20 acres of land at Siliguri at Rs. 2000 per bigha. Eventually it is bought on 11th September 1964. On 30th October 1964 Fr. Provincial and Fr. Cajetan Biswas[12] leave for Siliguri. Fr. Biswas is entrusted with the supervision of the construction of the new *aspirantate*, and steps are taken to collect the required materials, bricks, sand, and gravel, to start soon building operations.

On 18th December 1964, the rector of Sonada, a few members of the staff and the I and II Course brothers leave for Nagrakata for a month-long holiday. At the end of the month, the brothers choose not to go up to Sonada, but to spend the rest of the holidays in Siliguri in makeshift structures prepared by Fr. Biswas for the purpose using the bricks already bought for the new *aspirantate*. He prepares a big thatched barrack for the dormitory of the clerics, a small one for four fathers, a chapel, and a little kitchen by the side of the existing well. The refectory and study hall are under two jackfruit trees surmounted by a parachute.

On 21st January 1965 the new Provincial, Fr. M. Casarotti pays a visit to the holiday-makers and gives a friendly scolding to the rector for keeping the brothers in that primitive condition, but he calms down when he is told that it is the clerics themselves who have chosen to spend the rest of the holidays in Siliguri rather than go back to Sonada in the middle of January.

But soon a new difficulty arises, which forces the postponement of all building operations. The sister of the two brothers who have sold the land contests the property. The court puts an injunction that prevents Fr. Biswas from proceeding with the construction work. On 28th January 1965, the Provincial informs his Council that the property is contested and the discussion continues about the future of Siliguri. They agree to open a Higher Secondary school for day scholars and to begin its construction as soon as the first floor of the *aspirantate* is completed. Let the detailed plans be prepared. In Siliguri there will be Classes IX, X, XI of the aspirants who should not exceed 150. In the Council meeting of 11th March 1965, the plans are approved. Mr. Guin is chosen as Contractor, the location of the building and all the details are approved.

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[12] Fr. Cajetan Biswas: born on 11.8.1925 at Krishnagar, makes his first profession on 6.1.1948 is ordained a priest on 8.12.1957. He works in Salesian College, Sonada, in Don Bosco, Park Circus; he is parish priest at Maliapota and at Auxilium Parish, Calcutta, and Rector of Don Bosco School, Azimganj. He dies on 7.5.1993, aged 68.

As the case takes time to be completed, Fr. Biswas, unable to do anything due to the injunction, goes back to Calcutta and the land is left once again under the supervision of the two *chowkidars,* Mr. Lama and Mr. Kancha.

The future of the *aspirantate* at Siliguri is again on the agenda of the meeting of the Provincial Council on 12th August 1965. The case in the Jalpaiguri court has given time to think on the advisability of having the *aspirantate* at Siliguri. The pros and cons are discussed both as regards Siliguri and Bandel. Greater advantages are seen to be in favour of having the complete *aspirantate* at Bandel, the main one being that Bandel is a better place for the formation of the future Salesians, while greater disadvantages seem to militate against Siliguri, such as, the difficulty of keeping there the non-Indian personnel due to the 'emergency', and the danger that the Military may again take it away from us, as they have done already once.

For the whole of 1965 and a good portion of 1966, there is no sign of the court-case coming to an end. It is only on 3rd September 1966 that the Provincial can announce to the Council that the case in Siliguri is over. On 29th July 1966 the parties concerned reach a compromise and the case is cancelled. He adds that the Military offers only Rs. 325,000 for the old 'Don Bosco', the amount spent by the Salesians, since they have paid the rent regularly. "It is not a 'fair' price," he says, "but it is better to take what they offer, the other alternative is to start a case in Delhi, which is going to give us only more headaches. Let us take what they give us now on 'protest' If available, let us buy more land in Siliguri and make plans for a high school, a technical school, and the holiday quarters for the Sonada community." Another 12.15 acres of land will be purchased for Rs. 92,000 on 6th June 1967.

In January 1968 the Provincial, Fr. Stroscio, sends Fr. Daniel Venia[13] and Bro. Joseph Paranthara to Siliguri to start a small agricultural farm. The main reason, however, is not so much the farm, but to protect the land and save it from possible encroachment by lawless elements.

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[13] Fr. Daniel Venia: born at Bronte (Catania – Italy) on 14.4.1930, makes his first profession on 18.8.1946, comes to India in 1953, is ordained a priest on 7.8.1956. He belongs to the Madras Province. On 20.12.1962, he is lent to the Calcutta Province and works in Salesian College, Sonada, in Don Bosco Park Circus, and in Siliguri. In 1970 he goes to the Province of Bombay. He dies in Rome on 20.12.1995.

In the meeting of the Provincial Council of 20th March 1968, the Siliguri project figures as the second important item on the agenda, in order to explore various options to put the huge plot of land there to best use. There are several good reasons which apparently induce the Council to keep and protect the land, such as, the fact that Siliguri is the third biggest city in West Bengal after Calcutta and Burdwan, it is the seat of the North Bengal University, it is the meeting place of Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Darjeeling, Bhutan and Sikhim, it is also a very important Railway and Military Centre.

When the problem is presented to Fr. Pianazzi, his first reaction is: "Sell the land...do not waste time...you have no personnel." But when he is presented with the case in all its aspects he gives a more positive answer and says it is worthwhile saving the land, although he feels that probably Siliguri would not be the solution as the place for clerics to spend their holidays, as there would not be scope for apostolic activity, whereas Azimganj is much better in this respect. He also feels that it is not the time to establish schools. "A Youth Centre at Siliguri would certainly be a fine thing, if a capable man is available to develop it."

What the Council proposes eventually is: to start immediately a small agricultural centre for 10 to 15 young men of 15 to 16 years of age, Catholics, who have farms and who can be probable vocations; to begin a small English medium school at the beginning of 1969, and to start a Youth Centre.

The future of Siliguri land comes in for discussion several times in the years 1968-69, and the conclusion is always to keep the land and continue the project of an agricultural farm. On 9th April 1968, Fr. Venia is asked to begin the construction of a small two-storey house to serve as a residence for the two confreres. The house is blessed on 22nd September 1968. It has four self-contained rooms and an external staircase in wood. On the whole it is a comfortable house. A certain Mr. Singh, a Punjabi, who is an expert in agriculture, helps Fr. Venia in the farm project.

On 15th January 1970 Fr. Provincial discusses once again the future of the Siliguri land, now consisting of 38 acres, after the addition of 5.75 acres bought in September 1968. Besides the agricultural project, the Council considers also another plan. Going back to an idea that has already been suggested several years before, it is proposed that Siliguri should become the seat of Salesian College for about six months, that is, from the

end of October to the end of March. The proposal is that there should be one term of classes in Sonada (June–October) and another in Siliguri (November–March), the holidays (April–May) again in Sonada. During this time there would be the public examinations, the retreat and the renewal of the vows. This arrangement would allow us officially to keep the College in Sonada with all the advantages that this entails (for instance, to continue to keep it private), at the same time it would obviate, at least partly, the difficulties of Sonada. If the plan materializes, the Council thinks also of opening an English medium school and, possibly, a free-primary school for the poor people of the locality.

On 31st May 1970 Fr. Provincial writes to the superiors in Turin submitting this plan (attached to the minutes). We do not have a reply to this request, but if approved, it has not been acted upon, as future events clearly show.

On 23rd May 1970 a telegram from Fr. Sheehy announces that Fr. Paul Taverna will be given a permit to stay in Siliguri as replacement for Fr. Venia, who cannot get a permit to remain in the North. In the Council meeting of 10th July 1970, at which Fr. Taverna is also invited, the school building is discussed together with the terms and conditions proposed for Mr. Singh and other workers, and the sinking of a deep tube well, which Fr. Venia has for some time been clamouring for, is approved.

The Council, to which Fr. Taverna and Brother Jacob Ettil[14] are invited, again discusses the question of Siliguri. As regards the school, considering the present situation it is felt that the building of the school should be delayed may be till after the next general elections. Efforts must be made to set up the farm. Brother Jacob Ettil is put in charge of the farm and Mr. Singh's resignation is accepted. He is given time till November to vacate his quarters and hand over the administration.

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[14] Brother Jacob Ettil is born on 7.2.1930 in Champakulam, Kerala. He is recruited by Fr. A. Pianazzi in 1950, and makes first profession on 8.5.1952. Sent to the COP he matures as a Salesian Brother under the eyes of Fr. M. Ferrario. In the late 60s he is sent to the Salesian Agricultural College at Warrentown (Ireland). In September 1970 he is back from Ireland after a two-year course in Agriculture. On 23rd October 1970 he is in Siliguri where he is given the charge of organizing the farm started by Fr. Venia and Brother P. J. Joseph. But his stay in Siliguri is very short, as he finds the land not suitable for cultivation. He spends most of his Salesian life in the Don Bosco agricultural centre of Krishnagar. His last obedience is in bishop's house, Krishnagar. He dies on 31.8.1962, aged 52.

In the meeting of 30th October 1970, the Provincial Council once again discusses the future works in Siliguri in the presence of Fr. B. Tohill. A report by Bro. Jacob clearly shows that to bring the land under efficient cultivation much time and money will be needed. It is, therefore, unanimously decided to begin immediately an English medium school. The building will be a modest one, and the school will develop slowly adding only one class a year, beginning with Class VI.

The Chronicle of the Province of 18th January 1971 reports that according to Fr. Taverna the farm is not doing well. The soil is sandy and unfit for agriculture. Bro. Jacob desires to do a course in agriculture. Fr. Taverna proposes to buy nearly 5 acres of land from a certain Mr. Singh with a good bungalow, two big sheds, and a small house. The two sheds, sufficiently adapted, can be used as classrooms for the intended English medium school. The Provincial Council in its meeting of 10th February 1971, approves the proposal and an application to the Rector Major for permission to buy is sent on 31st March 1971. Eventually the purchase does not come through as Mr. Singh increases the price.

During the Council meetings held on 12th March and 6th April 1972, decision is taken to discontinue the farm project and to study further the project of the school.

On 29th June 1972 the laying of the foundation stone of the confreres' residence takes place. On 8th October 1972 Fr. Provincial, Fr. Taverna, and Fr. Jellici discuss arrangements for the opening of the school on 31st January 1973. Only class VII will be opened. The Sisters of St. Joseph's Matigara will offer about 10 boys. A few others might come from other places. Some 15 boys are expected. On the first of November, however, the Superior of St. Joseph's writes to Fr. Taverna informing him that their Provincial is not in favour of sending their students away, as the Inspector of Schools has promised to upgrade their school to junior high school, and, if the number of students is not considered adequate, that may be an obstacle.

The following chapter will tell us about the modest beginning and the development of the Don Bosco School, Siliguri.

3. A Salesian Presence in Delhi: The Don Bosco Technical School

Already in the 1930s,[15] to have a Salesian presence in the Capital is a cherished dream of Msgr. L. Mathias. It takes over thirty years before the dream could be realized.

On 29th November 1959 the Provincial Council discusses for the first time an offer by Msgr. J. Fernandes, the Archbishop of Delhi, of a plot of land for a technical school. There is, however, a fear that the land may be included in the 'Green Belt', which is controlled by the Delhi Development Administration (DDA). On 22nd June 1962, the Council discusses the modalities of a request to *Misereor* for the construction of a technical school in Delhi.

During the two years in which Fr. M. Casarotti is the Provincial of the Calcutta Province, the Provincial Council takes the Delhi project for discussion several times. In the meeting of 11th March 1965, Fr. Casarotti presents a report on his visit to Delhi saying that there are great hopes. Again in the meeting of 18th November 1965 he gives news of his ten-day visit to Delhi. If the two Archbishops, J. Fernandes and his Coadjutor, Angelo Fernandes, have no objection, he suggests having there a confrere to follow up the case. For this purpose he proposes to buy a house between the city and the industrial zone. The suggestion is accepted, and on 13th March 1966 Fr. Provincial and Fr. Uguet are in Delhi to buy a three-storey building at Greater Kailash. Fr. Uguet and Bro. Mascarhenas of Bombay will follow up all the negotiations from there.

From the minutes of the meeting of 30th June 1966, we come to know that Fr. Uguet is already in Delhi, but due to some problems with his eyes, he needs to come down to Calcutta for some time, and that Fr. E. Zanon would substitute for him.

On 3rd September 1966 Fr. Provincial again informs the Council about the situation in Delhi. The government asks a much higher price for the allotted plot. At the beginning of October 1966, the architect sends the preliminary plan for the new school building. The plan of the general layout is satisfactory. Details have to be studied further. In the mean time this plan can be sent to Turin and to Fr. Rauh, the Salesian

[15] Cfr.Ch.V, 126.

representative at *Misereor*, to get their opinion. Fr. Rauh needs it to submit it to *Misereor* at the earliest.

On 14th November 1966 Fr. Provincial and Fr. Stroscio, the Provincial Economer, report to the Council on the purchase of a plot of land in Delhi. The Delhi Development Authority promises to release 10 acres of land at Rs. 100,000 per acre and only on lease for 35 years and a rent to be paid every year.

The two have seen two plots of land 15 kms. from Okhla, on the Mathura Road, costing Rs. 40,000 per acre. One plot is 25 acres, and the other is 13 acres. The first one is judged the better of the two. Fr. Uguet is asked to go ahead to secure this plot. The Provincial feels that it is necessary to secure one plot, otherwise the Salesians run the risk of losing all chances of having an institution in Delhi. He gets also the approval of the other two Councillors who have not been in Delhi to see the plot in question. After this at once they get to study the financial situation of the Province together.

The final decision to buy the plot of land on the Mathura Road is taken on 2nd December 1966. It is situated 13 kms from the city centre. The land in question is mortgaged with a bank, but the owner is ready to sell 24 acres at Rs. 45,000 per acre. It is not a notified land, but government releases it as soon as it is bought. In Delhi, Fr. Stroscio signs the deeds of purchase of 24 acres of land at Faridabad on 24th December 1966.

The New Year 1967 brings some good news. On 12th January 1967 Fr. Casarotti tells the Council that the government of Delhi is offering the land at Okhla at the nominal prize of Rs. 60,000. The Council decides to take it. Later on they will see what to do with it.

The next meeting of the Provincial Council is on 24th February 1967, presided over by the new Provincial, Fr. Rosario Stroscio. In this meeting Fr. Stroscio announces to the Council Members about the official offer by the government. On 31st January 1967, a letter[16] is received from Shri Jagmohan, Special Secretary (L+B), Delhi Administration, informing him that Lieut. Governor of Delhi is allotting 10 acres of land in the region of Okhla at the rate of Rs. 5000 per acre, plus 5% thereof as annual ground rent for the establishment of a technical school.

[16] Ref. No. F. 19 (53) 64.

This poses a dilemma. Should the technical school be established at Okhla or at Faridabad? The Provincial goes personally to Delhi to study the situation *in loco* and decides in favour of Okhla.

On 17th April 1967 Fr. Zanon and Fr. Uguet pay to the treasury Rs. 50,000 for the 10 acres of land at Okhla. It will be demarcated on 18th April.

In the meeting of the Council on 17th August 1967, the Provincial announces that the project for a technical school in New Delhi is receiving a favourable response from *Misereor* and the German government. The final decision has not yet been taken, but there is a possibility that the project will be approved. They have sent a detailed description of the project with the costs involved.[17]

News of the approval by the German government of the Delhi project is received on 31st May 1968.

Mr. B.M. Sharma, appointed as the architect of the Delhi project, comes to Calcutta several times to discuss the plans with Fr. Provincial and Fr. Sheehy. On 18th February 1967 he comes to finalize the plan.

On 20th March 1968 the Provincial Council approves the proposal of the Provincial to establish an agricultural farm at Faridabad with a view to train 20 to 25 Catholic boys from around New Delhi. Archbishop Angelo Fernandes, when told about it, considers it a wonderful project, which government Authorities would view with pleasure. He will mention it to the clergy and enlist their cooperation.

The blessing of the foundation stone for the future technical school takes place on 31st January 1969. A beautiful *shamiana* is erected on the site. By 5.45 p.m. some 350 distinguished guests are already seated when the Governor Dr. A. N. Jha arrives. The Police Band is in attendance.

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[17] a. Cost of the first stage of the project (DM = nearly Rs. 2):

- Buildings	DM	1.228.000
- Furniture and Equipment		875.000
- Reserve		107.000
Total	DM	2.210.000

b. Financing to be met thus:

- Salesian Congregation	DM	600.000
- German Federal Government	DM	1.610.000
Total	DM	2.210.000

The ceremony is conducted according to schedule and it proves quite impressive. Among the distinguished guests are the Minister Councillor and the Attaché for Cultural Affairs of the West German Embassy, the Italian Ambassador, Msgr. Calasuono from the Apostolic Nuntiature, Archbishop Angelo Fernandes, Mr. B. M. Sharma, the architect, and Shri Jagmohan. The Archbishop of Delhi blesses the site. There follows the signing of the parchment and the laying of the Foundation stone. His Excellency A. N. Jha, Lieut. Governor of Delhi speaks at the end. The function ends with the singing of the national anthem and light refreshments are served.

In a few days the tenders will be published and it is hoped that by the beginning of March the construction work will start. On 10th April 1969, Fr. Zanon signs the contract with the contractor, Amat Nath Chirangi Lal and Co. for the construction of the building, which is to be finished within 12 months.

Though the West German government has approved the project, Fr. Provincial realizes the need to seek more financial assistance from other sources in order to lighten the burden of the Salesian contribution to the project. Through the good offices of Fr. Rauh he tries to get some more help from *Misereor* itself. He also approaches the Pro-Nuncio, Msgr. Caprio, to seek assistance from *Propaganda Fide*. The Holy See contributes $ 15,000. *Oxfam* offers to build one of the workshops. Fr. Maschio makes a loan of Rs. 3 lakh. In July 1970, Fr. Zanon gets exemption from custom duty for the machines arriving from Germany.

On 14th January 1971 all the confreres of the new community settle permanently in the new school at Okhla: Fr. Uguet, rector, Fr. Guido Colussi, prefect, Fr. Zanon, Fr. Colzani, Bro. Rettore, and Bro. James Mampilli. The house at Greater Kailash is given to the Archbishop at cost price at the request of the Archbishop and is occupied by Fr. Valentine de Silva, parish priest.[18]

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[18] Cfr. Chronicle of the Province, Provincial Archives, B.10.1.3. For the request of Archbishop Angelo Fernandez: "whether the House at Greater Kailash could be sold to the Archdiocese at the minimum possible price", and for the decision of the Council: "It was decided to offer it at cost price, exclusive of the air-conditioners and the furniture", and for further details on the same topic, Cfr. Provincial Council meetings of 14.5.1970 and 16.6.1970, Provincial Arhives, B.8.2.1.

The blessing of Don Bosco Technical School takes place on 31st January 1971. At 4.00 p.m. Msgr. J. M. Lemieux, O.P. Apostolic Pro-Nuncio to India officiates at the ceremony on the ground floor as his age prevents him from going upstairs. The parish priest of the Cathedral blesses other parts of the buildings. After the blessing, Fr. Provincial addresses the gathering to thank all those who have cooperated in the project and to outline the nature and the aim of the institution. He thanks, in a special way, the unforgettable late Archbishop Joseph Fernandes, who first invites the Salesians to Delhi and who till his death follows with great interest and love the gradual and at times difficult realization of his dream, to provide a technical school to the youth of His archdiocese.

The Provincial concludes his speech by presenting to the honoured guests the origin and the aim of the project. With regard to the aim of the project, he says that Don Bosco Technical School intends to provide technical training for boys belonging to the poorer sections of the society, so as to prepare them for employment, within a reasonably short period. He expresses the hope that the school will get affiliation to ITI. It is going to be a three-year course but there is provision for an extra year of preparation for those who do not know English.

Classes begin on 1st March 1971, and with them begins also the gradual realization of the great dream of the late Archbishop of Delhi, Dr. Joseph Fernandes.



Okhla (Delhi): Don Bosco Technical School

4. The Santal Mission: Azimganj

Fr. John Topno, who is assistant parish priest of Behrampore, in 1956 launches out into the interior villages of Murshidabad District and contacts the Santal Catholics who have migrated from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and have settled there. Many more accept the faith and soon Christian Communities are established.

In the meeting of 13th June 1963 the Provincial Council, for the first time, starts thinking of buying land among the Santals, probably at Azimganj. In the next meeting of the Council on 14th September 1963, the purchase of land at Azimganj seems to be quite possible and deputes Fr. Gobetti and Fr. Lazzaro to see about it and take steps in that direction.

The Chronicle of the Province records that on 31st March 1964, at Azimganj, in the Diocese of Krishnagar, 18 bighas of land (6 acres) have been bought for Rs.7500. It is bought in the name of the bishop of Krishnagar and successors in office. He has given a letter stating that the land belongs to the Salesian Society and that it has been bought with the funds of the Society for its own purposes. He adds also that permission is granted to build a school. The granting of permission is communicated to the Council on 12th August 1964.

As reported in the chronicle of the Province, on 11th December 1964, Fr. Sergi goes to Azimganj to supervise the building of the Tribal Welfare Centre. He lives in a rented house. On 22nd September 1965, the Council is informed that the construction of the house at Azimganj is about to be over and needs personnel to work there.

In the meeting of 18th November 1965 Fr. Sergi is given the permission to buy 8 more bighas of land close to the existing property. More land will be added to the original property in subsequent years. On 3rd August 1968 the Council approves the suggestion of Fr. Lazzaro to buy 4 bighas of land adjacent to the present plots for about Rs. 1000 per bigha. Again on 10th April 1969, the chronicle of the Province records that the Provincial Council has decided to buy 14.5 bighas of land at Azimganj adjacent to the present compound, by the side of the school. The purpose is to have some cultivation for the boys. The decision to buy as much land as possible around the school has already been taken by the Council under Fr. Casarotti.

On 4th January 1966 the Sonada community moves in from Krishnagar for the second part of their holidays.

On 3rd February 1966 several problems are discussed by the Council concerning the new school at Azimganj, especially with regard to the composition of the students: Will it be only for Santal boys? This might turn the surrounding Bengali population against the school. The medium of instruction too is discussed: through what Medium will the teaching be imparted? If Santali is chosen as the medium of instruction then the Santals will never rise to the standard of the Bengali society. Next a decision has to be reached as to what class to start with and who could be appointed as in-charge. After much discussion Fr. Lazzaro is given the responsibility.

In March 1966 the Provincial Council decides to start with Santal boys of classes IV and V from the junior school in Krishnagar. In June 1966 Fr. Provincial asks the confreres of Azimganj to start the work with 30 boys. The Staff consists of Fr. Lazzaro, rector, Fr. Sergi, confessor and economer, Fr. John Topno and deacon K.A. Thomas. The Province would extend financial help.

In the Council meeting of 9th March 1966 the Provincial informs the Council that it is now time to ask for the canonical erection of the new community. Communication has to be given to the bishop and also to Turin, and the boundary of the new parish too will have to be demarcated.

Don Bosco Welfare Centre Azimganj, comes into existence on 18th July 1966, with the opening of the boarding with 26 Santal boys. Msgr. Matthew Baroi, bishop of Krishnagar, blesses a convent and a school-cum-boarding on 20th February 1972. The Sisters of Charity take care of the Santal girls at Primary and later also High School level, and conduct a one-year *grihini* course for older girls. In later years Don Bosco High School becomes coeducational and it is taken care of, together with the boarding, by the Salesian community of the Welfare Centre.





Azimganj: 1. Don Bosco Welfare Centre
2. Parish House and Boarding

The Azimganj parish is erected in 1967 and Fr. Jim Gimenez[19], rector of the COP since August 1965, is appointed as its first Pastor. Under the dynamic leadership of Fr. Gimenez the mission develops rapidly. The presbytery is blessed in 1969. The Christian community grows so much that the old church building proves insufficient. Fr. Gimenez therefore builds a new beautiful church, designed by Fr. Ojer and dedicated to St. John Bosco, which is blessed on 11th November 1973.[20]

Fr. Gimenez' next major project is a convent for the Sisters of Charity and a hostel for the Santal girls. He buys land in a number of villages and sets up village chapels as well as quarters for the visiting priests and sisters. The Azimganj Mission witnesses rapid growth as a result of his zeal and abilities, especially due to his great interest in the welfare of the Santal tribe. He speaks the language well and pioneers the translation and publication of religious literature in Santali. Some of the books that he will publish in Santali are: 'My Catholic Faith' by Bishop L.R. Morrow, the lives of Don Bosco, Mickey Magone, Dominic Savio, and a spiritually inspirational book, called 'The Path,' published in Santali under the title *Hor*.

B) Life in the Established Institutions

1. Don Bosco Liluah

The period witnesses the completion of the school building, the addition of some valuable machines to the workshop, thus enhancing its training capability, and the construction of the teachers' quarters. In the Council meeting of 10th June 1962 it is decided to make a change in the construction of the school building: to build the fourth storey of the central part instead of the third storey of the south wing. The first Provincial

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[19] Fr. Jesus Gimenez is born on 4.12.1931 at Layana (Saragozza, Spain), makes his first profession on 16.8.1947 at San Vincente (Barcelona -Spain), comes to India via Goa on 16.3.1950, does his philosophy at Sonada till 1951. He does his practical training at Don Bosco Krishnagar, his theological studies at Shillong ('54–'59), is ordained a priest at Shillong on 28.6.1959. He is Prefect of studies at Bandel ('59–'65), Rector of the COP ('65–'67), parish priest at Azimganj ('67–'75), parish priest at Polsonda More ('75–'81), and parish priest at Purnea ('81–'96). In April 1996 he is served a Quit Order by the Government and leaves India on 6.8.1996. In Spain he works at the Salesian Procure of Madrid. He dies in Madrid (Spain) on 15.1.2001, aged 70, 52 years a Salesian and 42 years a priest. "F. J. Gimenez manifests three outstanding characteristics, his human trait, his Salesian Charism and his missionary zeal." (Fr. Francis Alencherry, Provincial)

[20] Cfr. Chronicle of the Province 11.11.73, *Provincial Archives, B.10.1.3;* Cfr. also Krishnagar Calendar, 2000.

Council meeting of 1963 on 24th January discusses the need of providing quarters for the teachers. Ten *khatas* of land are on sale for Rs. 50,000. The decision to build is taken in the meeting of 9th December 1963. The house will have to finance the project.

On 31st January 1970 there takes place the unveiling of the statue of Don Bosco on top of the central building. It is the fulfilment of a promise made by Fr. Uguet and Fr. Stroscio when they undertake the construction of the building.

The 1950s and the early 1960s witness the great progress of the technical department of Don Bosco School. The workshop grows quantitatively and qualitatively under the expert guidance of Bro. Silvano Rettore[21], who can be rightly called the 'pioneer' of Don Bosco's workshop. He possesses great skills in designing machines, like lathes, tool and cutter grinders, and horizontal boring machines. He is able to do all these with the help of the trainees themselves in the workshop.[22] He makes use of second-hand machines discarded by local factories. To these, new machines will be added in the 1960s.



Rev. Brother SILVANO RETTORE, SDB
The 'Pioneer' of Don Bosco Liluah Workshop

The intellectual aspect of the training is taken care of by the theory classes and the introduction of the City and Guilds Engineering Course. It means a confident plunge into Technology, Science, Mathematics and Technical Drawing. But the real worth of Don Bosco boys is shown in the examination results where a good

[21] Bro. Silvano Rettore is born at Borgomanero (Padova – Italy) on 19.8.1926, makes his first profession on 16.8.1944. In May 1948 he comes to India already a well trained technician at the *Conte Rebaudengo* Institute (Torino – Italy). He works in Don Bosco Liluah, in Don Bosco Krishnagar, and is on the staff of the incipient Don Bosco Technical Institute at Okhla (Delhi), which starts functioning on 1 March 1971. He leaves for Italy on 24 August 1972 on a few months' holidays. However, he does not return to India and joins the Manila Province (Philippines). He dies at Padua (Italy) on 23.9.1988, aged 62. He is a very capable craftsman, a very good religious and a great example to the boys.

[22] Cfr. Don Bosco School *Diamond Jubilee Brochure 1937-1007*, 3.

number of boys secure 'first class'. In the exhibition held at St. Xavier's there stands a graceful Don Bosco lathe, which draws the attraction of amazed visitors.[23]

Prior to the introduction of City and Guilds, in the early 60s, an unsuccessful attempt is made to introduce in the school the junior Technical Engineering Course. On 1st December 1959, Mr. A. D'Souza, Inspector for Anglo-Indian schools, speaks to Fr. Provincial and to the rector on the need for starting a trade school for Anglo-Indian boys who for various reasons fail to reach Matriculation.

On 11th October1960, in the meeting of all Anglo-Indian schools, Mr. Austin D'Souza announces that Liluah School has been authorized by government to begin the 3-year Junior Engineering Certificate Course in January 1961. In the Provincial Council meeting of 21st December 1961, the Provincial announces that Don Bosco Liluah has obtained the permission for offering the Engineering Technical Certificate Course.

However, the project soon runs into difficulties. On 5th April 1962 Mr. A.C. Sen, the Chief Inspector of Technical Education, manifests his resentment at the refusal of Rs. 400,000 that the government offers to the Salesians for the Junior Engineering Certificate Course and threatens to withdraw the recognition granted in December.

On 9th May 1962 another meeting takes place between the Provincial and Mr. A. Sen. He complains that the Salesians have no trust in the government. The government, he says, pays all expenses and has therefore the right to control the admission and dismissal of teachers and pupils. The Provincial, on his part, says that the Salesians cannot accept this since it may result in the school falling into the hands of a Managing Committee.

On 17th December 1962 Fr. A. Pianazzi, who happens to be in the Province, advises the Provincial to withdraw from accepting the Junior Technical Engineering Course, as the management would not be free to appoint teachers and choose pupils. In the meeting of 13th June 1963 the Provincial tells the Council that the sum of Rs. 100,000 that the government has given to Liluah for the said purpose is given back to safeguard the freedom in the management of the school.

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[23] Cfr. Don Bosco School *Silver Jubilee Brochure*, 1938–1963, 29–32.

The troubled political situation prevailing in the State of West Bengal ever since the United Front government assumed office has its effect felt also in the school at Liluah. In September 1967, the Chronicle of the Province reports the trouble experienced because of the unruly behaviour of some boys of the school. On 15th September a group of boys of class X and a few others from other classes begin to agitate instigated probably by some of the teachers. On 17th the school is closed and announces that it will remain closed till 22nd. When the school is reopened on that day the boys of class X are prevented from entering the campus but due to the negligence of the one guarding the gate a few boys manage to enter. They prevent the other students from going to the assembly. Once again it is announced that the school will remain closed till 28th. But even on that day the trouble continues and second term exams are due to begin on the following day. On the 29th some 40 policemen, some in plain clothes, led by the Inspector of Howrah Police Station help the boys to enter into the compound. At 8.35 a.m. when the second bell is about to ring, a group of parents asks that the examinations be cancelled. They give their reasons, the main one being the safety of their children, exposed to the threats of the striking boys, once they come out of the school. it is finally decided to close the school indefinitely. On 23rd October the school reopens, but cyclonic rains prevent classes from being held and from the following day normalcy returns.

2. Bandel

2.1 Bandel Seminary Needs Expansion

On 12th August 1965, the Provincial Council discusses the pros and cons of choosing Siliguri or Bandel for the aspirants of classes IX, X, and XI. Finally Bandel is judged to be a better place for the formation of the aspirants.[24] The decision is therefore taken to have all the aspirants together in Bandel.

As a result of this decision another problem comes to the fore. With the increase of numbers due to the unification of the two branches – Bandel with the lower classes and Siliguri with the higher classes – Bandel has no adequate facilities to accommodate them all. In the late 1950s Fr. Joseph Marchesi, rector and Prior of Bandel, builds the second portion of the two-storey building facing the river built by Fr. Piaceski in 1950. Fr. P.J. Sheehy, who succeeds Fr. Marchesi in December 1958 as rector and Prior of Bandel, finds it difficult to accommodate comfortably even the three

[24] Cfr.Ch.X, 364.

lower classes, and so, in the early 60s, he builds a two-storey new wing facing the Shrine. But what is sufficient for the three lower classes is no more sufficient for the unified *aspirantate*, after the boys in Siliguri are forced to vacate their newly built house.

Fr. E. Ojer prepares the necessary plans for the complete – partly three-storied and partly four-storied – building inclusive of the Chapel, as it exists today. The Provincial Council discusses the plans made by Fr. Ojer and entrusts their execution to Bro. Isaac Puthumana. The new *aspirantate* building is blessed on 15th September 1967.



Bandel: The Seminary

2.2 Fr. A. Ricceri, Rector Major, Blesses the New Retreat House

On 4th November 1967 the Provincial Council discusses on a Retreat House at Bandel: its size, cost, furniture, need and suitability. The Vice-Provincial presents the need for a Retreat House. Only a few months before, he makes an effort as the Delegate for the Salesian Cooperators, to revitalize the Cooperators' movement in the Province. The Cooperators, the Sodalities, and other youth groups would need a place for meetings, retreats, and other activities. This explains the proposal made to the Council, which the Council approves.

On 17th March 1969 Fr. Provincial, Fr. Ojer, and Brother Isaac go to Bandel to plan out the Retreat House and on 19th March the foundation

stone for the new building is laid. On 21st April 1968, Fr. Provincial informs the Council that Fr. Pilla, the Economer General of the Society, has approved the project of the Retreat House.

Fr. Aloysius Ricceri blesses the Retreat House during his second visit to Calcutta in the year1968 on 14th November 1968. He arrives in Calcutta, together with Fr. Sylvanus, his Secretary, on 13th November and is immediately taken to Bandel from the Dum Dum airport. On the way to Bandel he visits Cossipore. In the evening he gives a good night to the confreres and to the boys in the Chapel of the Seminary and speaks of the wonderful impressions he is carrying with him, especially from Saigon.

In the morning of the 14th, at 7.00 a.m. Fr. Ricceri blesses the Retreat House and presides over a Concelebration in the Shrine with a homily by Fr. A. Colussi. Then he visits Auxilium Convent, where the students present a drill display.

Before noon the Rector Major gives a conference to all the confreres. In the afternoon he leaves for Liluah where he is given a short reception followed by a conference to the confreres. At 7.30 p.m. Fr. Ricceri leaves for Dum Dum airport, from where he takes the Air India flight for Beirut via Bombay.

2.3 Improvements in St. John's High School, Bandel

It is also during the years 1960 to 1972 that the St. John's School in Bandel witnesses a lot of progress, which continues during the subsequent decades.

Fr. O. Paviotti writes in the Chronicle of the Province dated 7th May 1962: "At the cost of Rs. 60,000 a new wing of St. John's High School has been built by the Province. I have asked the rector to request the authorities to recognize us as the owners of the newly built school too and claim a rent as proof." In 1964 the school building is considerably extended by the Salesians of Don Bosco, through the untiring efforts of Fr. Charles Niznansky,[25] the Headmaster. He builds the ground floor on the southern

[25] Fr. Charles Niznansky is born in Vrbove, Czechoslovakia, on 4.11.1919, makes his first profession on 15.8.1937 obtains his M. A. in philosophy before entering theology; and is ordained a priest on 29.6.1947 in Czechoslovakia. He serves in Shillong as catechist and Dean of studies. For six years he dedicates his efforts to being the Headmaster of St. John's High School in Bandel. Ill health forces him to leave India in the late sixties, but continues his work for India while he is in the United States. In February 1964, while Fr. Charles is stationed at the Junior Seminary in Goshen, N.Y. a 1 *bigha*, 16 *khatas*, and 8 *chatacks* plot of land is bought to extend the area of the playground. He dies on 25.6.1984, aged 64.

side. On 26th November 1968 Fr. Provincial, the Vice-Provincial, and Fr. Sheehy go to Bandel to decide on the extent of the building-work to be undertaken for the expansion. It is decided to build the second storey of the new portion. This decision is taken to protect the terrace of the ground floor, built by Fr. Charles, against the rain that is already causing cracks with evident danger to the whole structure.[26] The second floor is blessed at a private ceremony on 21st February 1969.

In 1977–1979 a two-storey western wing is added to the school building by the Headmaster, Fr. K.A. Thomas Kanjirathumkal and his assistant, Fr. M. C. Mathew Manianchira, with the help from Fr. Antony Doro and the Salesian Provincial, after demolishing the old asbestos-roofed building constructed in 1951.

With a generous donation from Fr. Louis Gobetti, who takes over as prior and secretary in 1988, Fr. M.C. Matthew, the Headmaster, is able to construct a new school Hall, renovate the old school office building, and make several other improvements. The school hall is blessed and inaugurated on 5th February 1990.[27]



Bandel: St. John's Higher Secondary School

[26] Cfr. Chronicle of the Province, *Provincial Archives*, B.10.1.2.
[27] Cfr. *Souvenir – 125 years*, 26–27.

3. Don Bosco School, Park Circus

The structural improvements, such as the purchase of some more land[28] and the completion of the third storey on one of the wings, and especially the opening of the Technical Section and the free night-school, both in 1967, make Don Bosco School a pulsating centre of value education for a steadily increasing number of boys of the working class, and for the poor needy sections of the locality.

The celebration of the 150th Birthday of Don Bosco is held on 15–16 August 1966, and the enthusiastic and active way the boys participate in the various events is a clear indication of the positive impact the Don Bosco's method of education is having on them. There are also setbacks during these years, mainly due to external factors, such as, the social and political situation of the times.[29]

3.1 The Trade School

On 27th August 1964 Fr. Provincial is invited by the Archbishop to attend a meeting of superiors, parish priests, and rectors to discuss about a trade school for boys unable to pursue their higher studies. He exhorts the Salesians to start one at Park Circus. The idea of opening a technical section at Don Bosco Park Circus is not new to them. It is in fact in their plan, but they need help from one willing foreign Agency to finance it.

On 22nd December 1961 a meeting takes place with Mr. Elloy[30] and Mr. A. D'Souza, at Park Circus, with a view to obtaining help from *Misereor* for a trade school. On 2nd August 1963 two representatives of

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[28] In August 1962, 38 *khatas* of land are bought at the cost of Rs. 144,000. When it is bought, it is a *khatal*. A case of eviction is going on against the Tewaries who occupy it. In March 1968 the Court pronounces sentence in our favour. The tenants are supposed to leave the place within 3 months.

[29] On 10 January 1964 Communal trouble breaks out in Calcutta. Muslim houses are set on fire in retaliation for atrocities committed against Hindus in Khulna. Christian families affected by the riots are sheltered in Don Bosco School compound, some 50 families on 11th January and 98 families on 12th January. On 14th January about 100 soldiers and officers, part of the force restoring order in the City, are stationed in the compound. By the 19th January the refugees have left the compound. The strikes and the *hartal* of September 1966 force the school to close like other schools in the City. On 21st November 1970 there is great tension in Don Bosco School due to the threatening letters received from the Naxalites. The asst. principal, Rev. Fr. P.P. Paul, receives one such letter in English.

[30] Mr. Elloy, a good Catholic friend of the Salesians, is a very much respected official at Writers' Building in the Ministry of Education. His wife is the music teacher in Don Bosco School, Park Circus.

Misereor come to Don Bosco School Park Circus to study the need and possibility of opening a trade school for poor boys.

A small section for a machine shop for mechanical engineering is added to Don Bosco School in January 1965. It begins on a small scale in a room on the top floor where 13 boys begin filing and bench-fitting and continue there till the month of October, when a room can be adapted for the purpose on the ground floor. In January 1967, thirty boys are admitted into the first year of the technical section. Nine small lathes and a shaping machine are purchased in order to teach the boys the second year programme: turning and shaping.

In January 1967 the workshop is extended to cover almost the entire ground floor of one of the wings of the building. Efforts made to get charitable organizations interested in the project meet with a most generous response. Thanks to the generosity of the German people through their organization *Misereor* and of many Italian benefactors, the machine shop is provided with many up-to-date foreign machines so necessary to give the boys a thorough training.

The solemn opening of the machine shop for mechanical engineering takes place on 26th October 1967. The Archbishop, Msgr. Perier, blesses the machines and Dr. Herman Rentrop, Consul for cultural affairs (W. Germany), cuts the ribbon. Present are the apprentices, their parents, and a large representation of the Clergy.[31]

An addition to the machine shop comes from unexpected quarters. In the evening of 16th February 1971 Fr. Provincial signs an agreement with Mr. Philip D'Souza, President of the local unit of the Society of the St. Vincent de Paul, for setting up within the Don Bosco Technical School a 'Vincentian Section' by installing a gift of machines from the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the Netherlands. The Salesian Province of Calcutta offers to collaborate with the Calcutta Particular Council in this 'special work' of providing technical education for poor boys by installing and maintaining at their own cost the aforesaid machinery and equipment in the machine shop of the existing Don Bosco Technical Training Institute and gratuitously making available the services of their staff for training the poor and needy boys.

[31] For the history and the aim of Don Bosco Technical School, Cfr. A printed write-up in the Chronicle of the Province 26.10.1967, *Provincial Archives*, B.10.1.2.

A maximum of 10 boys per year from those recommended by the Calcutta Particular Council will be admitted to the 'Vincentian Section', subject to the boys passing the admission test given to all candidates seeking admission. The boys thus admitted will be subject to all the rules of the Don Bosco Technical Institute as stated in the Prospectus. This agreement will be valid from the 10th day of February 1971 till the 10th day of February 1981, that is, for a period of 10 years. On the expiry of this period the aforesaid machinery and equipment will remain in the Don Bosco Technical Training Institute under the Salesian Province of Calcutta.[32]

The 'Vincentian Section' of the Technical Institute is opened on 17th July 1971. Those present on the occasion are Mr. Heigh, the Belgian Consul, who is the acting Consul General of the Netherlands; Mr. Roy, Deputy Director of Technical Education, West Bengal; Msgr. Lawrence T. Picachy, S.J. Archbishop of Calcutta; Mr. Philip D'Souza, President of the Calcutta Council of St. Vincent de Paul Society and other invitees. Fr. P.J. Sheehy, the acting Provincial, explains the terms and conditions of the agreement. Mr. Heigh cuts the ribbon, and the Archbishop of Calcutta blesses the new machines.[33]

4. The closure of the Catholic Orphan Press and the withdrawal of the Salesians from the Cathedral parish

4.1 The Closure of the Press

On 6th November 1972 the Salesians leave the premises of the Cathedral parish after 46 years of hard and fruitful work there. The closure of the COP in itself is not a reason for much regret The COP is a commercial enterprise fulfilling, however, an apostolic function, the spreading of good Catholic literature and the publication of a weekly Catholic paper, *The Herald*. During the years of its existence it has done a lot of good, and for the Salesians of North India it has served also as a 'Procure'. However, as it is being run on a commercial basis with paid workers, it does not sufficiently satisfy the Salesian idea of a Press, that of being a school of printing at the service of youth. The brothers, especially those directly in-charge of running it, do not feel quite satisfied with this kind of work.

[32] For text of the agreement, Cfr. Chronicle of the Province, 16.2.1971 in *Provincial Archives*, B.10.1.3.
[33] Ibid.

More than once the idea is mooted to find ways to turn it into a 'school of Printing'.

In the meeting of the Provincial Council of 3rd February 1966, the Provincial, Fr. M. Casarotti, strongly presents his idea with regard to the Press. "If we want to save our lay brothers and have some prospective vocations for the Press, we have to take out the COP from this 'hovel' and leave the Cathedral parish. Besides, we all understand that as soon as the Archbishop has his own Clergy, he will ask us to leave the Cathedral parish. The incipient technical school at Park Circus gives us the possibility of making this change." All the Councillors too are of the same opinion but want to go slow in implementing it, in order to avoid a 'sensational' change. Their suggestion is to start in a modest way in Park Circus a branch of the COP, and to allow the COP to die a natural death.

What leaves the confreres with shattered nerves and bitter memories is the way the closure takes place. The workers begin an agitation demanding a 3 months' *Puja bonus*. Every morning they enter the gate in procession carrying red flags, posters, (even the workers who are Catholics do the same), shout slogans, hang the flags in front of the Press door, and go slow on work.

On 26th September 1969 a compromise is reached with the workers. It consists in promising two months and ten days of bonus. But subsequent events prove that the compromise does not put an end to the agitation.

From the 10th to the 14th November 1969 Fr. Provincial makes the visitation of COP. It ends with a meeting of the confreres and a 'good night' by the Provincial on 14th. The main problem discussed is whether or not to close down the Press and the shop for religious articles, in view of the labour unrest prevailing in the State and which is also affecting the COP. Another reason in favour of closure is to give the Coadjutor brothers the possibility of exercising their Salesian apostolate among youth. As it is not opportune to close down at the present moment, it is decided instead to keep it going until God shows a way out of the difficulty.

And God shows the way, but in a hard manner. For some time the workers have been agitating and the strain is telling on the confreres' endurance, especially on Fr. Sheehy who falls sick. On 31st October 1970, the workers shout slogans more than ever before on leaving the Press. After they have gone, the confreres bolt the doors from inside, remove the

name board of the Press and affix the following notice: "The COP is closed indefinitely from 1st November 1970." On first November 1970, three jeeps full of Police keep watch night and day over the COP and continue to do so for a few more days. But the agitation lasts for weeks and nearly shatters the confreres. The workers continue shouting vulgar and insulting slogans.

On 3rd June 1971 the case between the management and the workers is adjourned. On 15th June 1971, the final verdict comes in favour of the management.

4.2 The Cathedral Parish is Given Back to the Diocese

On 7th May 1971 a meeting of the Provincial Council is held at COP. For the second part of the meeting all the confreres of the house are called to discuss the future of the house. A letter of the Archbishop is discussed in which he expresses the opinion of the clergy that the Cathedral should be run by the diocesan clergy and asks when it could be handed over. It is decided to write to the Archbishop saying that it is evident that the diocesan clergy should administer the Cathedral. However, as it is rumoured that the Cathedral would be removed to another more convenient place closer to the Catholic community, a request is made for the premises to be handed over to the Salesian Society for a nominal price. The Salesians would take care of the church at their own cost and, should they at any time withdraw, the church and the premises would revert to the diocese on conditions to be agreed upon.[34]

On 12th November 1971 Fr. Sheehy, acting Provincial in the absence of the Provincial who is away in Rome attending the XX General Chapter, receives a letter dated 6th November 1971 from His Grace, the Archbishop of Calcutta, informing him that at a meeting of the Diocesan Clergy on 4th November, a unanimous decision is taken on the premises of the Cathedral to be returned to the archdiocese. It is pointed that since the Salesians might need time to remove all their property, especially the machinery and materials of the Catholic Orphan Press they could take as much time as needed for this purpose. However it is desired that a diocesan priest be installed as Pro-Vicar of the Cathedral at the earliest.

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[34] For copy of the original letter to the Archbishop, Cfr. Minutes of the Provincial Council dated 8.5.'71, *Provincial Archives*, B.8, 2.1

On 29th November 1971 Fr. Sheehy writes to the His Grace the Archbishop reminding him of the agreement made in 1925 between the Salesians and the Archbishop of Calcutta, by which the Salesians would take charge of the Cathedral and its parish. While it is accepted that either party could revoke the agreement in writing, there is a clause that says that between the revoking of the agreement and its final lapsing one-year should pass. Hence, His Grace is asked that one-year be allowed to pass before a diocesan priest be appointed as Pro-Vicar of the Cathedral.[35]

In his letter of 13th December 1971 His Grace states that the diocesan consulters have agreed that the Cathedral should be in the care of the Salesians till 6th November 1972.

On 26th January 1972, in the parish hall of the Cathedral, a dinner is served as farewell to the Salesians who are due to leave the Cathedral for good by the end of this year. The Parish committee that has been connected with fathers and brothers both in the Cathedral and in the Catholic Orphan Press for many years is much grieved at the thought of having to lose the Salesians during the course of the year. Mr. C. S. Gabriel speaks in the name of all the parishioners and generously praises the good work of the Salesians throughout the years, especially the work on behalf of the poor people and of the young. On behalf of the Salesians, Fr. Sheehy gives a sincere word of appreciation of the spirit of cooperation of the whole parish with the work of the fathers and brothers all along.

On 6th November 1972, in the evening a dinner is hosted at the Cathedral House, Calcutta, at which are present His Grace, Lawrence Picachy, Archbishop of Calcutta, Msgr. Henry D'Souza, Vicar General, Msgr. John D' Souza, who is taking over as the new parish priest, Fr. A. Bruylants, Provincial of the Jesuits, Fr. Leander D' Costa, Archbishop's Secretary, Fr. R. Stroscio, Provincial of the Salesians, Fr. Sheehy, rector of the house, Fr. Eugene Ojer, Provincial Economer, Fr. A. J. Kuriakose, in charge of the 'Procure', Fr. Rapati[36], assistant parish priest, Bro. Abraham Pinakatt, in charge of the Press and of the building at

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[35] Cfr. Chronicle of the Province, 13.12. 1971, *Provincial Archives*, B.10.1.3.

[36] Fr. John Rapati: born at Amstardam (Holand) on 9.8.1913, makes his *aspirantate* in Belgium 1932–1936, comes to India in 1937, makes his novitiate and first profession at Sonada on 6.1.1941, is ordained a priest on 14.9.1950. He works at the COP (1950–1951), at Sonada (1951), at Shillong (1951–1952), at Sonada (1952), Shillong (Economer) (1952), Bandel (1963–1966). He dies at Rijswijk (Holand) on 26.8.1989, aged 76.

Entally, Bro. P.J. Abraham, who is the manager of the Press, Fr. A. Sylvester[37], and Fr. P.S. Thomas from Bandel. Fr. R. Maiques, parish priest of the Cathedral, is absent due to illness. Towards the end of the dinner, Fr. Stroscio speaks: "Since 31st December 1925", he says, "When Fr. Bonardi, SDB, takes over as rector, the Salesians have tried to do their best to enhance the splendour of the bishop's own church, to keep the Catholic population fervent, to create a youth movement in the Church, and through the Press to serve the cause of the Church through the written word. At this moment of departure, the Salesians want to thank the diocese, through His Grace, for having entrusted the care of the Cathedral to them ever since Archbishop Ferdinand Perier, S.J, called them. They want to thank the Jesuit fathers, through their Provincial, for their understanding and cooperation. They are now welcoming Msgr. John D'Souza; the new parish priest and wish him abundant apostolic fruits. The Salesians crave His Grace's blessing and prayers. They promise obedience, cooperation, and personal affection, as recommended by Don Bosco to his children."

In reply, His Grace thanks the Salesians for the splendid work they have done all these years with so much dedication and efficiency. He concludes by saying that the Salesians will be entrusted with a big parish, whose boundaries have been delineated[38], only the canonical erection now remains to be done. The new parish may be called 'Mary Help of Christians' parish'.

The Salesians leave the Cathedral at 8.20 p.m. At Park Circus, where they will stay until the new Provincial House is ready, the confreres welcome them with open arms. In his good night Fr. Provincial says that from now the Cathedral Salesian community ceases to exit. Every one feels the loss, especially those who have worked hard there. The whole process has cost a lot of suffering. Nevertheless, we can already see God's guiding hand in all this.

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[37] Fr. Antony Sylvester: born at Inslin (Rangoon – Burma) on 2.10.1931, makes his *aspirantate* at Bandel and Sonada, his novitiate at Yercaud (1954), his first profession on 24.5.1955, is ordained a priest at Bombay by Paul VI on the occasion of the International Eucharistic Congress on 2.12.1964. He works at Shillong (Don Bosco), at Don Bosco Park Circus, at Bongaon (Asst. P.P.), at Vyasarpadi (the Beatitudes – Madras), at Siliguri (Asst. P.P.), at Colle Don Bosco (Torino – Italy) in 1986, to reorganize the Missionary Museum. He dies at Chieri (Torino – Italy) on 3.10.1995, aged 64.

[38] On 26th March, Palm Sunday, 1972, Fr. Provincial concelebrates at the Cathedral Church with Msgr. Henry D'Souza, Vicar General, and Fr. Maiques, parish priest. After Mass they discuss the proposal of assigning a Parish to the Salesians in the area of Tengra, Dhapa and Topsia.

5. Krishnagar

5. 1 Don Bosco School

From the structural point of view we can mention: the addition of more land for the farm, the construction of a new building, and the lengthening of the workshop. In order to tide over the difficult financial situation, on 12th September 1969, the Provincial Council meeting at Krishnagar grants a substantial aid towards the completion of a poultry for 2000 hens, and Rs. 15,000 as part of the cost of a machine necessary to meet the requirements of the ITI, for which the school has recently received recognition. It is hoped that the rest of the money may be got from Oxfam, and about Rs. 25,000 is given towards the repairs of a boring machine.

In the meeting of 23rd November 1962 the Provincial Council approves the buying of 14 acres of land and on 1st January 1963 the chronicle of the Province informs us that Fr. A. Guarneri, rector of Don Bosco Krishnagar, has bought three acres of land thus enlarging the property and making it possible to expand the workshop. The expansion of the workshop takes place on 9th December 1963. In March 1969, the Don Bosco Technical School of Krishnagar is affiliated to the National Council for training in Vocational Trades.



Krishnagar: Don Bosco Technical School

On 8th January 1960 Fr. A. Doro is authorized to approach the Authorities to obtain the necessary permission to open a Higher Secondary School. On 10th January 1962 information is received that Don Bosco Krishnagar has been granted permission to be upgraded in humanities. Thus, it becomes a Higher Secondary School. It is hoped to have it upgraded in Science as well in the following year.

In the meeting of 10th January 1960 the Provincial Council also decides to have the plans made for a new building for the school and 'boarding'. At the end of December 1961, such a building is considered as an immediate need. In January 1962, Bro. Castelli is given the charge of the construction, which he completes in the course of one year. In fact a three-storey building is blessed on 29th January 1963.

The setbacks suffered during this period are due to the general precarious social and political situation in the State, as we have mentioned earlier. The Krishnagar riots of the year 1966 affect also Don Bosco School. On 9th November 1970 there is tension in the city of Krishnagar. Some schools are raided by the Naxalites and headmasters are threatened with dire consequences if they allow examinations to be held. Fr. K. A. Thomas, the Headmaster of Don Bosco School too, is threatened to have his head cut off, if he does not comply with their demands.

5.2 The Diocese of Krishnagar

During this period important changes take place in the administration of the diocese. The Holy See accepts Bishop L. R. Morrow's resignation. His 30 years of dedicated and self-sacrificing work leave an indelible mark on the diocese of Krishnagar. On 4th December 1970, Fr. L. Gobetti is chosen as Vicar Capitular. Brother Pancolini, expelled from Assam, chooses to join the Province of Calcutta and Fr. Provincial sends him to Fr. Gobetti to organize a propaganda office to support the diocese economically. On 8th July 1970 Fr. Matthew Baroi, rector of Bandel, is appointed rector of bishop's house, and Fr. Luciano Colussi is made rector of Don Bosco School Krishnagar. On 11th October 1970, Fr. Baroi is made Administrator of the diocese and is installed by His Grace L. Picachy, the Archbishop of Calcutta, on 8th November 1970,

5.2.1 Life in the Mission Centres

In the 1960s in **Behrampore** efforts are made by the bishop and the Congregation to buy an old half-abandoned Cemetery quite close to the

parish house, consisting of 5 acres of land. Bishop Morrow is trying to get it from the government for a school. Fr. Provincial visits the place in July 1962 and expresses his satisfaction.

In the meeting of 10th March 1964 the Provincial Council discusses the ways and means of getting the cemetery for a school, hoping that the permission of using it for a school will be a sufficient reason. But eventually, nothing happens and efforts for getting the cemetery will continue in the following years. On 9th December 1963, the Council decides to make a loan of Rs. 5000 to Fr. Lazzaro to buy some land near the cemetery to settle some refugees who are Christians.

A number of developments take place in the mission centre at **Ranaghat.** In its meeting of 9th December 1963, the Provincial Council decides to buy 16 bighas of land for Rs. 60,000. It is an ideal place for a school. On 6th February 1964 the land is registered in the name of the bishop of Krishnagar, who releases a document saying that it belongs to the Salesian Society, as it is bought by the Province of Calcutta with its own money and for its own use. In the Council meeting of 22nd May 1965 it is realized that the land that is bought is not sufficient and efforts are made to buy more land. The purpose is to have there a school for Bengali boys residing in any part of Bengal, Catholics who desire to send their children to a 'boarding' and who can afford to pay the required fees.

On 10th March 1966 the Council decides to start the work in Ranaghat, to build a school first and build it in such way that it may be used also as a boarding. The boarding will be built later, in a different place, that we may not lose both, in case schools are nationalized. There are 1500 Catholics in Ranaghat and the small town is fast developing. From the Christians we hope to get some good vocations.

However, the decision remains only on paper. In the months of September, October, and November, the preoccupation of the Provincial Council is not to build the school, owing to the present critical political situation, but how to protect the land. In the meeting of 13th November 1966 after some discussion two proposals are accepted: first, to keep a part of the land for a residential colony, it can be sold at a cheap price to some Catholic families; second, to keep the rest of the land for a future institution. There is also a suggestion to have a small school (and boarding) for Uraon boys from nearby villages. Even this decision does not solve the problem, which is still a topic for discussion in the meeting of the

Council on 31st March 1971. The problem of Ranaghat will be solved in March 1977, when Fr. Gobetti, the parish priest of Ranaghat, suggests the exchange of 12 bighas of land still belonging to the Province for a much bigger plot of land which he has bought for the diocese in Kalyani, and the Provincial Council is in favour of the exchange.

On 8th January 1975 the parish of Ranaghat is entrusted *in perpetuum* to the Salesian Society.

The Chronicle of the Province dated 4th July 1972, provides information about events that are taking place in the parishes of **Chapra, Maliapota, and Ranabondo.** From the time of the state of emergency, caused by the inflow of refugees from Bangladesh and the floods which threatened the life of thousands of local people, the mission stations of Chapra, Maliapota and Ranabondo are able to make much progress, particularly in the estimation of the Hindu and Muslim population. Many of them express their desire to become Catholics. No one has stood by them in their hour of need except the missionaries. Fr. Aldo Decaroli tells the Provincial that in one village he has 14 Muslim families under instruction and elsewhere others are asking to enter the Church. Fr. Sebastian Carvalho[39], parish priest of Maliapota, tells him that the Protestants of his District are fast losing ground. At Haulia all the young men have become Catholics and the pastor is left with a few old people. In that year many houses, roads and tanks have been built through the 'food-for-work' programme.

On 16th October 1963 Fr. Provincial and a few other confreres visit **Bongaon** to study the possibility of opening a new mission station detaching the Bongaon subdivision from Ranaghat. The opening of the mission centre takes place on 30th November 1967 with Fr. Pierluca as parish priest. The mission station plays an important role during the Bangladesh War in 1971. Through the influence of Fr. Joseph D'Souza, the parish priest, it becomes the clearing station for all the material dispatched by CRS and *Caritas* and other organizations to Bangladesh. Fr. D'Souza is able to win the good will of all government and Military Officers. In this way relief work is carried on unhampered.[40]

[39] Fr. Sebastian Carvalho is born on 15.10.1927 at Divinihilo-Varangola-Mimas (Brazil), makes his first profession on 31.1.1947, joins the Calcutta Province in 1951, is ordained a Priest at Shillong on 7.12.1956. He works in Don Bosco Krishnagar, Maliapota (Asst. parish priest), Chapra (Asst. P.P.), Maliapota (parish priest 1969); from here he goes back home (Brazil) for good in November 1976 and dies there on 8.7.1992, aged 64.

[40] Cfr. Chronicle of the Province, 7 July 1972, *Provincial Archives* B.10.1.3.

The mission centre of **Thakurnagar** is opened on 14th August 1971, when Fr. Giulio Ferretti,[41] Pro-Vicar of the Cathedral of Calcutta, is transferred to this new Mission Station as parish priest. In March 1972 the construction of the presbytery begins. It is a two-storey building designed by Fr. Eugene Ojer. The Christian community consists of Catholics from Barasol and Dhaka.

2.2.2 From Entrustment to Mandate – A Change in Church Policy

The relationship between the Ecclesiastical authorities and the religious is regulated by an instruction issued by the Sacred Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* in 1929. The Holy See entrusts a mission territory to a religious society. The Congregation or Order concerned accepts the responsibility to run the mission and contributes personnel and means. The Prefecture Apostolic of Assam, Bhutan and Manipur is first entrusted to the Salvatorians, then to the Jesuits, and lastly to the Salesians. The same policy is followed when the diocese of Krishnagar, the archdiocese of Madras, the dioceses of Dibrugarh and Tezpur, are entrusted to the Salesian Congregation.

In 1969 however, a new instruction is promulgated by the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (SCEP) in the light of the theology of Vatican II: where there is a bishop there is the Church. Bishops are ordained to lead the flock of Christ. So when a mission becomes a diocese and a bishop – diocesan or religious – is appointed, the bishop himself becomes the head of the diocese. Accordingly, when the instruction of 1969 becomes operative in 1970, the care of the dioceses of Shillong, Dibrugarh, Tezpur, Krishnagar ceases to be the responsibility of the Salesian Society. The 1929 Instruction of the Sacred Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* (SCPF) gave the Right of Entrustment (*Jus Commisionis)* to a religious Society and the Instruction of 1969 gives the Right of Mandate (*Jus Mandati*), i.e., the bishop may enter into an agreement with a religious Congregation or Order and give it the mandate to run parishes, institutions

[41] Fr. Giulio Ferretti is born at Iseo (Brescia – Italy) on 6.4.1911, comes to India to make his novitiate towards the end of 1931, makes his first profession on 8.12.1932, is ordained a priest on 1.6.1941. As a cleric he is Secretary to the Bishop of Shillong and to the Administrator of the Krishnagar diocese. He is Secretary to the Bishop of Krishnagar from 1941 to 1950, parish priest of Maliapota Parish (1950–1959), of Ranaghat Parish (1959–1970), and first parish priest of Thakurnagar Parish in 1971. Towards the end of the 70s, he goes back to Italy and dies at Iseo on 27.6.1984, aged 73.

or a portion of the diocese, according to the conditions laid down in the agreement itself.

"Institutes should be prepared to continue the work that they have begun, by cooperating in the ordinary ministry of the care of souls. Yet as the local clergy increases, care should be taken that in so far as this is in agreement with its purpose, the institute should remain faithful to the dioceses by generously shouldering special works or assuming responsibility for some part of it." (*Ad Gentes* 32 d)

"The institutes which for centuries have zealously dedicated their efforts to the preaching of the Gospel and establishment of the Church, are still to be acknowledged as very beneficial for these dioceses by the bishop in mission territories. Indeed, the collaboration given by these institutes enables missionary bishops to accomplish more efficaciously the task of evangelization. Nevertheless, these institutes, even in missionary territories, cannot be denied the exercise of the right to preserve their particular character and due autonomy, nor the possibility of establishing houses in accordance with the prescripts of law, and fostering vocations so that the faithful may choose freely their way of life in accordance with the inspiration received from the Lord. The same institutes will, with their zeal and experience, give the service and help to the missionary bishops, under the jurisdiction of the same bishops, which will constitute a real and efficacious sharing in the work of evangelization." (Instruction 1969, 14 a,b)[42]

6. Burma

This short report on Burma of the years 1960–1972 will not speak of any progress achieved by the work of the confreres. The early years of the 1960s, no doubt, are years of a forward march in Mandalay, Anisakan, and Thyngangyun, as we have seen earlier.

Our present account deals with the serious setbacks, a veritable cyclone, which threatens to uproot the Salesian presence in Burma, all due to the changed political situation. In 1962 the Army headed by General Ne Win captures power, and with him the Socialist Regime, which in a short time all but kills all ideas of democracy and freedom.

[42] Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands*, 153–154.

After having undergone many trials, after seeing the school at Mandalay destroyed and rebuilt twice, the confreres are at last hoping to see better days. Instead, on 1st April 1965, the new government confiscates everything. The Salesians lose at one stroke two good and much appreciated schools, Lafon's school (both academic and technical) and Don Bosco school Thyngangyun. Dark clouds appear in the horizon even before that, but the confreres could not imagine that everything would be taken away from them.

Fr. L. Barattoni, the parish priest of Mandalay, gives us an eyewitness account of the nationalization of the Lafon's school on 1st April 1965.[43] The government officials sent to take over the school cannot be less devoid of any sense of humanity and decency. They want to take everything, even what belongs to the church and the parish. They make a list of all that they find in the school, they count one by one the nails, the loose sheets of paper, and two ladies are put to count all the buttons in the tailoring. After the ladies finish their work, they are paid with the money of the school. They find the value of about two million Italian *Liras* in copy books.[44] They take away everything and never think of giving back even a *naya paise*. It is no exaggeration to say that the value of land and buildings must have been about half a billion *Liras*. They take also any money they find in the safe and some gold objects, which have been entrusted temporarily to the Salesians or that belong to the parish. Only after months of insistent requests the Salesians can get them back. They seal all the doors of the workshops and any other place where things belonging to the school are kept. They seal the door of the rector's office and at first they do not allow him to take with him the private documents of the Congregation. They confiscate all the registers of the school, of the boarding and of the technical school.

At the beginning of the year they invite the boarders to come back to school, but under their direction. The technical school is closed for good. Half-heartedly the Authorities allow the Salesians to continue to occupy their private rooms. In November 1965 the government changes the boarding into a kind of government hostel for University students.

On 1st March of the following year the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians meet with the same fate. Their school is confiscated. They

[43] Cfr. L. Barattoni, *Relazione*, 12–13.

[44] The Salesians usually buy books and copybooks in bulk, to distribute to the students at the beginning of the scholastic year.

want to occupy even the living quarters of the sisters, but the Superior courageously opposes them, and the sisters are left in peace.

In March 1966 the government releases the list of the foreign priests and religious expelled by them, in which the non-Burmese confreres are included: the rector and Delegate, F. U. Bordin[45], the parish priest, Fr. L. Barattoni, Fr. Alton Fernandez, Bro. G. Kramer and Bro. Vitali. Bro. Silvio Vitali leaves Burma together with Fr. W. Balocco, novice master, on 10th June 1966. The other five confreres mentioned earlier leave at the end of July, Fr. Antony Duca leaves in November. Out of 10 non-Burmese Salesians, 8 are included in the list. Two are left behind, Fr. F. Giacomin and Fr. Bertolino[46]. Fr. John San Maung remains alone in the parish, helped by a sick Coadjutor Brother, Bro. Peter Gontram[47]. With the profession of the last batch of novices under Fr. Balocco on 28th April 1966, the novitiate is closed.

With the departure of the non-Burmese confreres, Burma loses practically all the personnel for formation, except Fr. Giacomin. As a result of this, the formation of the aspirants and of the young confreres is adversely affected. The superiors in Turin are concerned about the future of the Salesian Congregation in Burma. In the Council meeting of 24th November 1966, Fr. Casarotti reads a letter from Fr. Tohill in which he expresses concern about the situation of the young confreres and asks the Council to study, pray, and see what can be done about it.

In the Provincial Council meeting of 17th April 1967, the new Provincial, Fr. R. Stroscio, speaks to the Council of his visit to the confreres of Burma on 2nd and 16th April 1967 on his way to and from Bangkok. At the airport he is allowed only a few hours each time and spends the whole night meeting about half the confreres. He notices a

[45] In 1965 the Delegation of Burma is formed with Fr. Bordin as its first Delegate. After Fr. Bordin's departure, Fr. Joseph Ahkee becomes the Provincial Delegate.

[46] Fr. Giacomo Bertolino is born on 26.1.1918. At Ventimiglia (Italy), makes his profession on 18.9.1936, comes to India in 1938, is ordained a priest on 20.9.1945 in Dehra Dun. He works in Burma till 29.6.1972, when he leaves Burma for good and returns to Italy. He dies at Varazze on 14.9.1993, aged 85.

[47] Brother Peter Gontram is born in Burma on 22.2.1932, is an aspirant at Sonada in 1950, starts the novitiate on 17.5.1955 and makes his first profession on 24.5.1956 at Yercaud as a cleric. Due to bad health he becomes a lay brother and works in Burma. When the foreign missionaries are expelled from Burma in 1966, Bro. Peter remains alone, the only companion to the parish priest of Mandalay. He dies in Mandalay on 29.12.1970, aged 58, after14 years of profession.

certain amount of dissatisfaction and uneasiness, especially among the young confreres. The future is somewhat bleak and there is no way of establishing a good novitiate and properly staffed houses of formation. In the present circumstances, therefore, in his opinion, the best course to follow seems to be: to have no novitiate, to admit to the renewal of vows and to perpetual profession only those who are truly prepared, to facilitate the exit of those who desire to join the secular clergy, and to prepare the aspirants for seminaries, telling them that should conditions return to normal, they may apply to come back, and, if found fit, they would be admitted.

In the meeting of the Provincial Council on 27th July 1967, Fr. Provincial informs the Council that the superiors want to take a final decision on the future of our work and of the confreres in Burma. Before that, however, they like to have the opinion of the Provincial Council. They put forward the following suggestions: take everybody to Anisakan where the students would do their philosophy and theology *alla eroica,* as it used to be done in the heroic days of the Congregation; or ask the perpetually professed priests and clerics to join the diocesan clergy, if they cannot come out of Burma, dispense from vows all the temporary professed and even the perpetually professed Coadjutor brothers and leave them free to do what they think best.

Fr. Provincial reads his reply to Fr. Fedrigotti's letter in which he suggests that, before taking a final decision, Fr. Tohill should be asked to go to Burma on a Vatican passport and stay a few days to study the situation *in loco.*

In the Council meeting on 4th November 1967, Fr. Provincial tells the Council about the letter of Fr. Joseph Ahkee, Delegate of the Provincial and rector of Mandalay, in which he asks to be allowed to start the novitiate with himself as rector and Fr. Giacomin or Fr. Thomas D' Souza as novice master. Fr. Francis Cyril can be sent to Thyngangyun and Fr. Bertolino or Fr. Jocelyn Madden to Mandalay. The work should not be allowed to die, as it is the work of Don Bosco and of our Lady, there is nothing to fear. The Council feels the reasons given by Fr. Ahkee to be very valid and Fr. Ahkee, Fr. Giacomin, and Fr. Thomas to be excellent Salesians who can do the work efficiently. Fr. Provincial will convey the opinion of the Council to the superiors in Turin.

Neither the minutes of the Provincial Council meetings nor the chronicle of the Province tell us anything more about the results of this communication with the superiors. But, if any answer is given at all, it may not have been a positive one, considering the fact that only a few months later, probably in March 1968, Fr. Tohill communicates the decision of the superiors regarding the young confreres. They are told of the indefinite closure of Salesian works in Burma: "The Salesians have no future in sight, you may leave for home or join the diocese."[48] Out of a group of 18 or more, only nine are left in Anisakan, planting, rearing animals, studying, and helping out twice a year in some parishes.

Fr. Provincial once again meets some confreres at Thyngangyun stopping at Rangoon on his way back from Bangkok on 4th November 1968. Of this visit he speaks to the Council on 16th January 1969. The confreres seem somewhat disheartened, being under the impression that they are condemned to a slow death, since they cannot have an *aspirantate* of their own and consequently a novitiate later on. Fr. Provincial, instead, is in favour of both the *aspirantate* and the novitiate and reads to the Council a copy of his letter to the superiors in this connection. However, due to the prevailing circumstances, not all the superiors of Turin seem to favour such a move.

The problem of the *aspirantate* and of the novitiate figures again on the agenda for the Council meeting of 17th February 1969. The confreres in Burma are clamouring for an *aspirantate*. At present they have only 8 aspirants. They feel that without new recruits, they will die out slowly. And in the minutes we read, "After reading the answer of V. Rev. Fr. Tohill to Fr. Provincial concerning the problem of the *aspirantate* in Burma, we still feel that the situation cannot remain as it is. The confreres there

[48] In his two books, "Antonio M. Alessi, *Una Vita per l'India*, p.181, and *Pionieri nel Cuore dell'India*, p.75, Fr. Antonio Alessi (Jr.) wrongly attributes the words said by Fr. B. Tohill to the Burmese Confreres in March 1968 to Fr. N. Lo Groi, as said by him in 1973. In 1968 Fr. Lo Groi was Vice Provincial, Rector, and Principal of Don Bosco Park Circus. When he went to Burma as Provincial in May 1973, he never said what Fr. Alessi puts in his mouth in his two above-mentioned books. Just the contrary, in June 1974 he will plead with the Rector Major to give confidence to the Confreres in Burma and to allow the reopening of the *aspirantate*, which he did. (Cfr.Ch.XI, 487).

want a clear answer to the problem. We agreed therefore to ask officially the opinion of the Superior Council on the problem."

In the Provincial meeting of 1st May 1969, the Council admits 5 candidates to the Novitiate at Anisakan, due to begin on 24th May with Fr. Giacomin as novice master. Three non-salesian clerics, students of philosophy, have refused to leave when all are given permission to leave the Society and go to the seminary. In answer to a request of Fr. Ahkee to the rector Major, in September 1968 as a special case they are given permission[49] to make their novitiate. To these three, two more are added, so five apply and all five are admitted. Of these, three leave at different stages before the profession, and only two profess in May 1970. One of them is Brother Charles Bo (today Achbishop Charles Bo). Due to lack of candidates, the novitiate is closed again. It will be re-opened only in 1981.

On 22nd August 1970 Fr. Provincial leaves for Rangoon and Bangkok on a transit visa of 24 hours. On his way back from Bangkok he obtains a seven-day transit visa, during which time he makes the visitation of the Salesian work in Burma. On 19th September he writes a detailed letter to the Pronuncio in Delhi, M. J. Lemieux O.P. in answer to a letter of his dated 27th August 1970, giving him his impression on Burma: the political, religious, economic situation, and the situation of the Salesians in Burma. In a detailed letter in Italian he gives his impressions to the superiors in Turin. He makes a chronicled history of his visit, gives a serene opinion on each confrere, and his impression on the economic, intellectual, and spiritual situation of the houses. He also touches the most important problems at the moment, such as the practical training, the apostolic future, and vocations, bewailing the fact that the confreres cannot have aspirants, and asks for more trust and confidence to be given to them. He also touches on the political, economic, and religious situation.[50]

[49] Cfr. Two letters of Rev. Fr. Stroscio to the Rector Major: in the first one, dated 6.9.1968, he writes that Fr. Ahkee has asked the Rector Major to grant this permission and Fr. Stroscio is favourable to its being granted; in the second letter, dated 2.10.1968, Fr. Provincial thanks the Rector Major for having granted the permission for this special case. Cfr. *Provincial Archives*, A.1.3.1.

[50] For these two letters, Cfr. Chronicle, *Provincial Archives*, B.10.1.2a, after 22 August 1970.

On 9th February 1971 Fr. Provincial meets Msgr. Francis Colasuono, first Secretary at the Delhi Nunciature. He is on his way back from a visit to Burma. He speaks of the Salesians in Burma, of the great hostility of the clergy and the bishops towards them, because they are shut up at Anisakan, whereas there is so much need of priests in the mission field. He makes the proposal that we send our clerics to the Seminary for their studies and accept a district with Lashio at its centre. The Holy See would make things as easy as possible and the PIME fathers on the spot would be happy if we accept.

On 17th February 1972. Fr. Provincial is in Burma with a five-day transit visa. He has a lengthy discussion with Bishop Than of Keng Tung over the proposal of entrusting the District of Lashio to the Salesians. It may not be wise to take charge immediately of the whole District. It is better for the Salesians to take care of a mission station, such as Namtu.

On 19th February 1972 Fr. Provincial has a meeting of the Delegation Council at Anisakan to discuss the above proposal. Fr. Provincial suggests waiting till the end of the year when the first three priests will be ordained in December 1972. In the same month a Priest should be fixed to go to Namtu and have the opening of the first mission station on 31st January 1973. The question of vocations is also discussed. The confreres object strongly to leaving Anisakan, as proposed by Bishop Than.

Before leaving Rangoon, Fr. Provincial writes a letter on 22nd February 1972, to Bishop Than with copies to Msgr John Camnasio (PIME), to Fr. Neo Paolo (PIME), to Msgr. Pietro Calvani (PIME), and to Msgr. Colasuono Francis, in which he expresses in writing the decision taken at Anisakan to send to Namtu an experienced priest in December 1972 to take charge of that mission station, preparing the place for the official opening on 31st January 1973.[51]

The Provincial Council discusses this proposal on 16th March 1972. In the same meeting of the Council, the Provincial gives an account of the confreres and of their work in Burma. He proposes that Fr. Akhe be appointed rector for the third time and Fr. Jocelyn Madden Provincial Delegate. No vote is taken and the Provincial is asked to act on his own

[51] Cfr. Chronicle, *Provincial Archives*, B.10.1.2a.

discretion, since he alone knows best the conditions in Burma. Fr. Ahkee is rector and Delegate since April 1965. The change of Delegate, however, does not take place that time, but later in 1974.

C) Three Other Events Affecting the Life of the Province in the Years 1960–1972.

1. Visitors

In February and March 1968 the Province witnesses the visit of some of the members of the General Council of the Salesian Society, and in particular, the Rector Major, Fr. Aloysius Ricceri. All of them are elected to their respective roles in the XIX General Chapter of 1965.

Fr. Bernard Tohill, first Regional Councillor of the English-speaking Region, has already been in the Province several times during the previous years.

The first visitor in February 1968 is Fr. Ruggero Pilla, the Economer General of the Salesian Society. He comes to Calcutta from Madras on 5th February 1968 to preside over a Conference of the Provincial Economers of the Orient, which is held from the evening of the 5th to the evening of 7th February at Calcutta. On 8th February Fr. Pilla leaves for Gauhati accompanied by Fr. Mario Porcu, the Economer of the Gauhati Province. He is again back in Calcutta on the 10th afternoon and goes to Krishnagar accompanied by the Provincial. On the 11th Fr. Pilla visits Krishnagar, has lunch at Don Bosco's with His Lordship Bishop Morrow and the confreres of bishop's house. In the afternoon he leaves for Bandel, where he visits the Shrine, Auxilium Convent and the Bandel community. Here the aspirants greet him. On 11th evening together with Fr. Provincial, he leaves Bandel for Dum Dum airport, boards the plane for Delhi, and from there for Turin via Teheran.

On 19th February Fr. Provincial reaches Bangalore by car from Madras together with Fr. Cajetan Scrivo, Councillor for Youth Pastoral and parishes. In Bangalore Fr. Stroscio meets the Rector Major, Fr. Aloysius Ricceri,[52] and offers him the homage of all the confreres of the Province.

[52] Fr. A. Ricceri is elected Rector Major by the XIX General Chapter (1965) in succession to V. Rev. Fr. R. Ziggiotti, who, breaking the tradition that Rector Majors are elected for life, resigns and asks the Chapter to elect a successor. Fr. Ziggiotti was elected to succeed Fr. P. Ricaldone in August 1952.

From the 20th to the 26th February 1968, a Conference of the Provincials of the Orient presided over by Fr. Ricceri and in the presence of some members of the General Council is held. It is a kind of Team Visit, which in future will become a regular feature according to a specified pattern. The representatives from the Calcutta Province are: His Lordship Bishop Morrow, Fr. R. Stroscio, Provincial, and Fr. N. Lo Groi, Vice-Provincial.[53] The conference is "a magnificent experience," writes Fr. Stroscio in the Chronicle of the Province, "and the family spirit and earnestness which inspires the proceedings, marvelous."

On 27th February1968 Fr. Cajetan Scrivo, together with Fr. Provincial and several bishops, Provincials and Vice-Provincials, flies to Calcutta and goes to Liluah. On the following day Fr. Scrivo leaves for Gauhati and is back in Calcutta on 2nd March 1969. From the airport he proceeds to Krishnagar bishop's house.

On Sunday, 3rd March 1968, Fr. Scrivo offers Mass in the Cathedral of the Holy Redeemer, and after visiting the communities around leaves for Bandel, where he spends the night. On 4th March 1968, in the morning he leaves for the COP, where he has a meeting with the Commission for Youth Apostolate and Vocations, and with the Commission for parishes and Catechetics. He also meets the Sodalities led by Fr. A. Colussi. After visiting Park Circus and spending the night at COP, on the following day he leaves for Beirut.[54]

But it is the visit of the Rector Major, Fr. Aloysius Ricceri, that captures the mind and the heart of the Salesians of the Calcutta Province, of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, of the Cooperators, Past Pupils, and friends on 29th February and 1st March and then again from 4th to 6th March 1968.

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[53] The role of 'Vicar' or 'Vice-Provincial' is a new structure introduced by the XIX General Chapter. Fr. Lo Groi is made Vice-Provincial in May 1967. At this time he is also rector and principal of Don Bosco School, Park Circus.

[54] Cfr. Circular letter of Fr. Stroscio, dated 11.2.68 in *Provincial Archives*, A.1.3.1.

The Rector Major reaches Dum Dum airport from Madras at 4.00 p.m, on 29th February 1968. Waiting to welcome him at the airport are: the Provincial and his Council, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians with their aspirants from Bandel and teachers from Dum Dum, Bandel, and Park Circus, the Sisters of Mary Immaculate from Nati house at Ballygunge, groups of Catholic boys from Liluah and Krishnagar, and some teachers and Cooperators from Krishnagar.

At 5.00 p.m. there is a solemn reception at Park Circus, where Fr. Ricceri is welcomed by the confreres, by the students of philosophy from Sonada, by many boys of the Park Circus school, and by the boarders of Don Bosco Liluah. A boy of Park Circus school reads an address in Italian.

At 7.00 p.m. the Rector Major gives a conference to the confreres. During dinner Bro. Tarcisius Sona speaks in the name of the Coadjutor brothers. Fr. Ricceri concludes the day with the 'good night'. The following morning there is a concelebrated Mass presided over by Fr. Ricceri, and Fr. A. Pianazzi gives the homily. Then the Rector Major leaves for Gauhati.



V. Rev. Fr. A. RICCERI SDB, SDB
Rector Major (1965–1977)

Fr. Aloysius Ricceri is born at Mineo (Catania – Italy) on 8.5.1901, makes his profession on 9.5.1917. He spends three years of post-novitiate at S. Gregorio (Catania) under the influence of three great Salesians: Fr. Luigi Terrone, novice master, Fr. L. Mathias, and Fr. Domenico Ercolini. He works in the Oratory of St. Philip Neri at La Salette (Catania), at Modica and at Randazzo. At Randazzo he studies Theology and is ordained a priest in 1925. From 1935 to 1942 he is the rector of Don Bosco School, Palerno, and of the St. Dominic Savio School, Messina. For 7 years he is Provincial of the Subalpine Province during the difficult years of the War. He is again rector at Novara (1948–1951), and at Milan (1951–1952). In 1952 he is the Provincial of the Lombard-Emilian Province. Soon he is called to be a member of the General Council in charge of the Co-operators and the Press. He is elected Rector Major by GC XIX (1965), and by SGC XX (1971). He dies at Castellammare di Stabia on 14th June 1989, aged 88, after 72 years of Salesian life and 63 years of priesthood.

In the evening of 4th March 1968 Fr. Ricceri is back from Gauhati. At 7.00 p.m. he gives a conference to all the confreres who could not be present on 29th February. During dinner Fr. Peter Lourdes speaks in the name of the priests and M. A. Joseph in the name of the clerics.

In the morning of 5th March the aspirants arrive from Bandel and at the concelebrated Mass, presided over by Fr. Ricceri, Fr. Peter Piemonte, the rector of Salesian college, preaches the homily. At 9.30 a.m. the 2000 boys of Don Bosco Park Circus pay homage to the Rector Major, who is impressed by their enthusiasm and mingles with them, causing a pleasant surprise and a tremendous enthusiasm among the boys.

At 10.35 a.m. the Rector Major meets the Provincial Council and gives them a detailed conference on the role of animation of the Council as a whole and, in particular on the role of the Provincial and of the new figure of the Vicar or Vice-Provincial.

In the evening he pays a visit to the Archbishop, then meets the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians from Dum Dum, Bandel, and Park Circus. After that he speaks to the rectors, heads of mission centres and parish priests.

A dinner is hosted in his honour to which the following guests are invited: the Archbishop A. D' Souza, Msgr. Barber, Vicar General, Msgr. E. N. Kowen, parish priest of Christ the King parish, the Jesuit Provincial, Fr. A. Vautier, Brother Leonard, Provincial of the Christian Brothers, and Fr. D. O'Callaghan of Fatima parish.

On 6th morning the Rector Major leaves for Delhi. Before midday Fr. Ricceri, Fr. Casarotti, Fr. Stroscio, and Fr. Silvano, the Rector Major's secretary, leave for the Pro-Nunciature. The Rector Major has a private audience with the Pro-Nuncio, Msgr. Caprio, till 1.30 pm. The topic of the discussion is about the situation of our missionaries in Assam.

At noon Fr. B. Tohill and Fr. L. Di Fiore arrive from Madras. In the evening they all go to see the land at Ohkla and the Jamuna River. The three Provincials travel together in a taxi with the Rector Major. The Rector Major expresses his satisfaction at seeing the three Provincials,

united together and gives them some final recommendations. That night the Rector Major leaves for Teheran by a BOAC plane.[55]

2. In Search of Vocations

The years that follow the Extraordinary Visitation of Fr. M. Bellido see great activity in all the Provinces of India, especially in the two Northern Provinces, with regard to the vocation promotion of aspirants to Salesian life.

At the end of the Visitation, speaking to the Provincial Council at Shillong, Fr. Modesto Bellido, among other things, expresses his conviction that the number of aspirants is not proportionate to the number of works and the needs of the Province. He suggests that another *aspirantate* be opened at Shillong.

The remark made to the Council of the then still undivided Province, touches both the Provinces that will emerge from the division in 1959.

The Province of Gauhati immediately decides to open its own *aspirantate* at Shillong, and as a result, the Savio Juniorate comes into existence. The aspirants of Bandel and Sonada are to be divided between the two Provinces during the novitiate at the time of profession.

The new Provincial Council of Calcutta Province in its meeting of 29th November 1959, makes the proposal of recruiting 60 boys for both Provinces and of sending Fr. Matthew Baroi to Kerala for the purpose.

On 22nd September 1965, speaking to his Council, the Provincial expresses the hope of getting vocations from Goa and Mangalore by opening an *aspirantate* or at least a school in that part of the country. He adds that on this point there is already an understanding with the Provincial of the South. The Provincial Council meeting of that day asks Fr. Sheehy to make a drive for vocations in Goa and Mangalore among boys who are finishing the matriculation, while Fr. Robert Kerketta can do the same in Ranchi. Those boys who come will do the PUC from Salesian College, Sonada. If found good, they will remain for an extra year to study Latin

[55] The detailed programme and all the talks, conferences, and good nights of Fr. Ricceri in Italian, and all addresses to him in Italian by confreres, Priests, Coadjutor Brothers and clerics, and by the boys (all in Italian) can be found in the Chronicle of the Province after 31st December, 1968, *Provincial Archives*, B.10.1.2a.

and then they will go to the Novitiate. If not, after the first year they can go back home.

On 30th November 1964 Fr. A. Pianazzi, speaking to the three Provincials in Bombay on the occasion of the International Eucharistic Congress, recommends among other things, to have at Ernakulam (Kerala), for one year, the aspirants of all the three Provinces. He also proposes that the Don Bosco Polytechnic at Cossipore be made the house for the Coadjutor brothers.

From 26th to the 28th April 1968, a meeting of all the superiors of formation houses in India, presided over by Fr. Modesto Bellido, the Catechist General of the Salesian Society, is held at Kristu Jyoti College, Bangalore. On 29th morning Fr. Bellido has a meeting with the three Provincials, in which an important decision is taken regarding the *aspirantates*, both for Clerics and for Coadjutor brothers. In this meeting it is decided that the three Provincials would meet the Cardinal of Bombay as soon as he returns from Rome, and ask his permission to proceed in their search for a suitable place where an *aspirantate* can be established for the two Northern Provinces.

On 22nd July 1968 the three Provincials, Fr. Di Fiore, Fr. Casarotti, and Fr. Stroscio, meet in Bombay to start a tour of Bombay, Bassein, Goa, Ernakulam and Irinjalakuda to explore the possibility of inter-provincial apostolic schools. This is a vital problem, on the right solution of which depends the future of the two Northern Provinces, which are unable to find sufficient vocations in their own regions.

The next day they all go to Lonavla, and on the way they discuss the modalities of establishing a new *aspirantate* for the Northern Provinces. As regards the place, they decide to look for a place between Bombay and Bassein, so as to attract boys from Bassein, Bombay, Mangalore and Goa.

On 24th they are back in Bombay and all the three Provincials go to meet Cardinal Gracias to ask his permission to open an apostolic school somewhere around Bombay. The Cardinal grants the permission saying that the proposed apostolic school should be attached to a school and adds, in a veiled language, that they should avoid rousing jealousies.

On 26th the three Provincials leave for Goa, from there they proceed to Cochin, Irinjalakuda, and reach Madras on 30th where the three Provincials hold a meeting to finalize the results of the tour and prepare a

report for the superiors in Turin. "The tour is enjoyable," remarks Fr. Stroscio in the Chronicle of the Province, "and probably also full of important results for the two Provinces of the North."

On 20th January 1969 Fr. Casarotti and Fr. Stroscio are once again in Bombay. The three Provincials meet again in the provincial office with Fr. Alessi and Fr. Maschio present. The latter agrees to buy 10 acres of land at Borivli for the *aspirantate*. Later, in his office Fr. Maschio spontaneously suggests that the whole land measuring 15 acres be bought. As soon as the land is purchased, Fr. Eugene Ojer will go to draw out the plans in such a way that they may be executed in stages. By June 1970 accommodation should be ready for about 60 aspirants. On 7th January 1970, Fr. B. Tohill blesses the foundation stone of the *aspirantate* for the two Northern Provinces. It will be opened on 22nd January 1971. On 6th February 1973, at Borivli, the Provincials of Bombay, Gauhati and Calcutta have a meeting on certain basic points regarding the apostolic school at Borivli. They arrive at an agreement to be signed by the three Provincials and their Councils and sent to the Rector Major for approval. The agreement is read and signed by the Provincial and the Provincial Council of Calcutta on 23rd February 1973.

After visiting Bangalore and Yercaud, on 18th August 1972, Fr. Stroscio reaches Mannuthy (Trichur), where the aspirants welcome him. Eleven boys have been recruited for the Calcutta Province. The school building has been finished. The boarding instead has still to be built. The boys sleep in the classrooms and veranda. In the previous year five Salesians and thirty boys occupy a small, shaky building, most of it with a thatched roof. They call it "Becchi". It is a wonder how they can stay in such a cramped, uncomfortable place. "Yet, I'm told," writes Fr. Stroscio, "they are exceedingly happy!"

In the same Council meeting of 23rd February 1973, the new Provincial, Fr. N. Lo Groi, gives a report of his visit to Mannuthy. The boys in this *aspirantate* are meant for Madras, Gauhati and Calcutta. An official agreement will be drawn up and sent to us later. The expenses of the *aspirantate* will have to be met by the different Provinces that benefit from it. We will have to pay one-third of the ordinary expenses and one-fourth of the cost for land and buildings. At present we have 11 boys there in class VIII. Nine boys came up to Bandel last year. In future the division of the aspirants will take place after SSLC Examinations. The Council of Calcutta makes a review of this agreement on 10th January 1974. The

feeling of the Council is that the average expenses per boy should not exceed Rs. 120 per month. The Council agrees to continue with this agreement provided a similar agreement is made for the Juniorate (Magistero) for the Salesian Brothers. As an alternative, the members propose to give a monthly allowance per boy on an average of Rs. 4 per day.

The apostolic schools at Borivli and at Mannuthy are the result of the tour of the three Provincials in search of vocations in 1968. The gain, however, for the two Provinces, in the sense of new vocations entering the northern Provinces, is not an equally happy one for both experiments. While a number of Salesians, working in the Provinces of Calcutta, Gauhati and New Delhi, hail from Mannuthy, practically no one hails from Borivli, except one who opts for Gauhati Province from Lonavla.[56]

3. The Meeting of Superiors of Formation Houses in India: Bangalore 26-28 April 1968

Fr B. Tohill, the Regional Superior in the year 1966, first suggests the idea of a meeting of the superiors of formation houses in India. At the time there are about 17 formation houses conducted by Salesians in India, including apostolic schools, minor and major seminaries. Fr. Tohill proposes "Formation in all stages of the priestly and religious life" as the central theme of the meeting.

Fr. James Oreglia, provincial secretary of the Province of Madras, is appointed as the organizing Secretary of the meeting. In April 1967, Fr. Oreglia enlists the services of Fr. Nicholas Lo Groi, the Vice-Provincial of Calcutta Province. All remarks and suggestions received from rectors

[56] The two experiments of Borivli and Mannuthy have a different span of life. In the meeting of the Provincial Council of Calcutta held on 6th and 7th June 1975, the Provincial informs the Council that Borivli is now a school for day scholars only, the aspirants having been shifted to Lonavla. This is practically the end of the Borivli experiment. Instead, it is only on 17 March 1988, that Fr. P.C. Thomas Panakezham, the 'Regional Superior', asks the Council to examine the advisability of continuing the payment for the aspirants at Mannuthy. In his opinion, it would be better to permit confreres desirous of joining the Missions, to join the Province later on. For this, Provinces can exchange confreres in practical training. The Provincial Council considers the option whether to pull out from Mannuthy or not in its meeting on 7th April 1988. At this meeting the question of compensation from the Province of Bangalore also comes up, as the Province has also contributed for the building of the place. The Council decides to raise the problem at the next SPCI meeting.

are sent to Fr. Lo Groi, who is asked to be the Moderator of the meeting, and to draw up a plan of action for the three-day meeting.

The meeting, originally scheduled for November 1967, is finally decided to be held from 26th to 28th April 1968, at Bangalore, under the chairmanship of Fr. M. Bellido, Catechist General of the Society.

Rev. Fr. Bellido reaches Bangalore on April 25, and in the meeting with the Provincials and the Moderator, he changes the plan of action, limiting the three-days to one stage of formation, the pre-novitiate period.

The meeting is held at Kristu Jyoti College, Bangalore, according to the new timetable and with 38 participants present. Not all the participants originally chosen are able to attend. It is not possible to exhaust the topic, but resolutions are formulated and recommendations made on the points discussed.

On 26th April two papers are presented and discussed: "The subject of a priestly and religious vocation," by Fr. Peter Lourdes, and "The recruiting and safeguarding of vocations, principles and experiences," by Fr. Lo Groi. By 'experiences' he understands the findings of a questionnaire administered to the confreres of the Calcutta and Madras Provinces, revealing that 53 per cent of these confreres do not believe that the Salesians in India are vocation-minded and 85 per cent think that the houses give few vocations. Over 60 per cent are dissatisfied with the way vocations have been recruited so far.

On 27th April 1968 two more papers are presented and discussed: "The human and Christian formation according to the mind of the Church and of the Congregation," by Fr. Joseph Kavilpuraidathil, and a paper prepared jointly by Fr. Paul Puthanangady and Fr. Sylvanus Sngi on the "Formation of the religious and Apostle-Priest and Coadjutor in the mind of the Church and the Congregation," presented by Fr. P. Puthanangady.

On 28th and 29th there are workshops, general assembly, and the drafting and passing of resolutions. On 29th evening after night prayers, Fr. M. Bellido closes the three-day meeting (extended by one day). He expresses his great satisfaction for the work done, and warns against blind excesses in any direction.[57]

[57] This brief report on 'The Meeting of superiors of Formation Houses' is based on a cyclostyled copy of the 'Acts of the Meetings of Superior of Formation Houses' 26–28 April 1968, Bangalore, 1–68. Cfr. Provincial's Library attached to the office.

CHAPTER XI

EXPANSION: 1973–1984

A) New Presences: 1. Salesian Presence at Tengra (Calcutta) 1.1 The Land 1.2 The Provincial House 1.3 The Don Bosco Complex and its Main Activities 1.3.1 The School of Graphic Arts 1.3.2 The Catechetical Centre 1.3.3 The Juniorate *(Magistero)* 2. Auxilium parish 3. Salesian Presence in Ranchi 4. New Developments at Siliguri: 4.1 The Don Bosco School 4.2 The parish 4.3 Nazareth Bhavan: The New Novitiate 5. New Parishes and Mission Centres: 5.1 Jokbhala 5.2 Polsonda More 5.3 Monigram 5.4 Mirik 5.5 Kalyani 5.6 Purnea: 5.6.1 The Parish 5.6.2 The Don Bosco School 5.7 Najafgarh B) Growth in the Established Institutions – Important Events, Celebrations: 1. Growth in the Established Institutions: 1.1 Liluah 1.1.1 Don Bosco self-employment Centre 1.1.2 The New Church 1.2. Don Bosco School Park Circus 1.2.1 The West Bengal Governor at Don Bosco Park Circus 1.2.2 The New technical school at Don Bosco Park Circus 1.2.3 The Salesian Brothers *Aspirantate* at Park Circus 1.3 Krishnagar: 1.3.1 Don Bosco School 1.3.2 The Diocese 1.4 Cossipore 1.5 Bandel 1.6 Delhi 1.7 Burma 2. Important Events 2.1 The Rector Major Fr. Egidio Viganò, Visits Calcutta Province 2.2 Visits of other Members of the General Council 3. Celebrations: 3.1 Centenary of the Salesian Missions and Golden Jubilee of the Calcutta Province 3.2 Centenary of the Official Approval of the Constitutions 3.3 Centenary of the Founding of the Salesian Cooperators 3.4 Golden Jubilee of Don Bosco's Canonization.

When the new Provincial assumes office on 16th December 1973, he does not need to spend much time to decide on where to start. The recently concluded Special Provincial Chapter held from 15th to 21st October 1972 already cuts out the work for him. The Chapter sets a number of priorities for the new Provincial, of which some are not altogether new ventures, but works which have received the active attention of the previous Provincial, Fr. R. Stroscio, such as, the purchase of a plot of land at Hesag (Hatia-Ranchi) for a future *aspirantate*, the account about which is given later in this chapter; making plans for a new English-medium school at Siliguri, and taking the preliminary steps for the establishment of a parish at Dhapa-Topsia, offered to the Salesians by His Grace, L. Picachy, Archbishop of Calcutta. The Chapter accepts these ventures and asks for their implementation, adding to these some other priorities, such as, the Juniorate or *Magistero* for the Salesian brothers after their

novitiate, a Catechetical Centre, a new school of Graphic Arts, and also a Newsletter[1] for the Province, recommended by the Special General Chapter and by the new Regulations *ad experimentum*. Top priorities are the Juniorate for the young Salesian brothers, the Catechetical Centre, and the new *aspirantate* at Ranchi.

Topics already dealt with in the previous chapters will appear again in this chapter, such as, new Presences, life in the established Institutions, Ecclesial and Salesian events affecting the Province, Visitors, etc. The sequence of the various events will not be strictly chronological, as in Parts I and II, but they will have either their origin or their implementation or a great part of it within these 12 years covering the activity of two Provincials, Fr. N. Lo Groi (1973–1978) and Fr. Joseph Kezhakkekara (1979–1984).

The first issue of the Newsletter is released on 1st March 1974, under the title *Provincial News Letter*. Fr. Provincial presents it to the confreres on the front page of the first issue, 1/74. It is a request, he says, of the Special General Chapter of June 1971 to January 1972, expressed in Acts of the SGC, 516, B: "A detailed Newsletter should be distributed, which will constitute a 'forum' for an exchange of views and other topics of general information." The Special Provincial Chapter (October 1972) takes up the recommendation of the SGC: "Within the Province there will be a regular newsletter" (Acts, p. 9, 3). The Vice-Provincial is made responsible for the regular publication of the Newsletter. The name *Salesian News Calcutta* (SNC) is the result of the answer of the confreres to the request for suggestions made through the first issues of the Newsletter. Before SNC there existed a Newsletter under the name of *Family News* started in 1952.

In the following two chapters (XI and XII) I do make abundant use of the SNC as a source of information. However, I do not do so blindly, but I use my own discretion in judging its reliability. For what concerns these two chapters, I have sufficient reasons, I believe, for considering reliable whatever information I have drawn from it. For the first twenty years at least (the period covering these two chapters), the vice-provincial is the official editor of the newsletter responsible for its regular publication and its reliability. Besides, for most of the events reported I haven been directly or indirectly connected with these events. The events themselves have a basis in the decisions of the provincial and of his council, as found in the minutes of the provincial council meetings recorded, in the letters of the provincial or of the major superiors and in the chronicle of the Province, when this exists, and in the chronicles of the houses concerned. The details of the events are drawn from the SNC. The issues of SNC from 1974 to 1984 are found in the Provincial House Archives, but from 1985 to 1988 they are available in the Library of Nazareth Bhavan, Siliguri.

A) New Presences

1. Salesian Presence at Tengra (Calcutta)

1.1 The Land

In the acquisition of the land for the new provincial house and the printing school at Tengra, we can discern the special intervention of St. Joseph. Fr. Eugene Ojer, the Economer of the Province, being a qualified and skilled architect is asked by the Mother Superior of Loreto Convent, Entally, to help in the remodelling of their chapel. While discussing about it in the chapel in the morning of 1st March 1972, the Superior suggests to remove the old-looking statue of St. Joseph, as it seems to her to be out of place in the newly remodelled chapel. But Fr. Ojer objects to the proposal and finally after a lot of discussion, the Superior agrees to give it a trial in the new setting Fr. Ojer is planning for the statue. It is at this moment that she enquires about the date on which the Salesians will be leaving COP and about their future plans. Fr. Ojer tells her that the confreres do not know what to do, as they cannot find a suitable plot of land to start a new presence. The Superior spontaneously replies that they can provide some land to the Salesians.[2]

On the same day, in the evening, Fr. Provincial, Fr. P. J. Sheehy, and Fr. A. Colussi go to see a plot of land adjoining the Entally Loreto Convent, proposed by the Mother Superior and find it suitable for the Provincial House and the printing school.

At the Provincial Council meeting of 6th and 7th April 1972, the decision is made to buy the above mentioned plot of land at Entally and to ask the superiors for permission to shift to the new place the Provincial House, the Press as a school of Printing, and the Parish. However, as the place will not be suited for a parish church, further search will be made later for a more suitable place.

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[2] Cfr. SNC, 8-2/75, 1. SNC quotes a page from the Provincial House Chronicle.

1.2 The Provincial House

The construction of the Provincial House begins sometime in the second half of 1972. It is a three-storey building designed by Fr. E. Ojer, the economer, and supervised by Brother Isaac Puthumana, under the expert direction of the economer. It is completed by June 1973.

On June 14th 1973 the Provincial Council holds its first meeting in the new Provincial House, and on 17th June 1973 the Provincial shifts his office from Don Bosco Park Circus to the new house. On 29th June 1973 a two-day meeting of rectors and parish priests starts at Bandel. In the morning of 30th June all leave for Tengra, where the blessing of the new Provincial house takes place. It is a semiprivate function to which a few people are invited: the parish priest and another priest from Fatima church, the Loreto Sisters, the Daughters of St. Ann, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians from Park Circus, and a few lay people. At 9.45 a.m. the last session of the rectors and parish priests' meeting is held in the new office of the Provincial. The Provincial House is canonically erected on 4th July 1974 and its Patron is St. Francis de Sales.



V. Rev. Fr. NICHOLAS LO GROI, SDB
Provincial (1972–1978)

Born:	18.2.1922 at Cammarata, (Agrigento – Italy)
Profession:	02.9.1938 at San Gregorio, (Catania – Italy)
Arrival in India:	05.12.1939
Practical Training:	Sonada: 1942, Mawlai: (Asst. of novices) 1947
Ordination:	03.10.1948 at the Cathedral in Shillong

Appointments:

1948–1951:	Teacher of Philosophy in Sonada
1951–1953:	Doctorate in Philosophy at PAS (Turin), Italy
1953–1966:	Sonada: Catechist, Dean of Studies, principal, Rector and Confessor
1967–1968:	Rector and principal of DBPC and Vice- Provincial
1968–1970:	Vice-Provincial
1970–1972:	Director of Novices at Sunnyside
1972–1978:	Provincial of Calcutta
1979–1981:	Kristu Jyoti College, Bangalore, in charge of on-going formation
1982–1988:	Rector of Salesian College, Sonada
1988–1994:	Confessor in bishop's house, Krishnagar
1994–1999:	Teacher and Confessor in Sonada
1999 onwards:	Provincial House, Kolkata



Kolkata: The Provincial House

1. 3 The Don Bosco Complex and its Main Activities

The Don Bosco complex consists of a four-storey building meant for three main activities: the School of Graphic Arts, the Catechetical Centre, and the Juniorate or *Magistero* for the Salesian brothers. The school of Graphic Arts and the Catechetical Centre are thought of from the beginning, but the Juniorate for the Salesian brothers is added later to the original plan, when all efforts to find a suitable place for it fail. Fr. E. Ojer prepares the plans and the execution of the project is entrusted to Bro. Isaac Puthumana, who succeeds Fr. Ojer as Provincial Economer.

Construction begins on 19th March 1975, feast of St. Joseph, and is sponsored by *Misereor* for the ground and first floor (meant for the school of Graphic Arts). The second floor (meant for the Catechetical Centre) and the third floor (part of it meant for the Juniorate) are built by the Province. *Misereor* helps also for the acquisition and transport of two new Heidelberg printing machines.

Pope Paul VI blesses the foundation stone in Rome, on 21st January 1976, when 20 missionary bishops and six Salesian Provincials from missionary Provinces, Fr.Lo Groi one of them, are received for a private audience after the usual Wednesday general audience. The bishops and the Provincials are in Rome for a two-weeks missionary seminar at the invitation of Fr. Ricceri as one of the many programmes during the centenary celebrations of the Salesian Missions.

The new building is inaugurated by Dr. W. Von Eichborn, Consul General of the Federal Republic of Germany, and is blessed by Lawrence Cardinal Picachy S. J. Archbishop of Calcutta, together with four other Salesian bishops: Archbishop Hubert D'Rosario of Shillong, Bishop R. Kerketta of Dibrugarh, Bishop M. Baroi of Krishnagar, and Bishop L. R. Morrow, former bishop of Krishnagar, on 11th November 1976.[3]



Kolkata: The Don Bosco Complex at Tengra

1.1.1 The School of Graphic Arts

We have seen in the preceding chapter how the confreres of COP, especially the Salesian brothers, are keen to turn COP from a commercial concern into a school of Graphic Arts for poor boys. The closure of the press, though very painful due to the exceedingly trying circumstances that led to it, brings with it the possibility at last of realizing their dream of opening such a school elsewhere in Calcutta.

On 14th June 1973, in its first meeting in the new Provincial house, the Provincial Council considers also, among other things, the need for preparing the required documents to be submitted to the superiors in Rome for the approval of the school of Graphic Arts.

[3] Cfr. SNC, 21-7/'76, 3f.

On 10th January 1974 Fr. Eugine Ojer presents the plan he has prepared for the new school. On 19th September 1974, the Council is informed that *Misereor* has finalized the plan for a school of printing and has presented it to the German government for its approval.

The Newsletter of the Province dated 9th June 1975, gives news of the progress of the construction work started on 19th March 1975: "The construction work of the school and of the Catechetical Centre is progressing pretty fast. Brother Isaac says that the casting will be over by the middle of June." In its meeting of 19th February 1976, the Provincial Council considers various points regarding the activities of the complex, such as the date of beginning and the selection of the personnel for the three sections. But no final decision is taken.

Though the whole complex is inaugurated and blessed on 11th November 1976, the school of Graphic Arts begins to function even before that. The Newsletters 17th March and 7th May 1976 contain a copy of a letter by Bro. Abraham Pinakatt, the Director of the new school, addressed to parishes and schools in Calcutta, announcing the starting of a new school of printing technology and machine-composing (linotype, letter-press printing with both hand-operated and automatic machines), on 5th July 1976. Besides courses in printing theory and drawing, there will be also classes of English and Christian doctrine, etc. Boys who have completed class 8 are eligible to apply and no tuition fee is collected. Each boy will be required to pay a maintenance fee of Rs. 5.00 per month.

The machines of the new school are those of the COP, the two Heidelberg printing machines from Germany, and two second-hand machines sold by Colle Don Bosco (Italy) costing 8 million *Liras*, a gift from Fr. Bernard Tohill.[4]

On 4th September 1976, in a letter to Fr. Tohill, Fr Provincial gives some news about the school of Graphic Arts: "I must tell you that the school is already a reality. The building for the printing school, for the Catechetical Centre, and the Juniorate (*Magistero*) for the brothers is ready. We will bless it on 11th November, the centenary of the Salesian missions and the Golden Jubilee of Province. The printing school, a gift of *Misereor,* is already functioning. The Catechetical Centre will begin next January and the Juniorate in June 1977."

[4] Cfr. Letter of Fr. Tohill to Fr Lo Groi, 7.9.1976, *Provincial Archives*, A.12.2.

On 28th December 1977 joyful news arrives from Delhi: "This is to inform you that the Don Bosco School of Graphic Arts is affiliated to the 'National Council in Vocational Trades (NCVT)' for trades: printing, machine operator, composition, and proof reading." The school authorities put this recognition as a condition for granting of exemption from customs duties: "Have the school recognized by the government in 6 months and you can have your imported machines customs free."[5]

The school opens on 9th January 1978, with a total strength of 41 on the rolls. The year 1978 ends with a spontaneous farewell arranged by the first batch of outgoing students. They have completed the ITI (Industrial Training Institute) at the school. They are 12 young men who have received training and who cherish the company of the Salesians. The school reopens on 9th January 1979 with 20 new students.

The Director of the school, Bro. A. Pinakkat, wants to expand the scope of the school. He dreams of new projects like a well-equipped offset and an informal training course for the poorest of the poor who cannot qualify for the ITI.[6]

The first years following the recognition for ITI and the good results at the examinations are very encouraging. But soon the prospects become less rosy. The boys do well at the ITI exam but difficulties arise when they seek employment. The various presses in Calcutta do not accept our boys, as the unions do not allow their admission. Eventually this will lead to the closure of the Press and the school, and later to its being shifted to Okhla, Delhi.

1.1.2 The Catechetical Centre

Already on 23rd February 1973 the provincial and his council turn their attention to this important priority set by the provincial chapter of 1972. As a step towards 'specialization of personnel', it is suggested that Fr. Joseph Poovathinkal of Delhi be sent to the Salesian Pontifical Athenaeum (PAS) Rome for a course in Catechetics.

In the plan of Fr. E Ojer the second floor of Don Bosco is set apart for the future Catechetical Centre and its various activities. As the second

[5] Cfr. SNC, 29-1/'78, 5.
[6] Cfr. SNC, 36-2/'79, 7.

floor is not sponsored by *Misereor* but built by the Province, Fr. Rauh, Director of the Provincial missionary procure in Bonn, suggests that the Salesians appeal to *Missio*, but he informs them that the application must show that the Centre will also be for the benefit of the diocese and that the application is to be recommended by the Archbishop of Calcutta. In his letter of 15.6.1975 to Fr. B. Tohill, Fr. Provincial writes that an appeal for help has been sent to *Missio,* but has not been accepted. He, therefore, asks Fr. Tohill himself for help. To this appeal Fr. Tohill answers positively on 7th March 1976 by apportioning $20,000 out of $50,000 for the Catechetical Centre. The other $30,000 are to be equally divided among Auxilium parish, Azimganj and Ranchi. On 3rd March 1977 Fr. Luciano Colussi and Fr. Joseph Poovanthinkal, arrive from Rome. Fr. Luciano, while in Italy has undergone an ongoing formation course at the Generalate (Rome), from November 10 to February 10. He has also spent some time at *Leumann* (Turin), to acquire practical knowledge of catechetical aids.[7] Temporarily he is posted at the Provincial House. Fr. Joseph has completed his licentiate in Catechetics at the PAS and a three months' course in Audio-Visual aids at Lyons, France, under Fr. Pierre Babin, the well-known Director of the Centre.

On 1st June 1977 Don Bosco Tengra is officially opened as a separate community. Fr. Luciano takes over as rector of the new community. On 6th June 1977, Fr. Pierre Babin, arrives from Bangkok. On the 7th and 8th he delivers two lectures attended by a good number of participants. On 10th June 1977, Fr. A. Alessi, of the Salesian Catechetical Centre at *Leumann* (Turin), arrives from Bombay to offer help in setting up the new Catechetical Centre. He spends two months and comes again in the following June together with Bro. Mario Notario from *Valdocco*, (Turin).

In a letter of 30th June 1977 the Rector Major, Fr. L. Ricceri, replies to a letter of Fr. Provincial, who thanks him for the help rendered to the Province for several projects. In it he mentions also about the 'quit order' being served on Fr. Stroscio, tells him of the new Catechetical Centre and Juniorate for the Salesian brothers.

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[7] Cfr. Chronicle of the Province, *Provincial Archives*, B.10.1.3.

With regard to the new ventures, the Rector Major expresses full satisfaction and gives his fatherly advice: "You are giving me two beautiful news: the Catechetical Centre is certainly a happy venture, so much Salesian. See to it that you prepare personnel for it, because it is not the gadgets which make the Centre apostolically effective, but the men who should be not merely capable, but first and foremost men of God."[8]

By 5th September 1977, Fr Tohill writes to Fr. Lo Groi in answer to his letter of 22nd July 1977: "I am glad to hear that the Catechetical Centre has got off to a good start. Excelsior!" In June 1978, the Provincial Council discusses the report of Fr. Joseph Poovathinkal on the first year of the Catechetical Centre. Present also at this meeting are Fr. Joseph Chittattukulam of Catechetical Centre and Fr. Alessi of *Leumann*.

The Newsletter of 10th August 1978 presents an informative write up by Fr. Joseph Chittatukulam on the activity of the centre during the first year of its existence. The Centre is accepted as part of the CBCI commission for Social Communication. In its last meeting in Bangalore Fr Poovathinkal is the only Salesian present. Fr. Joseph mentions how right from the beginning the Centre is in close collaboration with the Centre in Turin, due to the keen interest of Fr. Antony Alessi. Fr. Alessi's collaboration is invaluable in procuring the catechetical material available in *Leumann* for the Centre's use and distribution. In fact, he goes a step forward to produce filmstrips for distribution by the Centre in India. The Centre's main functions are in the field of animation, training, and production. While distributing the *Libreria Dottrina Cristiana* (LDC)'s film strips and slides, the Centre makes a positive effort to prepare its own slides suited to Indian conditions and situations. Bro. Mario Notario, from the photographic section of the Salesian institute of *Valdocco*, is of great help in preparing these. Fr. Joseph admits that the Centre is still in its infancy, and that it is short of many facilities that are required to make the department professional.

In its meeting of 24th April 1978, the Provincial Council, while discussing the development of the Centre, thinks it necessary to build a

[8] Cfr. *Provincial Archives*, A.1.3.



Kolkata: Don Bosco 'Nitika'

go-down, a showroom, and an administrative block, in between the servants quarters and the garage of the Provincial house. Fr. Luciano Colussi will realize this plan later with the help of Fr. Alessi of *Leumann*. The location of the *ad hoc* new wing will be on the right side of the main building, forming a horizontal L shape and will be named NITIKA (*Niti Shiskhsha* – Bengali for Catechetical Centre).

The chronicle of the Province dated 25th to 27th September 1978, speaks of the Provincial visitation of Don Bosco Tengra. There are two issues that require urgent attention. The first is with regard to the future of the Catechetical Centre itself, and the second is to decide about the place of the *Magistero* for the post-novitiate formation of the Salesian brothers. The Catechetical Centre is developing fast and, it seems it will be difficult for the two activities to go on together. A new place may be needed to house the *Magistero*. This question comes up again in the Council meeting held on 19th and 20th September 1979. On 25th September 1980 the Provincial Council meets to discuss the report of Fr. Luciano Colussi on the All India Catechetical Commission Meeting held in Calcutta, on 20th and 21st June 1980. The main item on the agenda is the setting up of a

National Catechetical Centre (NCC). The initiatives, attitudes, and roles of the Centre are described and suggestions are given with regard to the staff and finally a decision is taken as regards the location of the Centre.

The initiatives and roles are already spelt out in an earlier meeting of the Commission held on 3rd and 4th May in Calcutta. They are: 1. Coordination of the catechetical activities among various Provinces, 2. Establishing contacts with ecclesiastical, national, and international centres and organizations, 3. Study and research in the catechetical field, 4. Formation of animators, 5. Production of audio-visual aids.

With regard to the staff, seven competent persons are suggested to form the permanent staff of the NCC. Involvement of the Provinces as regards the setting up of the NCC is as follows: at least one member from each of the Provinces, all the expenses to be divided equally among the Provinces. The report contains also a discussion on the requirements and the equipment of the NCC.

A discussion ensues with regard to the location of the National Centre, as both Calcutta and Bombay are proposing to have the NCC in their own Provinces. A decision is taken by secret ballot in which 6 are for Calcutta and 3 for Bombay.

The Provincial and the Council then make their suggestions for the SPCI meeting:

1. If the Catechetical Centre is to be in Tengra, then the existing printing press should be within its set up.
2. A new wing should be built or a new floor be added to the existing building to meet the requirements mentioned in the report.
3. If Don Bosco Tengra is going to be the National Centre, then the Juniorate has to be shifted out.
4. The Province is willing to lend the services of Fr. P.J. Joseph Poovathingal and Bro. K.P. Chacko Kunnathupurayidom to the National Centre, while Fr. A.U. Thomas Anjilikuzhiyil will be the Delegate of the Province for Catechetics.

On 14th October 1980 a meeting of the Council presided over by Fr. P.C. Thomas Panakezham, the Regional, is held in the office of Fr. Provincial. Fr. Thomas briefs the members about the decisions of the SPCI on the NCC. The decision of the SPCI is that it should be in Calcutta and that it is left to the Provincial and his Council to decide its location. It could be in the present location with some changes and additions. In that case, the shifting of the Juniorate becomes a necessity. Fr. P.C. Thomas asks the Provincial and his Council to study the pros and cons of Kalyani as a possible site where the Juniorate could be located. In January 1981 Fr. Antony Alessi (LDC) comes to spend about a month to make plans for the NCC.



V. Rev. Fr. JOSEPH KEZHAKKEKARA, SDB
Provincial (1979–1984)

Born:	01.10.1936 at Palai, Kerala
Salesian:	24.5.1956
Priest:	17 April 1966
Appointments:	
1966–1967:	Financial Administrator, Bandel
1967–1968:	Financial Administrator, DBPC
1968–1969:	Course in Spirituality, UPS, Rome
1970–1971:	Financial Administrator, Salesian College, Sonada
1971–1974:	Rector, Salesian College, Sonada
1974–1978:	Vice-Provincial, Calcutta
1979–1984:	Provincial, Calcutta
1986–1996:	Director of Don Bosco Youth Animation (DBYA), India
1996:	Rector, Don Bosco Okhla, Delhi
1997–2003:	Provincial, New Delhi

On 25th June 1981 in the meeting of the Provincial Council the report of the SPCI is taken up for discussion. It does not sound very positive: "It is distressing," the report mentions, "that there was no report of actual work done by the Centre and plans for the future. The Provincials are not prepared to send personnel to Calcutta unless definite plans are drawn up for the work to be done that would need the presence of new personnel." After a brief exchange of ideas, it is decided to have a meeting with the staff of the Centre to discuss the actual situation and the problems of the Centre. After that the Provincial will decide the future course of action.

A two-day annual meeting of the Provincial Catechetical Delegates is convened at Don Bosco Catechetical Centre by Fr. Luciano Colussi, the national director and convener. The meeting starts with a prayer by Bishop Abraham of Kohima, the Chairman of the Regional Catechetical Commission of the Northeast. Fr Luciano presides over the meeting and Bro. K.P. Chacko is asked to be the secretary. Three points are discussed which have a reference to the NCC: collaboration between the Provincial Catechetical Centres and the NCC; list of confreres from other Provinces who could be of help to the Centre; suggestions to improve the functioning of the Centre.

Three suggestions are put forward: with regard to the personnel - the promise of SPCI to send one confrere from each Province should be implemented; as regards equipment – a good mixer and studio mikes should be acquired; as regards participation – the delegates suggest that the National Centre should always participate in the National Catechetical and Audio-Visual Conferences of the NBCLC, OCIC, UNDA, etc. One of the resolutions taken is to publish a Newsletter.[9]

From the 6th to the 10th December 1982, a course in Audio-Visuals and Catechetics is held at Don Bosco Catechetical and Multimedia Centre. Fr. A. Alessi and Bro. G. Pera from the LDC, Fr. Luciano Colussi, and Bro. K.P. Chacko, are the animators of the course. Similar courses animated by Fr. A. Alessi and Bro. G. Pera are also held at Bangalore and Pune.[10]

In August 1983, Don Bosco *Catechetics India*, a quarterly journal of Catechetics, featuring lesson plans, news and views, audio-visual aids, and other special features, published by Don Bosco Catechetical and Multimedia Centre, Calcutta, is launched.[11]

1.3.3 The Juniorate or *Magistero* for the Salesian Brothers

The setting up of a Juniorate for the Salesian brothers is decided as a top priority by the Special Provincial Chapter held in 1972. The new Provincial makes it one of his main concerns during his term. The topic of the Juniorate is on the agenda of his first Provincial Council meeting on 16th December1972, the day after his arrival from Shillong. Besides the decision of the Provincial Chapter, what makes him realize the urgency of

[9] SNC, 68-6/'82, 11–12.
[10] SNC, 71-1/'83, 6ff
[11] SNC, 76-7/'83.

the problem is the visit he makes to the Juniorate at Don Bosco Shillong where he comes to realize the inadequacy of the post-novitiate formation the brothers receive there. While the technical and professional formation is well taken care of by the excellent confreres at the head of the various departments, the religious and Salesian formation is quite inadequate owing to unavoidable circumstances.

The Provincial informs the Council that he will meet the staff of Salesian College, Sonada, in order to arrange with them a kind of intense course in religious and Salesian subjects to complement the formation of the brothers. This is only a partial solution to the problem. The next step will be to find a suitable place where the Juniorate can be established and he suggests that the Juniorate and the new parish be made the object of the solidarity campaign. In the meeting of 18th January 1973, the Provincial Council decides to ask the houses to contribute towards the future Juniorate. During the years 1973–74 and part of 1975, there are two lines of action followed by the Province with regard to the Juniorate for the brothers. The first is to find a suitable place to establish the Juniorate, and the second is to have some kind of *interim* arrangement for an integrated and specific formation of the brothers who are doing or will be doing their Juniorate course.

With regard to the first, we find that the Provincial Council in a number of its meetings deals with the problem of finding a plot of land suitable for the purpose. In the minutes of the Council meeting of 23rd February 1973 we read: "It has been proposed to have the Juniorate for the brothers here at Park Circus by dividing the present playground and acquiring an adjacent plot of land." A few days after, in his circular letter of 26th February 1973, the provincial writes: "Two or three places have already been seen where the Juniorate could be built, but they are not suitable either because of the exorbitant price or because the site itself is not suitable. At the moment there is a proposal of buying a portion of land adjacent to our school at Park Circus. If this suggestion materializes, then the whole plot of land will be divided in such a way that there will result two complete separate institutions, each having its own separate entrance, separate premises, and a good playground." He then asks for suggestions from the confreres before going ahead with the project.

The problem of the location of the Juniorate comes up again in several other meetings of the provincial council in 1973 and 1974. The

need to find a suitable place for the Juniorate becomes more pressing due to the fact that the National Congress of Salesian brothers held in Bandel from September 8th – 12th 1974, gives the green light to the establishing of a *Magistero* in Calcutta, which would be meant for the whole of Salesian India. Efforts, therefore, are intensified to finalize the location of the building.[12]

As regards the location, a new proposal is put forward in the Provincial Council meeting of 2nd March 1975. The Juniorate could be accommodated on the top floor of the press in Tengra. This proposal will be presented to the forthcoming Provincial Chapter. The Council will make a positive decision in favour of the above-mentioned new proposal in the meeting of 6th September 1975 and will confirm it in the meeting of 19th February 1976. Eventually, a two-year course for the brothers doing the *Magistero* course is opened on 13th June 1977. In answer to the letter of Fr. Lo Groi, informing about the opening of the Catechetical Centre and of the Juniorate, Fr Ricceri, writing on 30th June 1977, has this to say about the *Magistero*: "You are beginning the *Magistero* course for our dear brothers. Well done! Also for this you doubly need men: formators-teachers and pupils, and we hope you will deserve both the ones and the others. But take great care of their catechetical, spiritual and Salesian formation."

Regarding the second line of action concerning an *interim* arrangement for the formation of the brothers, we have two circular letters of the Provincial. The first one dated 21st February 1973, announces a three-month course at Salesian College Sonada: "Owing to the fact that unavoidable circumstances make it very difficult for the staff of Don Bosco Shillong to give adequate attention to 'an integrated and specific formation as Salesian educators' (Regulations, 92) of our brothers, the Provincial of Calcutta has proposed to Fr. Provincial of Gauhati and Fr. Rector of Don Bosco Shillong an *interim* solution to the problem, which has been accepted. The brothers will have a three-month course (March-May) at Salesian College Sonada. The staff of the College has willingly accepted to take the full responsibility of the course, which will end on May 24th with the renewal of the vows of the brothers. After that the brothers will be sent to the various technical schools of the Provinces concerned. A similar course for the same group of brothers will be organized at Salesian College in 1974 and, if necessary, also in 1975".

However, the starting of the course on 13th June 1977 does not definitively solve the problem of the Juniorate. Already in the meeting of

[12] Cfr. SNC 5/'74, 2.

24th August 1978, the Provincial Council discusses the possibility of the Juniorate being shifted to Park Circus. The discussion is taken up again by the Provincial Council on its meeting of 2nd October 1978. The suggestion is made more explicit here by proposing to accommodate the Juniorate on the second and third floor of the new workshop at Park Circus and to make it a separate independent community with its own staff, to which the coadjutor aspirants could be attached. The reason for this suggestion is that the Catechetical Centre is developing fast, and due to the many commitments of the Centre involving an increase of guests, the formative atmosphere required by a formation community is disturbed.

Another suggestion is to shift the Catechetical Centre to Park Circus and leave the Juniorate at Tengra together with the press. But this suggestion is not acceptable to many. Besides, the fact that the Catechetical Centre becomes the National Centre brings with it the need of shifting the Juniorate.

In the Council Meeting of 17th April 1979 the question of the *Magistero* and the coadjutor aspirants is discussed in the presence of Fr. P.C. Thomas Panakezham, the Regional. Fr. Thomas asks the council to reconsider the idea of having the Juniorate and *aspirantate* together. He is of the opinion that the two should be separate. In its meeting of 25th September 1980, the Council feels that if the Centre becomes National Centre, the Juniorate has to be shifted. The same is said by Fr. P.C. Thomas in the meeting of 14th October 1980. He also suggests that the Provincial Council study the pros and cons of choosing Kalyani as the site for the Juniorate. Let the difficulties against it, such as the distance and other implications, be studied in depth and possibly have also a limited consultation among the confreres in this regard.

In the Council Meeting of 22nd January 1981, after due deliberation and thought, Fr Provincial and his Council decide to shift the Juniorate to Kalyani. What hastens the choice is the decision by the SPCI (1979) to make the Calcutta Catechetical Centre the National Catechetical Centre and the wish that the Juniorate keep its own identity so as to avoid the danger of its being an appendix to some other work. On 19th February 1981, the Provincial Council visits Kalyani to see where the Juniorate could be built. At the National Conference of Salesian Brothers held at Bandel from 28th to 31st December 1981, the problem of the location of the Juniorate is thoroughly discussed by the whole assembly of participants: the delegates elected by the Provinces and all the Provincials. Fr. Thomas Polackal, in charge of the Juniorate, asks himself a question whether it is

opportune or not to have a separate studentate for brothers. In answer to this question he shares with the assembly the thinking of the Rector Major on the Juniorate. Fr. Polackal in his capacity as the rector of the Juniorate asks Fr. Ricceri's opinion about the formation of the brothers in a separate *Studentate*. The rector Major replies that our present experiment, which has begun after much thought and study should not be discontinued. After a prolonged discussion the Assembly is given four options to vote upon. The first one, 'keep the Juniorate as it is', receives 77 first preferences, 18 second preferences, 5 third preferences and 4 abstentions. The first one is the choice of the vast majority of members.

On 1st January 1982, at 4.00 p.m. all gather at Kalyani to witness the laying of the foundation stone of the National Juniorate for the Salesian brothers. On 13th June 1982 the brothers move out of Tengra for their new habitat with Fr. T. Polackal as the first rector of the new community. Bishop Mathew Baroi blesses *Vidyaniketan* (Sanskrit for Abode of Learning), the new National Juniorate for Salesian brothers on 15th August 1982.[13] Since then more than 150 brothers from India and also from abroad are enrolled for the Post-Novitiate course. In 1987 *Vidyaniketan* hosts also a 9-month theology course for perpetually professed brothers from all the Indian Provinces.[14]



Kalyani: Don Bosco Vidyaniketan

[13] Cfr. SNC, 63-1/'82, 18f.
[14] Cfr. Directory of the Salesian Province of Kolkata 2001–2002, 45.

2. Auxilium Parish

The new parish promised by the Archbishop of Calcutta, is also one of the priorities set by the Special Provincial Chapter of October 1972. On 16th December 1972, in his first meeting of the Provincial Council, the new Provincial suggests to make the new projected parish of Dhapa-Topsia, along with the Juniorate for the Salesian brothers, the main object of the solidarity campaign.

On 19th December 1972 Fr. Provincial accompanied by Fr. Sheehy pays a courtesy visit to the Archbishop. The Archbishop speaks of the new parish and says that as soon as we have a place where to gather the people he will give the *cura animarum* – 'the care of souls,' and the canonical erection will be made on our signing the agreement. He also foresees that eventually two parishes may arise from the development of the area given to us. When that happens, both parishes would be ours.

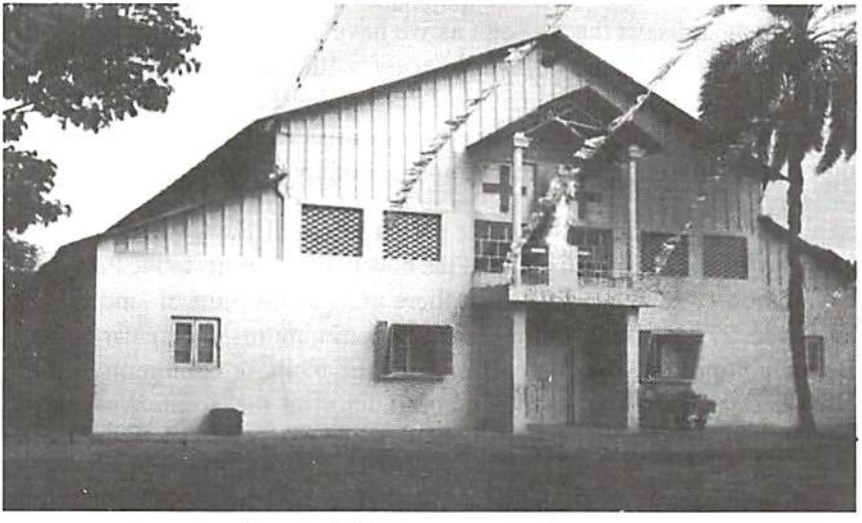
Fr. R. Maiques, the former parish priest of the Cathedral church and who will be the parish priest of the new parish, reports to the Provincial Council on 18th January 1973 that there are various plots of land that are available. The parish has three separate communities to take care of: the Bengali community on the North West, the Chinese community on the Northeast, and the Anglo-Indian community on the South West of the parish.

Some are of the opinion that the plot we propose to buy should be at the centre geographically, so as to attend to the various communities from there and to develop the whole area at the same time. Others are of the opinion that the land should be in or near one of the existing communities, so that the people can easily come to the parish. The Bengali and the Chinese communities, if needed, can be attended to from Tengra and gradually develop centres for them. The plots Fr. Maiques mentions are: a) a plot at the crossing of Christopher Road and Hugues Road. It is centrally situated, but not considered suitable as it is away from the various communities; b) a plot near Jusla Factory; c) a 2 bigha plot with the factory of Mr. Silas, which has an adjoining plot of 2 bighas; and d) a 5 bigha plot on Mahendra Roy Lane.

After pointing out the importance of acquiring the land at the crossing of Christopher Road and Hugues Road, Fr. Maiques leaves the meeting. As opinions vary, no decision is made, but Fr. Maiques is asked

to find out more precise information about the plot near the Jusla Factory and the plot on Mahendra Roy Lane, which may be better suited.

In February 1973 the plot on the Mahendra Roy Lane is bought. Five bighas of land with a fairly big and very convenient two-storey building, which becomes the parish house, a dilapidated workshop, but which has a very solid iron structure consisting of steel trusses used as pillars. Fr. Maiques beautifully remodels this covering it with asbestos sheets. It will serve as a parish church on Sundays, and as a parish school on weekdays. There are also two big ponds, which need to be filled.



Auxilium Parish: The remodelled factory shed used at first as chapel and school.

Fr. Maiques invites the Sister Adorers close to Don Bosco Park Circus to come and help him in ways possible to them. They respond positively by accepting to run a workroom: a group of women also learn typing, shorthand and sewing every morning from 8.45 to 11.45.

On 21st July 1974 Fr. Adichirayil Kuriakose is installed by Msgr. Alen De Lastic, Vicar General of the Calcutta archdiocese, as the new parish priest. Writing to Fr. Provincial on 18th September 1974, Fr. Kuriakose informs him that the Sister Adorers will not be able to run the parish school.[15] The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians of Auxilium

[15] Cfr. SNC, 4/'74, 2.

Park Circus are willing to take it up, if Mother Provincial allows. Eventually, the FMA Sisters set apart one sister to take charge of the parish school in January 1975. She comes to the school in the morning and towards evening she goes back to the convent.

On 7th March 1974 the official agreement between the archdiocese of Calcutta and the Salesians in connection with the parish of Mary Help of Christians, situated in the Topsia-Tengra area, is drawn up and signed. On 25th March 1974, the Feast of the Annunciation, the Decree of Erection of the parish is signed by the Archbishop.[16] Auxilium parish, carved from the eastern and western territories of the parishes of Fatima and of Christ the King respectively, is entrusted to the Salesians in *perpetuum*. Vast areas of the parish consist of slums and *bustees*.

At the meeting of the Provincial Council on 22nd August 1979, Fr. Kuriakose speaks at length of the projects approved by some Funding Agencies in Spain, especially he mentions a school and a non-formal training Centre. The need is felt of building some structure within the compound of the parish to meet some essential requirements of the parish. He thinks of a two-storey building of which the ground floor can be utilized for a dispensary, a go-down, and a garage, while the first floor would be the non-formal training Centre. Brother Isaac, the Economer, is asked to see where the two-storey building can be built.

In the meeting of the Provincial Council of 25th August 1982, Fr. Provincial informs the Council that the Archbishop has granted permission for the FMA to start a separate community of their own in the Auxilium parish. In the meeting of 24th June 1982, various suggestions are made with regard to the place where the new community would stay until the sisters find a place to build their own convent.

As all efforts to find a place outside the parish compound are not successful, on 20th January 1983, the Provincial Council decides to house the FMA Sisters in the new building, which is being built by Bro. Isaac within the parish compound, till the sisters find a suitable plot of land to establish their own convent.

3. Salesian Presence In Ranchi (Bihar)

On 17th January 1960 Fr. Crick, Provincial Superior of the Jesuit fathers of Ranchi, is sent to Calcutta as a delegate of the Archbishop of

[16] Cfr. SNC 2/'74, 1.

Ranchi, Msgr. Nicholas Kujur, S. J. to ask the Provincial of the Calcutta Province to open a junior technical school at Hatia, near the mighty industrial complex that is being established near Hatia. They would give the land, 90,000 rupees and future help from the German bishops.

On 14th March 1960 Fr. O. Paviotti, the Provincial, is again invited by the Archbishop to visit Ranchi, which he does together with Fr. M. Uguet to meet the Archbishop and to see the site of the proposed school. The Archbishop offers 15 acres of land, Rs. 80,000 and help towards the purchase of machinery. He wishes to have a technical school for carpenters, fitters, welders, drivers and motor mechanics for the Catholic boys of class VI to X. Fr. Provincial tells the Archbishop that he would write to the superiors in Rome for permission.[17]

On 26th March 1960 Fr. Paviotti informs the Council of the offer extended to us by the Archbishop of Ranchi and the Jesuit Vice-Provincial. The land offered seems to be a good one and he feels it is convenient to accept. But on 30th June 1960, the Council decides to write to the Archbishop informing him that at the moment it is not possible to accept due to lack of personnel.

On 3rd September 1968 the Provincial, Fr. R. Stroscio, has a discussion with Fr. James Toppo, the Archbishop's secretary, over opening an apostolic school and a technical school. Fr. James conveys to the Provincial the wishes of the Archbishop. On 3rd and 4th September, Fr. Stroscio visits Ranchi and Hatia and he is shown a plot of land on sale for Rs.15, 000, which he considers as a good place.

On 16th January 1969 the Chronicle of the Province reports a meeting of the Provincial Council at Don Bosco Park Circus. Among other things, a memorandum is drawn up to ask the superiors for permission to purchase a piece of land at Ranchi with a view to opening in a few years a technical school and an apostolic school for vocations. Should we miss this chance, it may not be possible to set foot in Ranchi, which would be detrimental to vocation recruiting in the future.[18] On behalf of the Rector Major, Fr. B. Tohill answers to this request on 11th February 1969, "You are in debt, and then, personnel? Hence wait."

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[17] Cfr. Chronicle of the Province; Provincial *Archives*, B.10.1.1.

[18] For a copy of this memorandum, Cfr. Chronicle of the Province at the end of the month of January. *Provincial Archives,* B.10.1.3.

On 13th March 1969 a similar memorandum is signed by the Council requesting the Rector Major to grant permission to buy a plot of land at Hatia (Ranchi) for a future technical school and an apostolic school. On 7th May 1969, in answer to a letter of Fr.Tohill dated 29th April 1969, Fr. Stroscio writes that with regard to Fr.Tohill's remarks on the Hatia project, he feels that probably the project is not clearly expressed. On 4th June 1969, Fr. Ricceri himself writes to Fr. Stroscio. He repeats the difficulties regarding personnel advanced by Fr. Tohill, but gives permission to buy the land, which 'at the proper time' will be useful for vocations. The work will start only when the situation of the personnel improves.[19]

In January 1970, at a Provincial Council meeting held at Krishnagar, the Council decides to proceed with the purchase of the land at Ranchi. On his return to Calcutta on 20th January, Fr. Provincial finds an urgent letter from Fr. James Toppo urging him to go immediately to Ranchi and settle the matter of the land, as the 21st is given as the last day to do so. Hence, Fr. Provincial and Fr. Sheehy leave for Ranchi by Howrah-Hatia Express. At Ranchi Fr. Provincial and Fr. Sheehy are confronted with a fresh difficulty against buying the land at the Hesag brickfield.[20] A minor seems to be implicated that would render the purchase invalid. They, therefore, visit other prospective plots. In the meantime the difficulty over the brickfield seems to be less serious than it looked before. Fr. Sheehy, therefore, returns to Calcutta, while Fr. Provincial remains on to see whether the problem can be solved. On 24th January 1970, at Archbishop's House, Fr. Provincial signs the agreement of purchase for the kin at Hesag and gives Rs. 20,000 as advance.

On 2nd November 1972 the Provincial Council approves and signs a formal petition to the Rector Major to start work at Ranchi. In the long letter the Provincial describes the object of the petition, the plan of execution, a brief history of the project, the reason why we want to go to Ranchi, and the decision of the recently held Special Provincial Chapter, which amply discusses the proposal presented by an *ad hoc* commission and votes on it.[21]

On 27th November 1972, the Rector Major, Fr. Ricceri, in a letter to Fr. Stroscio acknowledges receipt of the formal request. He hopes that it

[19] Cfr. Rector Major's file, Fr. Ricceri, *Provincial Archives* A.1.3.1. and A.1.3.2.
[20] The name Hesag is the name of a tree that gives the name to the whole village.
[21] The votes are: Yes – 27, No – 0, abstentions – 1. Cfr. *Provincial Archives*, B.8.2.2.

is a missionary work in line with the directives of the Special General Chapter, and that the Province has the required personnel for it. On 31st December 1972, Fr. Williams, the Regional Superior, unofficially writes to the new Provincial that the Rector Major and his Council have approved the Ranchi project.

At the meeting of the Provincial Council on 2nd February 1973, Fr. Provincial announces officially that the permission to open a Salesian house at Ranchi has been granted by the superiors in Rome. Before proceeding with the project Fr. Provincial and a member of the Council should visit Ranchi to study the situation and particularly to find out what the Archbishop would expect from the Salesians. Fr. Guido Colussi, who is willing to pioneer the work, could also go with them. At a later period he will go and reside there. He can start by building the residential quarters for the confreres. We will be happy to accept a parish, if we are offered one.

On 3rd April 1973 Fr. Provincial and Fr. Sheehy, the Vice-Provincial, leave for Ranchi. On 4th April they are received cordially by the two Vicar Generals and other fathers. In the afternoon Fr. Guido Colussi arrives from Delhi. On 5th April at 9.30 a.m. Msgr. Marcel Minj, the 2nd Vicar General, accompanies the visitors to the house of Mr. Kullu, Development Officer in Hatia Engineering Corporation (HEC) and an *Adivasi* Catholic. It is through him that the three Salesians have an interview with the Chief Administrator of HEC. To their question whether there is any hope of our boys from the proposed technical school being absorbed in the HEC, the Chief Administrator answers that no such commitment can be made, but he states the general policy according to which preference is given to the uprooted local persons, and to the local *Adivasis*, but always through the Employment Office.

Regarding the kind of trades in which the boys should be trained, the Chief Administrator says that they need: machinists, crane operators, welders, and furnace-men. Regarding the requirement of work need, he advises to inquire from the CTI (Central Training Institute).

The next morning the three Salesians go to see the land and contact the most influential men of Hesag village, and on return they meet Fr. George, S. J. the parish priest of the place, who expresses happiness if we got a parish.

On the 7th at 11.00 a.m. they are received by the Archbishop, Msgr. Pius Kerketta, S. J. who welcomes the Salesians to Ranchi "with open mind and open heart assuring them of the same status as that of the other priests." The Salesians may establish and run:

- A technical school, teaching a course in mechanical engineering and welding that will prepare boys for work in HEC complex at Hatia, a high school for boys; and a boarding for students who may show signs of vocation. The Salesians may recruit vocations and they may advertise for them in the *Nishkalanka.*

- The Salesians may be asked to exercise their apostolate for souls in a parish that may be erected at Hesag.

- The Salesians may be asked to take care of souls within the confines of HEC. However, the school, which has been started by Fr. George Zewijren, S.J., within HEC, should not be interfered with.

- The Archbishop insists that, if we open a school, also for the technical, we should charge fees, at least according to possibilities.

Before leaving Ranchi, Fr. Guido makes some arrangements for levelling the land and preparing the road that leads to the property. In the evening Fr. Provincial and the Vice-Provincial leave for Calcutta.[22]

On 25th and 26th April 1973, Fr. Provincial gives a report to the Provincial Council on his visit to Ranchi together with Fr. P. J. Sheehy and Fr. Guido Colussi. It is suggested that an overall plan be made before we do anything in the plot. Some are not in favour of having everything in the same spot: the trade school, the *aspirantate*, the oratory, hostels, parish, etc.

On 13th September 1973 the Council discusses the Ranchi project. The Council agrees that the first phase of the project could be: the levelling of the ground already acquired and the building of the Salesian residence-cum-*aspirantate*. The technical school, the highschool, the Hostel and the parish, etc. can come later. Fr. Ojer presents a sketch of a plan for the said Salesian Residence-cum-*aspirantate*, which is discussed and approved. Fr. Guido would start work as soon as possible.

[22] Cfr. Chronicle of Province; *Provincial Archives*, F.B.1,3.

On 8th February 1974 the signing of the contract takes place in the Provincial Office in Calcutta for the construction of the new Don Bosco parish. Actual construction work starts on 20th February. The property is situated in the village of Hesag, nine kilometres from Ranchi.[23]

In the minutes of the Council meeting of 16th January 1975 we read: 'The house at Hesag is almost ready. The fees will be the same as in any other school. At present we will have two sections of class VIII with 40 boys each, about 14 aspirants and the rest day scholars. The school building will be started soon, as by next year class rooms for four sections will be required.'

The 31st of January 1975, feast of St. John Bosco, sees the realization of a long-cherished dream, the opening of Don Bosco Youth Centre at Hatia. A concelebrated Mass, presided over by Fr. Provincial, the concelebrants being Fr. Guido Colussi, Fr. Uguet, and Fr. Joseph Topno, solemnizes the occasion. The Ursuline Sisters also attend the Mass, together with Teachers, friends, and parishioners.

The Archbishop and those who accompany him, among whom is Fr. George, the parish priest, and Fr. Kindo S.J. the Inspector of schools, arrive at 3.00 p.m. His Grace is welcomed in the traditional Indian style with garlands, ablutions, and dances.

In his opening speech, Mr. Marcel Hembron, the President of the Catholic Association of Chottanagpur, welcomes the Salesians on behalf of the Christians of Ranchi. Fr. Provincial speaks next and thanks the Archbishop, in the name of all the Salesians, for having invited them to open a house in Ranchi. "We consider it a blessing and a privilege to work for the poor and abandoned boys of Ranchi," he adds.

In his speech the Archbishop warmly welcomes the Salesians in his diocese. "I receive you into my diocese with open arms and open heart," he says. He promises the Salesians his wholehearted cooperation and assistance. At the end of the cultural show His Grace blesses the new house and lays the foundation stone for the new school. In April 1975 Fr. R. Pilla writes that the permission to build the school has been granted.[24]

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[23] Cfr. SNC, 1/'74, 3

[24] Cfr. Minutes of the Provincial Council meeting of 15.4.'75, *Provincial Archives* F.B.8.2.2.



Hatia (Ranchi): Residence, blessed on 31.1.1975

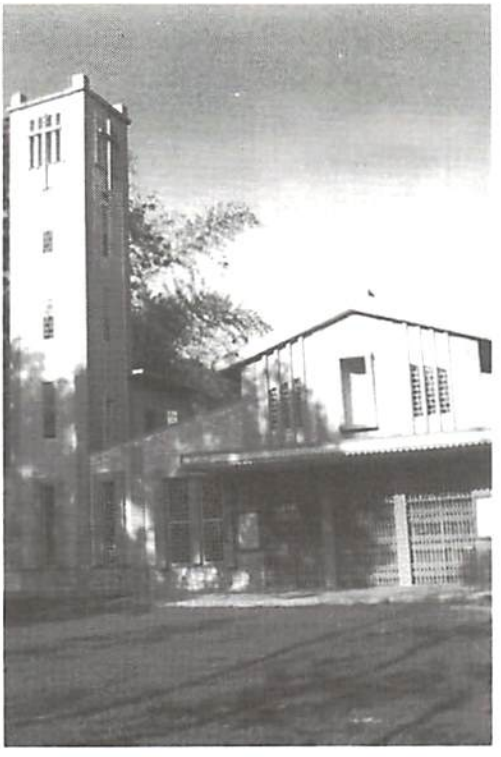
The house, though just begun, is already a well-organized working unit. It has a Hindi Medium School. There are nearly 90 boys divided into two sections, and about 18 apostolic boys recruited from different villages.[25]

On 27th September 1975 Fr. Provincial writes to the Rector Major asking for the canonical erection of the Ranchi community under the title of 'Don Bosco'. He encloses the written permission by the Archbishop of Ranchi.[26]

By the end of the year 1975 the three-storey building for the school is completed. On 31st January 1976 Archbishop Pius Kerketta blesses the new school building, and lays the foundation stone for the new parish church. The L-shaped three-storied building is capable of accommodating about 600 boys. Prior to the blessing there is a Solemn Concelebrated Mass in the veranda of the school building. Don Bosco boys and Ursuline Convent girls join together to form the choir. A large crowd of parishioners and children are present. In his speech during dinner the Archbishop speaks of the enrichment brought to the archdiocese by the presence of the Salesians. He expresses the hope that he will be able to lay the foundation stone of the technical school next year.[27]

[25] Cfr. SNC 15-1/'76, 10-11.
[26] *Provincial Archives* A.1.3.3.
[27] Cfr. SNC, 15-1/'76, 10-11.

On 10th June 1976 the Provincial Council sends a copy of our agreement with the Archbishop of Calcutta with regard to Auxilium parish, to the Archbishop of Ranchi for the parish in Hesag. After a year we receive the draft of a new agreement quite different from our own, which is read and commented upon. The Council feels that some of the clauses are not needed and others require modifications. It is also pointed out that two distinct agreements for the school and for the parish will have to be drawn up and forwarded for approval.



Hatia: The Church, blessed on 11.4.1977

In the meeting of 26th August 1976 Fr. Provincial tells the Council that *Misereor* refuses to help Fr. Guido to set up the technical school. This explains why we have not been able to start to build what is very much in our plan and in the expectation of the Archbishop. To build the four walls of a workshop would not be that difficult, but to equip it with the required machines is beyond the capacity of the Province, without the help of a funding Agency. The reason why *Misereor* refuses is that someone from the archdiocese has written to *Misereor* that a technical school is not needed, as there is already one functioning close by.

In a letter dated 4th September 1976 addressed to Fr. Tohill, Fr. Provincial writes that in Ranchi we have built the residence, the school, and that Fr. Guido is building the parish church. He says also that the Archbishop is pressing for the technical school for which he especially has called us to Ranchi, but *Misereor* refuses help. Is it possible to find another Agency that would be ready to help us? To this Fr. Tohill answers saying that he finds no other Agency ready to help us, and he himself

sends some help. In his letter of 12th October 1976, Fr. Lo Groi thanks Rev. Fr. Tohill for the help he has sent and tells him that the Archbishop has written to *Misereor* to reconsider their stand, but so far there is no answer.

From the Chronicle of the Province we know that on 11th April 1977, Easter Sunday, there takes place the solemn blessing of the new church built by Fr. Guido Colussi. The Archbishop, Msgr. Pius Kerketta, S. J. blesses the church amidst much rejoicing of the people around and with good participation of priests, sisters, and brothers.

On 19th March 1978 Fr. Provincial is back from Italy after the XXI General Chapter. He comes back via Delhi and Ranchi (Hatia). It is on this day that he blesses the foundation stone of the new *aspirantate*. By now the school has grown in numbers and the space available to the aspirants diminished considerably as the number of aspirants increased steadily. This necessitates the building of distinct premises for the aspirants. On 15th August 1979, the blessing of this new two-storey building by Fr. Joseph Kezhakkekara, the New Provincial, takes place. The aspirants have prepared well for the solemn function, getting the house ready, practicing church music for the solemn Concelebration, and making arrangements for an enjoyable and thought provoking cultural programme.[28]

On 12th June 1980 Fr. Provincial reads to the Council a request by the house council of Don Bosco, Hatia. The confreres feel that there should be a technical school there. The house could think of starting this new venture on a small scale. On 28th November 1980 the Council sets the Hatia project as one of the priorities for 1981, and decides to start in January 1981.

The technical school is officially inaugurated and blessed by Archbishop Pius Kerketta, S.J. on 1st August 1981, in the presence of the staff and students of Don Bosco, the new students of the technical school and some 30 guests and friends of the Salesians. The Archbishop thanks the Salesians for beginning the technical school, which has been his dream from the time he invited the Salesians to Ranchi. He assures them of the cooperation and support of everyone in the archdiocese. Fr. Provincial thanks His Grace for all the encouragement and for blessing the new venture.[29]

[28] Cfr. SNC, 40-6/'79, 7.
[29] Cfr. SNC, 60-7/'81, 6.

The technical school is indeed a humble beginning. But Bro. Francis Surin, the Superintendent and his team set to work with great efficiency. On 8th October 1982, two trucks arrive bringing 10 second-hand machines purchased from the Plastic Moulders Pvt. Ltd. Belur, Howrah. This is the result of the untiring effort and determination by Bro. Francis Surin and the precious help of Fr. Rector, Bro. T. V. Mathew Thaiparambil, Fr. M. M. Joy Marangattikala and Bro. Nellickal Ambrose of Don Bosco Liluah, who carried out all the negotiations. The acquisition of these machines is for equipping the new technical project at Kokar.[30] In fact, it is clear from the very beginning that the dream of Archbishop Pius Kerketta cannot be fully realized at Hesag and no one is more convinced of this than the enterprising and energetic Fr. Guido Colussi himself. He buys a piece of land at Kokar in Ranchi itself to establish the new technical school.

At present at Hesag there is a parish, with 3 sub-centres, one sub-station with a school and a hostel. There is also the Don Bosco High School in Hindi Medium.

On 10th June 1982 Fr. Guido leaves for Italy in search of some funds for the Kokar project. Fr. Charles Lobo and Bro. Francis Surin have to frequent the court in Ranchi to settle disputes over the land at Kokar.[31] Providence comes to the aid. On 15th November 1984, Fr. Provincial informs his Council that *Misereor* has almost agreed to pay 75% of the expenses for the Kokar project provided we are prepared to spend the rest 25 per cent. The new technical school is blessed on 20th April 1987.

Kokar has also a parish created by dividing the Cathedral parish of the Archdiocese of Ranchi. Archbishop Telesphore Toppo blesses a beautiful church, dedicated to the Holy Angels, on 30th October 1988. The parish at present runs one primary school, the technical Institute that has a hostel and offers formal and non-formal training in different trades. From July 1999, it also houses the aspirants for Salesian Brotherhood. An English Medium co-ed school is started in 1999.[32]

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[30] Cfr. SNC, 69-7/'82, 4–5.
[31] Cfr. SNC, 68-6/'82, 4.
[32] Cfr. Directory and Calendar 2001–2002 of the Salesian Province of New Delhi.

4. New Developments at Siliguri

4.1 The New Don Bosco School

On 15th January 1973 the new school is started with 7 boys in class VII. The ground floor of the small two-storey residence built by Fr. Daniel Venia serves as classroom. Fr. Paul Taverna is entrusted with the task of finding the finance and starting the new school building.

On 31st January 1973, feast of St. John Bosco, in the afternoon there is a concelebrated Mass with homily by the new Provincial, Fr. N. Lo Groi. The bishop of Jalpaiguri, James Toppo, is the main celebrant. The blessing of the foundation stone of the new Don Bosco School follows the Mass.[33]

On 10th January 1974 the Provincial Council discusses several matters relating to the house of Siliguri. The first is whether the house needs to have the canonical erection or not. There seems to be no need, since it was already canonically erected when Siliguri house was first opened at Salugara under the Title of Mary Help of Christians and for the purpose of a school for boys and of an *aspirantate*. In the meeting of 21st February 1974, Fr. Provincial will be able to say whether there is need of a new canonical erection or not.

Another problem considered by the Council is the need of a primary school, if we want to get boys. The Council agrees that the matter needs to be studied further. The Council is also informed that Mr. Musha Singh has donated to Fr. Paul Taverna a piece of land measuring 240'x 100' adjoining our compound.

The year 1974 begins with 50 boys on the rolls in three classes VI, VII, and VIII. A small number at the beginning will help to establish sound traditions. On the feast of St. John Bosco, 31.1.1974, Fr. Provincial blesses the residence of the confreres. The students take part with enthusiasm in all the activities.

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[33] Cfr. Chronicle of the Province; *Provincial Archives* F.B.10.1.3; Cfr. Also Minutes of the Provincial Council meetings, *Provincial Archives* F.B.2.2.



Siliguri: The residence, blessed on 31.1.1974

The Provincial Council deals with the problem of the primary school in three of its meetings on 10th April 1974, 20th June 1974, and 19th September 1974. In the meeting of 10th April it discusses having a primary school in Siliguri run by sisters. We would buy the land and build the Convent, while the sisters would build the school and develop it. They would also run a dispensary. However, there is no agreement on what congregation of Sisters to invite. In the meeting of 20th June the Provincial tells the Council that two Congregations of sisters who have been invited, the MSMHC of Shillong and the SMI Sisters of Krishnagar, are declining the invitation. It is suggested to invite a Secular Institute, while some members of the Council feel that also the primary school should be in our hands. In the meeting of 19th September the Provincial informs the Council that no Secular Institute is in a position to take up the primary school. Mr. A. D'Souza, the Inspector of Anglo-Indian schools, advises us not to apply for the recognition of a primary school, but for a junior high school for classes V to VIII, as this has a better chance of being approved.

Fr. P. Taverna commences the work for the third floor, so as to make room for labs and the library. These are a prerequisite for the

recognition of the school. The strength of the school in 1975 is 120 students for classes IV to IX.[34]

The year 1976 starts with a big rush for admissions. Of the 225 applications, only 110 students are selected. The new school year begins with a total strength of 215 students.

On 21st November 1975, there is the inspection for recognition. The school authorities accord recognition and the recognition order is expected soon. This year the school will be sending its first batch of students for ICSE Examinations.

A free night school for the benefit of some 80 boys of the locality is opened in 1976. It is conducted both in the Hindi and Bengali medium. The Siliguri unit of the Lion's Club contributes 500 rupees worth things for the purpose. An onlooker moved with pity for these unfortunate children makes a substantial contribution towards this noble task.[35]

In 1977 the number of boys in the day school rises to 380 with the introduction of classes I and II. The results of the first batch of the ICSE, is 100 percent with 60 per cent of the students securing I Division marks and the rest obtaining II division. In the Hindi and Bengali sections of the night school there are some 120 boys in classes one and two... The continuation of the construction of the school building starts about 10 days before the school opens and proceeds at a fast pace. The new section of the building should be ready by the time the boys come back for the next term.[36]

On 14th December 1977 the Don Bosco School receives the official papers announcing the affiliation of the school to the Delhi Board. The Salesians have eagerly been looking forward to it, after the school-received recognition the previous year. The completion of the extension of the main building provides, to a great extent, more classrooms to accommodate the boys. The construction of a new wing is likely to start soon.

In its meeting of 6th October 1977, the Provincial Council discusses several projects proposed by the house council of Siliguri: a) to build an

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[34] Cfr. SNC, 8-2/'75, 4, and 9-3/'75, 4.

[35] Cfr. SNC, 16-2/'76, 10, Chronicle of the Province, 12.1.1997–15.1.1977; *Provincial Archives* B.10.1.3, and SNC, 23-2/'77, 8–9.

[36] Cfr. Chronicle of Province, 12-15/'77; *Provincial Archives* B.10.1.3, and SNC, 23-2/1977, 8–9.

assembly hall with foundation for three floors; b) to make a playground in the land donated by Mr. Singh for the small boys; c) to build a hall in the small boys ground for their recreation; d) to build a boundary wall. The Council approves a), b), and d).

On 27th August 1981 the Provincial Council grants the request of the house council of Don Bosco School to complete the planned wing above the auditorium and asks Bro. Isaac to complete the work.



Siliguri: The School built by Fr. P. Taverna.

Fr. Paul Taverna, rector of Don Bosco Siliguri, is present at the meeting of the Provincial Council on 24th July 1980. He presents various problems affecting the school. In Siliguri we are going to have many works: the parish, the Savio Centre, the dispensary, the residence of the sisters, the Novitiate. There is already the talk of the Terrai diocese. If this new diocese is created we will have all these works except the parish, which would go back to the Jalpaiguri diocese. There is the offer of the bishop of Darjeeling, to start a work in the New Chumta area. Suppose we accept this area what type of institution shall we have? Can we think of having the Savio Centre in this new place? After much discussion the Council decides that the work of the Novitiate, the dispensary, and the residence of the sisters should go on as planned. The rest of the projects can wait for some more time. Fr. Provincial then reads to the Council the

letter of the house council. The letter mentions all the problems they have to face with the Bus Syndicate of Siliguri and their ultimatum to stop their services by the first of September. Over 500 boys of the school make use of these busses and without them they will find it very difficult to reach the school. The house council is asking to have its own busses – three of them. They hope to buy them at a reasonable price from the auctioning centre in Siliguri. The Provincial Council is not against the idea. The school should get the parents involved in this and see what they can do to help solve the problem. The Provimvial Council decides to write back to the house coumcil asking for more clarifications on the procedure of acquiring the busses and how they are going to finance the project.

4.2 The Parish

The question of the parish comes up in the Provincial Council meeting of 6th October 1977, in connection with the question of the sisters in Siliguri. After some discussion the Council suggests first to accept the parish – a Salesian parish if possible – present agreement, etc. Then ask the Bishop's permission to invite sisters to work in the parish.

The problem of the parish comes up again in the Council meeting of 24th August 1978. The bishop is not keen to offer all the area mentioned earlier for the Salesian parish. If we do not get sufficient scope for work – at least three tea gardens – we will not accept the parish and Fr. Paul is not willing to build even the proposed youth-centre.

On 2nd October 1978 the Provincial gives more positive information on the parish. The bishop was under the impression that the Catholics in the area did not want the Salesians. Later he realizes that it is not so. Hence in his second letter he offers the parish with seven tea gardens. At the Centre we will have a youth-centre with hostel, with its hall serving as a chapel for the parishioners around. From the Centre the other areas will be served.

In the meeting of 30th November 1978, Fr. Provincial communicates to the Council members the answer of Fr. R. Pilla to the presentation of the project of a youth centre-cum parish at Siliguri: the superiors have approved the Youth Centre, but they ask for a separate request to the Rector Major and his Council as regards the parish. This has already been done.

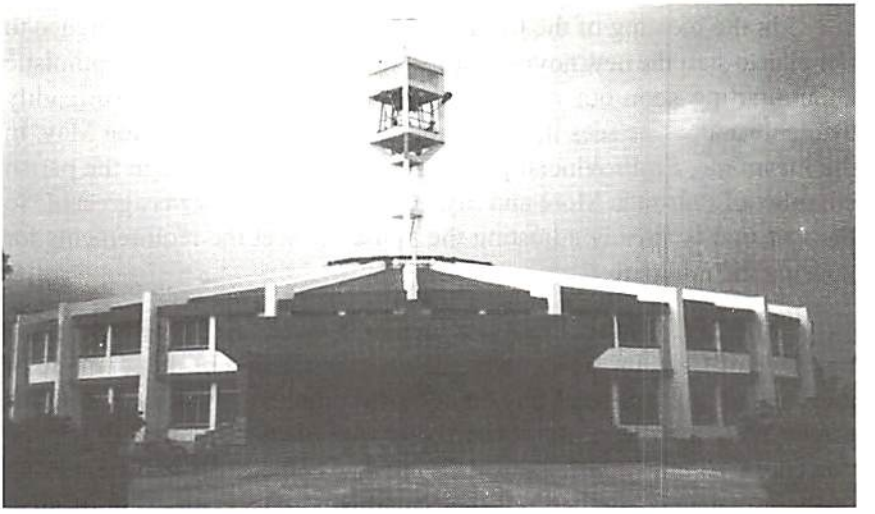
In the meeting of 21st and 22nd February 1979, Fr. Provincial reads out the agreement with the bishop of Jalpaiguri and the Salesian Society represented by the Provincial. May 6th, feast of St. Dominic Savio, will be the day in which we shall officially accept the parish. In the next meeting of the Council, however, on 29th and 30th March 1979, the Provincial has to tell the Council Members that as regard the signing of the agreement with the bishop of Jalpaiguri there seems to be a small hitch about the allowance to the parish priest by the bishop. The diocese is not willing to grant the allowance. The hitch, however, does not seem to be so small, considering that it delays for a long time the signing of the agreement.

The Rector Major, Fr. E. Viganò, blesses the foundation stone for the Savio Centre on 10th October 1979. In December 1980 it has about 45 boarders. They come mainly from the tea gardens. Most of them are attending the night school. The Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians are here for two months to get the Centre started. They are also of great help to prepare the Christians for the reception of the sacraments.[37]

The Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians arrive on 2nd September 1981. Temporarily they are put up in Don Bosco. Fr. Paul Taverna sets apart a portion of our land, surrounds it with a wall and builds the convent for them. The blessing of the convent is held on 6th September 1981. The blessing is presided over by the bishop of Jalpaiguri. The Provincial comes down from Sonada with the rector and other staff members of Salesian College. The sisters come to help in the parish. On 11th January 1982 the sisters open the kindergarten. In 1988 they start a boarding school for girls. In the beginning the children attend the night school of Don Bosco, but later a primary school starts functioning for them at Savio Centre. In 1994 the Novitiate is built and it is blessed on 26th December 1995. Their first group of novices makes the first profession on 8th December1997.

On 1st May 1993 Bishop James Toppo of Jalpaiguri blesses and Fr. Thomas Polackal, the Provincial, inaugurates the present Don Bosco Shrine, a greatly cherished dream of Fr. Paul Taverna.

[37] Cfr. SNC, 43-9/'79, 8.



Siliguri: The Don Bosco Shrine, blessed on 1.5.1993

4.3 Nazareth Bhavan: The New Novitiate

It is in the Council meeting of 29th and 30th March 1979 that the Provincial speaks of the need for a separate Novitiate for the Calcutta Province. There is a plot of land in Siliguri that could serve the purpose.

Then again in the meeting of 17th April 1979, in the presence of the Regional Superior, Fr. Thomas Panakezham, Fr. Provincial presents the need for a separate Novitiate due to the big number of novices in Sunnyside.

On 28th June 1979, speaking to his Council, Fr. Provincial speaks of a separate Novitiate as a necessity as the numbers are on the increase. Possible sites are mentioned, but then the Council decides to ask the fathers of Sonada and Siliguri to find out a suitable place in and around Siliguri. It is suggested to discuss the problem at the meeting of rectors and parish priests.

In the meeting of rectors and parish priests in July 1979, it is suggested to build the novitiate in the land we have in Siliguri. This suggestion is confirmed by a decision of the Council in its meeting of 20th and 21st July 1979, and Bro. Isaac is asked to make the plans and execute them.

In the Provincial Council meeting of 19th and 20th September 1979, Fr. Provincial reads a letter from the Generalate giving the permission to open a novitiate for our Province in Siliguri.

In the meeting of the Council of 15th November, with reference to our plan to start the new novitiate in 1980, Bro. Isaac is not at all optimistic about starting soon our novitiate in Siliguri. Cement is not so readily available and, as he sees it, it will not be ready by the following May. In the meantime, Fr. Provincial proposes to start the novitiate in the parish complex of Polsonda More and says that Fr. Jim Gimenez is agreeable to the idea and is already adjusting the house to meet the requirements for housing the novitiate.

The 31st of May 1980 is a memorable day in the history of the Province of Calcutta, as it marks the official opening of the novitiate of the Province at Polsonda More, until the new novitiate building at Siliguri is ready. A total of 24 priests concelebrate with Bishop Baroi. Fr. Provincial preaches the homily during the Mass. In it he emphasizes that the starting of the novitiate in the heart of the Santal Missions, is an event of great significance for the Province, as it indicates the renewed thrust that is given to the missionary dimension of the Province. The 31st May being the feast of the Visitation, he also points out that no important undertaking in the Province has started except on a feast of our Blessed Mother Twenty-two novices start the novitiate, with Fr. P. J. Joseph Punchakunnel as their novice master.[38] In November 1980, Polsonda More is approved by the superiors in Rome as the Novitiate house for the year.[39]

On 24th May 1981 the first batch of novices makes their profession. Fr. Provincial presides over the ceremony. Some of the brothers make their profession using the formula in Bengali. The parents of a few brothers are present on the occasion. That day the parish bids farewell to F. J. Gimenez who is on transfer to Purnea. In the afternoon there is a cultural programme to wish adieu to him. On 26th morning the newly professed bid farewell to Polsonda More and to Fr. Jim Gimenez.

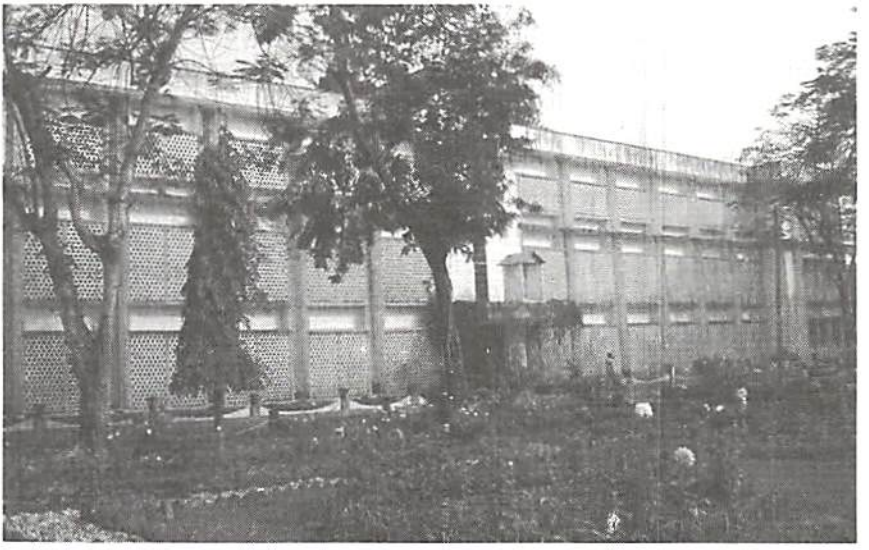
On 4th November1980, the laying of the foundations of the new novitiate starts in Siliguri. The two-storey structure, designed to accommodate 40 novices and the staff members is ready for the blessing on 2nd June 1981, in just six months.

The 19 new novices arrive on 31st May and officially start the novitiate on the same day. Their first job is to arrange the new house and

[38] Cfr. SNC, 49-6/'80, 3–4.
[39] Cfr. Provincial Council Meeting of 10.11.1980, *Provincial Archives*, B.8.2.2.

get it ready for the blessing two days later. On 2nd June at 9.30 a.m. Bishop James of Jalpaiguri comes to bless the house. After welcoming the bishop, every one gathers at the entrance of the house for the blessing. A large candle is lit and kept burning at the entrance as a symbol of the new life that is infused into the house. As the chapel is not yet ready for use, the study hall is turned into a chapel for the celebration of the Eucharist. After the Mass a short musical programme is held to thank the bishop and the guests. The bishop speaks welcoming the novices and the staff to his diocese. Fr. Sebastian Alancheril, the rector of Sonada, on behalf of the Provincial who is absent due to illness, thanks the bishop and everyone present. The new house is named 'Nazareth Bhavan'.[40]

The foundation for a new chapel, by the side of the novitiate, is laid in May 1996, and is blessed by Fr. T. Polackal, Provincial, on 23rd December 1996. Work for the second floor starts in early 1997, and is blessed by Fr. Francis Alencherry, Provincial, on 24th December 1997.



Siliguri: Nazareth Bhavan, the completed Novitiate
Blessed on 24.12.1997

[40] Cfr. SNC, 58-5/'81, 9-10.

5. New Parishes and Mission Centres

5.1 Jokbahla

On 28th October 1976 Fr. Provincial leaves for Kunkuri in Madhya Pradesh to meet Bishop Francis Ekka of Raigarh-Ambikapur. The purpose of the visit is to go to Jokbahla parish, where a Janata High School is offered to us. The visit to Jokbahla is undertaken together with the bishop, Fr. Guido Colussi, rector of Don Bosco Hesag, and Bro. Timothy Kerketta.

They receive a warm welcome in the school. The Managing Committee of the school is ready to give the school completely to the Salesians, both property and management. The bishop is also ready to give the parish with 15,000 Catholics, belonging to the *Uraon* tribe, in 62 villages. Speaking to the bishop, to the Committee members and to the people, Fr. Provincial makes no commitment. He says that he comes only to see, the rest depends on the Provincial Council and on the superiors in Rome, and, of course, on the availability of personnel.[41]

The final decision to accept the offer of the bishop is arrived at only in early 1979. The Salesians will take up residence at Jokbahla from 31st May 1979. The diocesan priests who are at present at Jokbahla will not be moving out immediately.[42]

In the Provincial Council meeting of 21st February 1979, Fr. Provincial says that he will be sending a letter to Fr. P. C. Thomas Panakezham, the Regional, to place a request to the General Council to be allowed for one year to be in Jokbahla to study the situation and the type of work demanded of us. We intend to send a team of three confreres in June to start this work.

In the Council meeting of 29th and 30th March 1979, Fr. Provincial communicates to the members that the Jokbahla project is approved on an experimental basis for one year. At this same meeting, after a lengthy discussion on his problems and difficulties, Fr. Joseph D'Souza agrees to lead the team to Jokbahla to assess the situation.

On 29th May1979 the confreres of the Provincial House and Don Bosco Tengra bid farewell to Fr. Joseph D'Souza, Fr. Lucas Sirkar, and

[41] Cfr. SNC, 38-4/'79, 7.
[42] Cfr. SNC, 38-4/1979, 6–7.

Fr. Jose Naikamparambil who set out for Jokbahla. Fr. Provincial and Bro. Isaac Puthumana, the Provincial Economer, accompany them.[43]

On 1st July 1979 Fr. Jose Naikamparambil takes charge of the school. Minor repairs and maintenance are done. We decide for the time being not to make any substantial changes in the present set up. This can be done when we take up the project permanently. Fr. Joseph D'Souza and Fr. Lucas engage in visiting the mission centres.

In the meeting of 12th June 1980, the Council discusses in the presence of Fr. Sheehy the modalities of the contract with the bishop. The Society is ready to help the Janata in the further development of the highschool, but the ordinary regular financial obligation is to be borne by the Janata as before. The bishop of Raigarh agrees to our proposals regarding the Janata High School. The parties concerned will sign the agreement in the near future.[44]

The Salesians accept the parish with 62 villages. But still in the Council meeting of 29th April 1982, presided over by Fr. Thomas Panakezham, it is felt that, this being an experiment, things need to be clarified and the official permission is to be sought.

In its meeting of 10th February 1983, the Provincial Council reads a letter of Bishop Francis Ekka of Raigarh requesting the Salesians to start a new Centre at Ramsama in the present parish of Jokbahla. The Council agrees to accept this proposal, as this new centre has about 6000 Catholics, scattered in some 20 villages. The diocese offers about 6.5 acres of land for the development of this centre.

Ramsama and Jokbahla become two separate parishes on 26th May 1985. On that day Fr. Victor Kindo, the Apostolic Administrator of Raigarh, installs Fr. V. V. Mathai Vellappallil as the new parish priest of Jokbahla, and on 22nd June 1985, Fr. Joseph D'Souza, is made the parish priest of Ramsama.[45]

5.2 Polsonda More

This is not the first time that we write on Polsonda More. We have done this when the mission there houses the novitiate for one year. However

[43] Ibid. 3
[44] Cfr. Provincial Council Meeting of 8.8.'80, *Provincial Archives* B.8.2.2.
[45] Cfr. SNC, 5-15/'85, 3.

dealing now with new parishes and mission centres we consider this to be the correct place for reporting about the origin and growth of this parish for the Santals.

In January 1976 Fr. Gimenez, the parish priest of Azimganj, inspired by a particular event that has occurred the year before,[46] begins to think of the need of opening a mission centre at Polsonda More as an act of thanksgiving and remembrance of the work done by the Salesians in the missions in the past one hundred years. Polsonda More is situated 15 kms North of Behrampore, along the Calcutta-Siliguri National Highway. The building is gradually taking shape as a prominent landmark. The local people are inquisitive about its purpose wondering whether it is going to be a hospital or a College. However, for us its purpose is very clear: it will become a hostel and a parish centre for the poor tribal youth, especially Santals of Nobogram and subdivisions of Murshidabad District. The new parish, when erected, will have about 800 Christians. But the region has about 10 to 15 thousand Santals.[47]

On 8th September 1976 Fr. Jim Gimenez and Fr. David Mondol move to the still incomplete house.[48] On 20th February 1977 Fr. George Williams, the extraordinary Visitor blesses the new centre. At present the centre comprises the residential quarters of the Salesians with offices and a hostel for boys. Msgr. Mathew Baroi, bishop of Krishnagar, and Fr. Provincial are present at the function. Bishop Baroi signs the decree of the canonical erection of the parish backdating it to 11th November 1976, the closing date of the Centenary of the Salesian Missions. Polsonda More, in fact, is opened to coincide with the Centenary.[49]

On 2nd April 1978 Bishop Baroi blesses the new church, assisted by a large number of priests who concelebrate with him immediately after the blessing. The Polsonda More complex, however, is not complete. A

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[46] Fr. Gimenez refers here to his having baptized the little girl of a non-Christian Santal woman with the name Fatima when he visits the only Catholic family in Polsonda More. Some days later while again passing through Polsonda More, he wants to see the little Fatima, but the mother at once tells him: "Sahib, the baby died but we shall become Christians." He had not mentioned a word about Christianity to her before. Father attributes this to the prayer of little Fatima. Then he thinks of starting a new centre at Polsonda More. Cfr. SNC, 15-1/'76, 11.

[47] Cfr. SNC, 18-4/'76, 12.

[48] Cfr. SNC, 21-7/'76, 10.

[49] Cfr. SNC, 22-1/'77, 7.

new wing must be added to the present building to house some 200 students, who will attend classes in a government school close by and reside here.[50] The parish is entrusted to the Salesians *in perpetuum*[51]. The blessing and official opening of the convent for the sisters, the boarding for the girls, and the school is held on 2nd March 1980. The Sisters of Charity of Sts. B. Capitanio and V. Gerosa take charge of the administration of the whole complex meant for the girls.[52]

5.3 Monigram

In its meeting of 30th November 1978, the Provincial Council considers the question of opening the parish of Monigram. As not all the confreres working with the Santals seem to be favourable to the opening of this parish, it is suggested to the bishop to hold a meeting of all the confreres engaged in the evangelization of the Santals and come to a decision after a secret vote on it.

Monigram is bifurcated from Azimganj on 24th May 1979. A project to build a church at Monigram is presented to the Provincial Council on 21st July 1983. The parish will arrange its own finances for it. The Council agrees to forward it to the Economer General whose sanction is required for the project.

The blessing of the foundation stone of the proposed church at Monigram takes place on 15th May 1983, the Beatification day of our two Martyrs in China, Bishop Luigi Versiglia and Fr. Callisto Caravario. Fr. Varkey Padamattumel, the Vicar Capitular of Krishnagar diocese, lays the foundation. The newly built hostel is illuminated and it attracts thousands of people from the villages.[53]

In November 1984 pilgrims from the diocese of *Tortona* (Italy), where Bishop L. Versiglia is born, present a life-size portrait of the Salesian Martyrs to the parish community. The Vicar General and the Italian artist Scarampi come to present the portrait.[54]

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[50] Cfr. SNC, 30-2/'78, 7–8.
[51] Cfr. Official resolution of the joint meeting of the Diocesan Council and the Provincial Council held on 2 April 1986, *Provincial Archives*, B.8.2.3.
[52] Cfr. SNC, 47-4/'80, 6–7.
[53] Cfr. SNC, 75-6/'85, 9.
[54] Cfr. SNC, XII-7/'85, 7.

The new church at Monigram is blessed on 21st November 1985. A group of 30 benefactors from the diocese of *Tortona* together with their Bishop Luigi Bangianino are present for the blessing. They want to express their solidarity with the Christian community of Monigram, since the Salesian Martyrs, Msgr. L. Versiglia and Fr. C. Caravario, are especially honoured in this church. Both Martyrs belong to the diocese of *Tortona.*[55]

In the year 1995 Talkola parish is separated from Monigram. In December 2000, the parish of Monigram is given back to the diocese.

5.4 Mirik

In 1974 Fr. L. Jellici visits Mirik on request of the Manager of Dake Tea-Estate, Mr. Jeevan Gurung, to meet his sick grandfather. From 1977 onwards the Holy Cross Sisters from Sonada visit the sick there. Later the priests from Salesian College accompany them for Holy Mass.

On 7th February 1979 Bishop Eric Benjamin, bishop of Darjeeling, requests Fr. Jellici to start a work in Mirik. On 13th November 1979 Sr. Pietà, the Superior General of the Sisters of Mary Immaculate, and Sr. Rosemary, visit Mirik to study the possibility of starting a convent there. On 24th September, a plot of land is bought from acertain M. B. Gurung.[56]

In a resolution passed by the bishop of Darjeeling and the Senate of priests at its 28th meeting at Siliguri on 26th November 1980, we read: "...the Sonada-Nagrispur-Mirik areas will be committed to the Salesians... The Salesians already look after the growing church, consisting of Catholics living on the left bank of the Balasun River." In agreement with this Senate resolution, "Bishop Eric Benjamin of Darjeeling has entrusted the Mirik Mission, a newly carved out territory, to the care of the Salesians in 1980. Soon after, Fr. Jellici contacts the SMI Sisters who express their willingness to work in the Mission and as a result, before his departure for Italy, he arranges to have the sisters come and start off."[57]

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[55] Cfr. SNC, XII-11/'85, 3.
[56] Cfr. SNC, 76-7/'83, 9–10.
[57] Cfr. SNC, 59-6/'81,12–15.

Again in the minutes of the 30th meeting of the Senate of priests', dated 21st March 1982, we read: "The Sisters of Mary Immaculate of Krishnagar arrive in Mirik on 6th April 1981, they are going ahead with plans for a *pakka* dispensary and at the moment are doing that service in a small rented house." "The Salesians are already building a Mission house there for their residence to look after the growing church consisting of the Catholics living on the right side of the Balasun River."

On 15th April 1982 Fr. Thomas Panakezham blesses the foundation stone of the proposed building. On 20th August 1982 Fr. George Alakulam, accompanied by Fr. Jellici and Bro. Isaac Puthumana goes to reside in Mirik. Sr. Mary George and Sr. Rosalia who are already there welcome him and, like them, he too lives in a rented house with little facilities. Even water he has to fetch from far away.[58]

The new building of the Mirik Mission is blessed and inaugurated on Sunday, 19th December 1982. The blessing is integrated with the concelebrated Mass. The building is dedicated to Fr. Jellici, who celebrates 50 years of his Salesian missionary life.[59]

The parish and the school have grown over the years. The school is a co-educational English medium school from class 5 to 10 following the Madhyamik syllabus. Fr. George Alakulam starts it in 1983. It is meant to give a chance to drop outs to prepare and appear at the exams as external candidates. Efforts are made to upgrade it into a government-recognized school, but so far all efforts are meeting with no success. A boarding has been started to accommodate the poor boys from the far off villages. Fr. Thomas D'Souza, Administrator of the Darjeeling diocese, blesses the new beautiful church on 18th November 1995. Today Mirik is a growing parish with 8 substations. The house is canonically erected in the year 2000,[60] and in 2001 the parish priest, Fr. Varghese Kalluvachel, is made the rector of the community. In June 2002, Fr. Mathew Pulingathil is made rector and parish priest.

5.5 Kalyani

In the Council meeting of 11th February 1977, Fr. L. Gobetti makes a suggestion to exchange the land that belongs to the Society in Ranaghat

[58] Cfr. SNC, 68-6/'82, 6.
[59] Cfr. SNC, 72-2/'83, 8.
[60] Cfr. Directory of the Calcutta Province, 2001–2002.

with all the land he has bought in Kalyani for the diocese. The Council is in favour of the exchange, which is actually done in the same year.

The 24th May 1979 sees the official inauguration of the new Centre at Kalyani. Situated on the outskirts of a well-planned and fast growing town, the Centre at Kalyani has every promise of developing into a fine centre of Salesian activity.

The new parish of Kalyani covers the areas under Chakda, Kalyani, and Haringata police stations. Though it will be known as Kalyani parish, the main centre with the parish church and the priest' residence is located at Kestopur, 3 kms away from Kalyani railway station. Kestopur has a Catholic population of over 70 families. They are mostly *Adivasis* who migrated long ago from Ranchi to work in the indigo factory. Originally belonging to the *Oraon* community, by now they have been practically bengalized. A few families are new arrivals from Ranchi. Besides the main section there is a spattering of Anglo-Indians, Nepalese, local Bengalis and East Bengali Catholics in the area, giving the parish a somewhat cosmopolitan outlook.[61]

Kalyani is bifurcated from Ranaghat and established as a parish on 24th May 1979. The presbytery is blessed on 24th May 1981. Bishop Lucas Sirkar blesses the foundation stone of the present majestic church on 31st January 1990, and he blesses the church on 1st March 1991. The parish is named after St. John Bosco and is entrusted to the Salesians *in perpetuum*

Among those present at the solemn blessing are: Chevalier Arvedi, who funds the project, and his wife, the designer, Mr. Mukherjee, Fr. Provincial, and Bro. Isaac Puthumana and his team of workers.

Fr. Scaria Thuruthyil, professor at our Salesian University at Rome, quotes Mrs. Arvedi: "The entire experience was a marvellous experience for me, there were so many moving moments for me, which almost led me to shed tears." Mr. Arvedi too commented: "It was a unique event in our lives."[62]

[61] Cfr. SNC, 39-5/'79, 3.
[62] Cfr. SNC, XX-1 January–March/'92, 12.



Kalyani: The new Church blessed on 1.3.1991

The parish is a part of the mission of the Don Bosco *Vidyaniketan* community. The FMAs are given a portion of the land on which they build a convent, a boarding for girls and a primary Bengali medium school for boys and girls. Bishop Matthew Baroi blesses the Vidyaniketan Juniorate for Salesian brothers on 15th August 1982.

5.6 Purnea

5.6.1 The Parish

The Provincial receives several letters from the bishop of Dumka inviting the Salesians to his diocese.[63] On 12th June 1980, Fr. Provincial reports to the Council about his visit to Purnea and Katihar. The bishop is prepared to give anything, provided we go there.

On 22nd January 1981 Fr. Provincial briefs the Provincial Council on his visit to Purnea and Katihar together with Fr. Jim Gimenez from Polsonda More. Purnea and Katihar are two districts and in each there is a priest in charge. There is no expansion of the church in these areas for the past one hundred years. In Purnea there is a small Chapel that is built around 1949. In the parish compound and close to the sisters, there is a

[63] Cfr. Letters dated 21.2.1979, 29.3.1979, and 17.4.1979.

villa that serves as an apostolic school with 21 students. The Ursuline Sisters run a very big school for the girls – over 1800 students, and the Clarists give medical care and assistance to the people of Purnea. In Katihar the Missionaries of Charity sisters are doing a marvellous work.

Bishop Telesphore Toppo is happy that the Salesians have accepted to work in his diocese. The Provincial Council decides to begin our work in Purnea on 31st May 1981. They have in mind Fr. Gimenez, Fr. John Topno and Fr. Thomas Kolacheril of Madras Province to start the work in Purnea.

The Salesians officially take over the Mission of Purnea in the diocese of Dumka on 31st May 1981. Bishop Telesphore and the other priests welcome them very cordially. Fr. Luciano Colussi, the Vice-Provincial, Fr. Thomas Polackal, and Fr. F. Alencherry, the secretary to the Provincial, represent the Province. Due to illness Fr. Provincial cannot be present. Present at the inauguration are also Bishop James Toppo of Jalpaiguri, Bishop Leo Tigga of Raiganch, and Fr. J. Scicluna, S. J., Superior of the Santal Region.

At 9.30 a.m. there is a solemn concelebrated Mass presided over by the bishop and the church is filled to capacity with people. After explaining the meaning of the ceremony to the people, Bishop Telesphore, installs Fr. Gimenez as parish priest according to the customary rite. Fr. John Topno will be the Assistant. The liturgical celebration in Hindi is truly meaningful. The singing is excellently rendered by a choir of girls under the direction of the Ursuline Sisters.

There is a short gathering after the Mass to welcome the Salesians at which Bishop Telesphore speaks once again thanking the Salesians for accepting his invitation to work in Dumka diocese. Speaking in Santali, Fr. Scicluna, S.J. welcomes the Salesians to Purnea on behalf of the Jesuits fathers.

Fr. Luciano Colussi speaks in the name of Fr. Provincial, thanking the bishop for his invitation and the clergy and the faithful for the warm welcome given to the Salesians. Finally, at the request of the people, Fr. Jim Gimenez speaks in Santali, assuring them that he and Fr. John would give of their very best to serve them as priests. He assures them that soon he would learn Hindi so as to speak to them in the language commonly

used at the Centre.[64] The construction of the presbytery begins on 8th December 1981, and it is blessed on 8th December 1982.

In the Provincial Council meeting of 4th November 1982, the Council discusses among other things also the organization of various works in Purnea. The best thing for Purnea would be to have a set-up like that of Azimganj; viz. to have school and boarding away from the parish in the separate plot of land donated by the bishop. On 4th December1982, Fr. Provincial tells the Council that Bishop Telesphore of Dumka has very kindly given us a second plot of some 20 acres close to the present one, which are meant for the development of Salesian works. The Council decides to start with a Hindi medium school from the primary onwards together with a boarding for the bigger boys. The present boarding close to the church should remain there to cater to the smaller boys.

Early in the year 1983 Bishop Telesphore Toppo of Dumka erects Purnea-Katihar into a Deanery and Fr. Jim Gimenez, the parish priest of Purnea, is appointed as its first Dean.[65]

5.6.2 The Don Bosco School

Don Bosco School opens in 1981, thanks to the valiant efforts of Fr. Jesus Gimenez. On 31st January Bishop Telesphore blesses the foundation stone of the school at Purnea He and Fr. Alencheril Sebastian, the Vice-Provincial, together with Mr. Victor Lal, the representative of the District Magistrate, lay the foundation stone. The function starts at 3.00 p.m. with the cutting of the ribbon by Fr. Sebastian Alencheril, followed by the blessing and the laying of the stone.[66]

The middle school is established in 1984 and is upgraded to a highschool in 1987. But the Bihar Board does not yet recognize it and the students appear for the Bihar Board Exams through a recognized school. Currently efforts are made to get the school affiliated to the CBSE Board. There is a boarding for the Catholic tribal boys. A non-formal training

[64] For a detailed and well-documented report of the inauguration of the Purnea Mission by Fr. Francis Alencherry, Cfr. SNC, 58-5/1981, 5–8.

[65] Cfr. SNC 73-3/'83, 3. For a general description of Purnea and Katihar Districts, social and economic conditions, Cfr. SNC, 60-7/'81, 8–9.

[66] For a detailed account of this blessing, Cfr. SNC, 72-2/'83, 16. For a brief history of the mission of Purnea and Katihar and the hectic rhythm of activities and improvements, Cfr. SNC, 98-7/'85.

technical school is established in 1990 to impart vocational training to the youth of the locality. The house is canonically erected in 1993.[67]

5.7 Najafgarh (Delhi)

During the year 1979 Fr. Joseph Fernandez sends several not so encouraging reports regarding an experiment he has started at Jhajjar in the Rhotak district in Haryana, in understanding with the Provincial and his Council.[68] In the Council meeting of 22nd July 1979, the Council comes to the conclusion that the work at Jhajjar does not seem to be the work they had in mind when it was taken up.

On 15th November 1979 the Council is informed that the Archbishop of New Delhi is offering a mission to the Salesians at Narjafgarh. Fr. Luciano Colussi and Fr. B. Diamond are deputed to go and study the project.

At the Provincial Council meeting of 5th December 1979, Fr. Provincial reads the letter of the Archbishop of New Delhi and listens to a report of Fr. Luciano Colussi, who has visited the place and has spoken to the Archbishop. His Grace gives probably the best area, Najafgarh. He will not give land or money.

In early June 1981 the Province acquires two acres of land at Najafgarh, situated about 25 kms away from Okhla on the Delhi-Haryana border. A few Catholic families and a convent of sisters (Holy Cross, Trichy) make up the existing Christian presence in Najafgarh.[69]

The parish of Sts. Peter and Paul, given to the Salesians by the diocese is opened 24th May 1984 with Fr. E. K. Varghese as in-charge. In 1993, a vocational training is started and at present, there are classes in Computer, Typing, Tailoring and spoken English. In March 2001 a newly constructed vocational Training Centre, opposite to the present house, begins to function with more facilities and trades. There are plans to expand the Non-formal training.[70]

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[67] Cfr. Directory of the Salesian Province of Calcutta – 2001–2002, 60.
[68] Cfr. Minutes of Provincial Council Meetings, 20.1.'78; 21.2.'79; 22.2.'79; 28.6.'79, *Provincial Archives* B.8.2.2.
[69] Cfr. Minutes of Provincial Council meeting of 27. 5.1981, *Provincial Archives*, B.8.2.2 and SNC, 58-5/'81, 3.
[70] Cfr. Directory and Calendar 2001–2002 of the Salesian Province of New Delhi, 26.

B) Growth in the Established Institutions: Important Events – Celebrations

1. Growth in the Established Institutions

1.1 Liluah

1.1.1 Don Bosco Self-Employment Centre

Way back in October 1974, at the General Body Meeting of SKIP (Skills for Progress: an organization of private technical schools all over India) the idea is expressed that the sophisticated training given in technical schools can reach only a limited number of young men, while there are hosts of young men who are school drop-outs, or lacking in text-book-handling facilities, though not entirely unfurnished with practical intelligence. Such youngsters end up as misfits in society. It is, therefore, felt that a new training programme should be devised, less sophisticated and lengthy, and employment oriented.

Bro. T. V. Mathew Thaiparambil, Superintendent of Don Bosco Technical School, Liluah, is an attentive and interested participant at the above SKIP meeting. He is facing a problem. By the end of 1974 there will be thirty or more young technicians passing out of school into an already saturated employment market, while hundreds of youngsters in the vicinity of the school, are idling away their youth and vigour. He takes up the idea mooted at the SKIP meeting of October 1974 and launches a programme of non-formal technical training. With the financial aid of the Indo-German Social Service Society (IGSSS), a new section is added to the workshop for the non-formal trainees.

This section is inaugurated by Mrs. Zutzi, Additional District Magistrate of Howrah, on 15th August 1977. Fourteen young men are selected and begin training under the watchful eye of the Instructors of Don Bosco Technical School. However, the results of this experiment do not produce the desired effect.

The solution comes in the form of a new idea. Why can't the boys be their own employers by making small machine parts? A comprehensive plan is drawn up combining the non-formal training course with a self-employment scheme. Financing the project is settled by the possibility of procuring bank loans against a lump sum deposited by IGSSS. Their funding agency also undertakes to defray the running expenses to some extent.

The next step is to rent a two-storey building adjacent to the school to house the self-employment project. Nine of the fourteen trainees in the first batch are given a loan by Indian Overseas Bank to acquire a machine each. The loan is to be paid back by the trainee by depositing a certain percentage of his earnings every month in the bank.

On 23rd September 1982 R. Saha, Deputy Secretary to the Ministry of Social Welfare, government of India, visits the Self-Employment and Non-formal unites of Don Bosco Liluah and is deeply impressed and inspired by the work done by the Salesians.[71]

In July 1974 the Provincial Council discusses and approves a decision taken by the House Council of Liluah in favour of expanding the Self-Employment project as sponsored by *Misereor*.

1.1.2 The New Church

The need for a new church at Don Bosco Liluah is felt for a long time. The present church is in need of major repairs. The House Council presents a site plan for the church, which is approved by the Provincial Council in its meeting of 26th November 1981. Fr. Provincial blesses the foundation stone for the new church on 31st January 1983.[72]



Liluah: The new Don Bosco Parish Church

[71] Cfr. SNC, 69-7/'82, 4.
[72] Cfr. SNC, 72-2/'83, 3.

In the Provincial Council meeting of 7th August 1984, the Council agrees with Don Bosco Liluah to have the blessing of the church on 8th December 1984, together with the Foundation Day and the celebration of Fr. Uguet's Diamond Jubilee of Priesthood and Fr. A. Colussi's Golden Jubilee of Priesthood, as they are former rectors of Liluah.

1.2 Don Bosco Park Circus

1.2.1 West Bengal Governor at Don Bosco Park Circus

Don Bosco Park Circus celebrates its silver Jubilee of the foundation of the school on 30th January 1983. The Silver Jubilee celebrations are presided over by Shri B. D. Pande, the Governor of West Bengal.

The Governor addresses the assembly as 'Members of the Don Bosco Family.' Congratulating the school, he says: "I am much impressed. In 25 years you have established yourself, made a name in the city, and produced excellent citizens. It is the first time that I have come across a school running a free night school for 800 children from the proceeds of the day school." [73]

1.2.2 The New Technical School at Don Bosco Park Circus

On 31st January 1979 Fr. P. Sheehy, rector, blesses the foundation stone of the new Technical complex in the northeast corner of the school grounds. Machines are shifted to the newly constructed Work Shop in January 1980.

On 16th June 1980 the classes of the Technical Section are shifted to the new Technical building. A new department, that of Electronics, is added to the Technical Section. This department trains students as Radio and T.V. technicians.

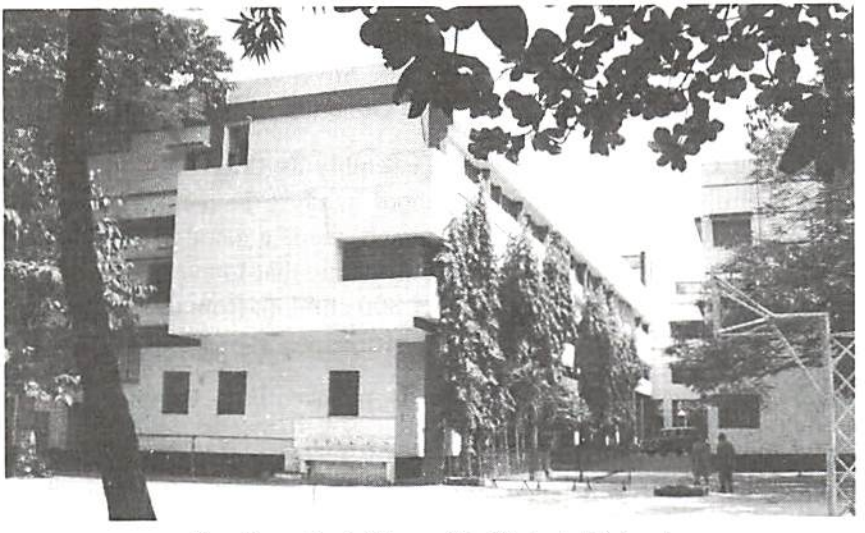
On 1st November 1980 the new Technical complex is officially opened. Msgr. Alan de Lastic, blesses the new building, and His Excellency, the Consul General of West Germany, presides over the function.

On 31st January 1982 His Eminence, Lawrence Cardinal Picachy, Archbishop of Calcutta, officially inaugurates and solemnly blesses the Don Bosco Non-formal Training Centre, in the presence of several parish

[73] Cfr. SNC, 72-2/'83, 9.

priests and heads of institutions. The Training Centre is an extension work of the Technical Institute for the under-privileged boys of the city.[74]

In the late 90s (1997...) a new partly three-storey building is added to the existing technical school joined at the first and second floor to the old one. The new wing is completed in the year 2001 before the Platinum Jubilee Celebrations.



Don Bosco Park Circus: The Technical School

1.2.3 The Salesian Brothers' *Aspirantate* at Park Circus

On 8th November 1973 the Provincial Council approves of a suggestion to house a group of coadjutor aspirants in the future printing school. From there they can attend different places for their professional training, while the confreres of the Provincial House and of the school of Printing would take care of their intellectual, religious, and spiritual formation.

In the Provincial Council meeting of 15th July 1976, the Council considers the problem of the vocation promotion in the Province, in particular of vocations to the Salesian Brotherhood, but it says nothing about where to house them.

[74] Cfr. the House Chronicles of Don Bosco Park Circus.

The question of housing the coadjutor aspirants comes up again in the Council meeting of 29th and 30th March 1979. For the time being they can be sent to Don Bosco, Ranchi, with the possibility of shifting them to Don Bosco Park Circus along with the Juniorate for the Salesian brothers.

The idea of having Salesian brothers and brother aspirants together is discouraged by Fr. Thomas Panakezham, the Regional Superior. In his opinion, it is better to separate the coadjutor aspirants.[75]

On 28th June 1979 Fr. Provincial announces to the Council Members that ten boys will be arriving from the South at the beginning of August to be coadjutor aspirants. For the time being they will go to Ranchi to learn English. But soon a decision has to be taken as to where to house them.

The Provincial takes up the question of the coadjutor aspirants with the House Council of Don Bosco Park Circus. During the Provincial Council meeting of 22nd September 1979, Fr. Provincial reads to the members a letter written and signed by all the members of the House Council of Don Bosco Park Circus, who are not in favour of the proposal. In spite of the problems, difficulties and objections, the Provincial at present feels that there is no choice but to begin this important work of the Province in Don Bosco Park Circus. This group will occupy the top floor of the new technical school that is being built at Park Circus. On 12th June 1980, Fr. Provincial informs the members of the Council that the *aspirantate* may be opened on 3rd July 1980. There will be about 20 boys.

1.3 Krishnagar

1.3.1 Don Bosco School: The New School Building

On 18th January 1973 the Provincial Council approves a request by the Don Bosco School, Krishnagar, to buy a plot of land to which the Higher Secondary and the primary school will be shifted. Though the proposed land is quite far from the community, it is considered suitable enough, since no better choice is possible.

On 18th September 1973 the Provincial Council approves the proposal of the House Council of Don Bosco, Krishnagar, to build 20 rooms in the new plot of land to serve both for the primary school as well

[75] Cfr. Minutes of Provincial Council meeting of 17.4.'79, *Provincial Archives* B.8.2.2.

as for the Higher Secondary section. The expenses will be met by the diocese of Krishnagar and by the Salesian Society equally.

1.3.2 The West Bengal Governor at Don Bosco Institute, Krishnagar.

His Excellency, Shri Antony Lancelot Dias, Governor of West Bengal, on his State visit to Krishnagar, includes in the official programme a visit to the Don Bosco Institute.

In the morning of 25th September 1975 at 7.30 a.m., the Governor pays an informal visit to the Cathedral, where he is welcomed and shown around by Bishop Motilal Baroi, Bishop L. R. Morrow, Fr. Stroscio, the Vicar General, Fr. C. Biswas, the parish priest, and other Religious.

At 11.45 a.m. the Don Bosco Institute welcomes him. Fr. Luciano Colussi, the rector, welcomes the distinguished guest and ushers him to the dais, where he is garlanded and addressed. Then in the company of the District authorities and Church dignitaries, he visits the Technical Department, the Carpentry section, and the poultry. He is delighted to see a small agricultural centre. The dairy, where crossbred and exotic (Holstein) milch animals are reared, impresses him.

There is a short drill-display presented by the Don Bosco Primary school children, directed by the Sisters of Charity. In reply to a short address read to him by the Headmaster, Fr. E. V. Chacko,[76] the Governor commends on the varied activities of the school management, its dedication and the discipline of the students. He is especially impressed by the fact that the majority of the students are hailing from the villages of Nadia, 24 Parganas, and Murshidabad.[77]

1.3.3 Golden Jubilee of Don Bosco School, Krishnagar: 1934–1984

The Don Bosco School Krishnagar solemnizes its Golden Jubilee celebrations on 25th, 26th, and 27th September 1984. The Don Bosco institution at Krishnagar is started in 1934, as a living monument to St. John Bosco, who is canonized on 1st April 1934. It has its beginning in 1926 as the parish school attached to the bishop's house and is known as the 'R. C. School'.

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[76] Fr. E.V. Chacko Erumpuzhil is born on 26.10.1936. At the age of 14 he enters the *aspirantate* of Bandel on 11.2.1951. He makes his Profession at Yercaud on 24.5.1956, is ordained a priest at Bandel on 11.9.1966. He works in various capacities in St. John's School, Bandel (assistant headmaster), Krishnagar (headmaster), Bongaon Parish (assistant PP), Don Bosco School Park Circus (Rector), Provincial House (Secretary of the Registered Society), Monigram, and Don Bosco Liluah (Confessor). He dies at Don Bosco Liluah on 19.5.2001.

[77] Cfr. SNC, 11-5/'75, 8f.

Till 1939 Don Bosco School is just a primary school. In 1939 Msgr. Scuderi, the Apostolic Administrator of Krishnagar, transfers the school to its present location. It is raised to a highschool in 1951 and is up-graded to Higher Secondary School in 1962. Only in 1964 it is handed over to the Salesian Congregation. In 1975 the day school section is shifted to a new building, the old building catering to the boarding and the Technical section.

On 25th September, at 7.00 a.m. with a prayer service *Mangaliki*, the three-day celebrations of the Golden Jubilee opens. A public function to mark the occasion is held at 9.15 a.m. with Mr. M. Chanda, the ADM as the chief guest. The school flag is hoisted, the statue of Don Bosco is garlanded; balloons and pigeons are released.

The school band accompanies a grand March Past in which over 500 students take part. A colourful drill display follows the march past. The Golden Jubilee Souvenir and the Gold Medal commemorating the Golden Jubilee are released. The ADM also opens an exhibition consisting of the chronicles of the school for the past 50 years, in charts and models. The students of the Technical department take pride in exhibiting items produced by them in the workshop.

The evening witnesses a unique event in Krishnagar city: the *Sova-jatra,* or the candlelight procession. Almost 2000 boys and girls carrying lighted candles walk through the main streets of Krishnagar, singing songs of praise to God and to Don Bosco. The last event of the day is the staging of the drama *Phulwali* by the West Bengal *Lokoranjan Sakha.*

The celebrations of the second day consist of various competitions. On the last day there are football matches in the morning. The concluding ceremony starts at 5.00 p.m. with the prize distribution. Bishop Lucas Sirkar, a past pupil of Don Bosco Krishnagar, presides at the function. A fitting conclusion is the staging of the drama *Dar Ghar* by R. Tagore, excellently acted by the staff and students of the school.[78]

1.3.4 The Diocese

1.3.4.1 The New Bishop's House

On 18th January 1973 the Provincial Council approves the request of the house of Don Bosco School, Krishnagar, to give 4 bighas of land on the roadside to the diocese in exchange for 21 bighas near the graveyard.

[78] Cfr. SNC, 90-10/'84, 5–7.

The foundation stone of the new Bishop's house is blessed by Msgr. L. R. Morrow, former bishop of Krishnagar, on 23rd April 1973. The Pro-Nuncio, Msgr. John Gordon, is a guest in the diocese from the 15th to the 18th January 1974. He visits every parish in the diocese. He blesses the new bishop's house on 16th January 1974.[79] According to the minutes of the Provincial Council of 10th July 1975, no new canonical erection of the bishop's house and of the Cathedral parish is needed, as it has already been done.



Krishnagar: The new Bishop's House

1.3.4.2 The New Bishops

1.3.4.3 Bishop Mathew Baroi

In the evening of 6th October 1973, the nomination of Msgr. Mathew Baroi as the new bishop of Krishnagar is announced. Msgr. Baroi at that time was attending the national Consultation on Evangelization at Patna. On 10th October Msgr. Baroi returns to Provincial house from Patna. In the afternoon together with Fr. Provincial and other confreres he leaves for Krishnagar. He stops for 15 minutes at Ranaghat and on reaching Krishnagar receives an official reception in front of the Cathedral.

[79] Cfr. SNC, 1/74, p. 3.

The Episcopal Ordination of Msgr. Baroi takes place on 15th December 1973. The Archbishop of Calcutta, His Grace L. Picachy, S.J. is the ordaining bishop, assisted by 10 other bishops. They are Archbishop Hubert D'Rosario of Shillong, Bishop Marengo, Administrator of Tura, Bishop L. R. Morrow, former bishop of Krishnagar, Bishops Abraham (Kohima), Kerketta (Tezpur), Eric Benjamin (Darjeeling), Francis Ekka (Ambikapur), James Toppo (Jalpaiguri), Tigga (Dumka), and Larouse (Chittagong).[80]

At his Episcopal Ordination he reiterates his programme for the future, "I will dedicate all my energy and life for you all." And he lives his programme of action for the next ten years of his life. He is a true pastor to his people, deeply aware of his mission, and has a profound love for the people, especially the poor.

Msgr. Motilal Baroi, the first Bengali bishop of Krishnagar, dies on Monday, 4th April 1983 at 4.15 p.m. following a massive heart attack.[81]

1.3.4.4 Bishop Lucas Sirkar

Fr. Lucas Sirkar is nominated bishop of Krishnagar (6th bishop of Krishnagar and 4th



Rt. Rev. Bishop MATHEW BAROI, SDB
Bishop of Krishnagarh (1973–1974)

Bishop Motilal Baroi is born on 31st August 1925 at Narkelbari, Faridpur, now in Bangladesh. He does his high school studies at Padishpur under the auspices of the Holy Cross fathers. He is sent to Salesian College, Sonada (Darjeeling), in 1945 as a Holy Cross Seminarian to study Latin. Here he is attracted by Don Bosco and his way of life. With the permission of his superiors in Bangladesh, he joins the Salesian Novitiate at Mawlai (Shillong), and makes his First Profession on 6th January 1948.

After his Philosophy studies, he is sent as assistant to the *aspirantate* at Bandel that opens on 11th February 1951. He completes his Theology studies at Sacred Heart College, Mawlai, and is ordained a priest on 8th December 1957. He works as in-charge of Studies among the aspirants at Salesian College, Sonada, Siliguri and Bandel. Fr. Baroi is the first Bengali priest to be the rector and prior of Bandel.

On 19th October 1970 Fr. Baroi is appointed Apostolic Administrator of Krishnagar. On 6th October 1973 he is

[80] Cfr. Chronicle of the Province 10.10.'73 and 15.12.'73, *Provincial Archives* B.8.2.2.
[81] Cfr. Letter by Rev. Fr. Joseph Kezhakkekara, to be found before SNC 75-6/'83.

Salesian bishop) on 16th July 1984. All the priests, Religious and institutions of Krishnagar give him a warm and rousing welcome at the bishop's house on 31st July 1984. He receives the Episcopal Ordination on 22nd September 1984.

For 16 years he lives a very dedicated life as the Good Shepherd of the diocese in keeping with his motto, "For me to live is Christ."

On 1st May 2000, he is transferred as coadjutor Archbishop to the Calcutta archdiocese. On 2nd April 2002 the Holy Father accepts the resignation of Archbishop Henry D'Souza and the Apostolic Nunciature of Delhi informs that his Coadjutor Archbishop, Msgr. Lucas Sirkar, succeeds him as the new Archbishop of Calcutta.[82]

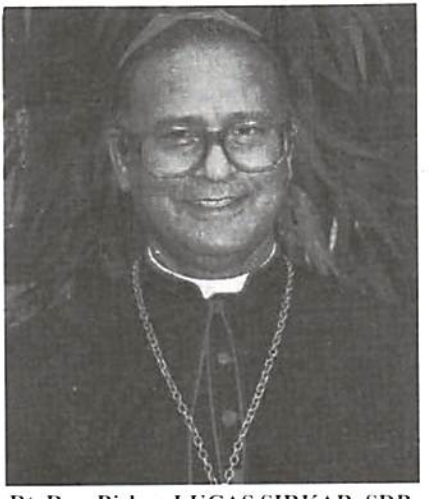
1.3.4.5 Cathedral remodelled

On Sunday 15th December 1974, on the first anniversary of Bishop Baroi's Episcopal Ordination, the Cathedral church of Krishnagar is opened for worship after the remodelling of the sanctuary according to the new liturgical instruction.

A full size marble slab altar replaces the temporary wooden

nominated bishop of Krishnagar, and on 15th December 1973 he receives the Episcopal Ordination.

During his 13 years of pastoral service, his only desire is to be a father to his people. He gives impetus to all spheres of activity in the life of the diocese. For quite sometime, Bishop Baroi suffers from heart problems, but in spite of his sickness he keeps on working right till the end. Msgr. Motilal Baroi, the fifth bishop of Krishnagar and first Bengali bishop of the diocese, passes away on Monday, 4th April 1983 at 4.15 p.m. following a massive heart attack. He is 57.



Rt. Rev. Bishop LUCAS SIRKAR, SDB
Bishop of Krishnagarh (1984–2000)

Archbishop Lucas Sirkar SDB is born on 24th January 1936 at Nalkaira village of Barisol district, now in Bangladesh. He does his early studies at Don Bosco Krishnagar from where he joins the *aspirantate* at Bandel and at Salesian College, Sonada. He makes his First Profession on 24th May 1958 at Sunnyside, Shillong. He does his philosophy studies at Salesian College, Sonada, and theological studies at Kristu Jyoti College,

[82] Cfr. SNC, 88-84/'84, front page, Provincial's letter of 15.8.'84 attached; Cfr, also "The Herald", 12–18 April 2002.

altar. The wooden platform is removed. In its place a fully decorated marble platform gives a solemn appearance to the new setting. For the tabernacle a beautifully arranged grey cotter marble altar is constructed on the left of the sanctuary. The railings are kept in order to preserve a reverence for the sanctuary.

A new feature is the mounting of the statues of the four Evangelists – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – on the platforms behind the bishop's Cathedra. The whole church is tinged with water green and the sanctuary dome is painted a sky blue colour fading into green.[83]

Bangalore. He is ordained a priest at Krishnagar Cathedral on 20th April 1968.

As a priest, he works as the Catechist at Don Bosco parish Liluah, CRS Director at Krishnagar, assistant parish priest at Bongaon and at Jokbahla, rector of Don Bosco Cossipore and New Delhi from where he is chosen as bishop. He is nominated as the bishop of Krishnagar (6th bishop and 4th Salesian bishop of Krishnagar) on 15th July 1984 and receives the Episcopal Ordination on 22nd September 1984. His motto is, "For me to live is Christ." On 1st May 2000 he is transferred as the Coadjutor Archbishop to the Metropolitan See of Kolkata. On 2nd April 2002, he succeeds Msgr. Henry D'Souza, as the new Archbishop of Kolkata. He is formally installed at the Cathedral of the Most Holy Redeemer on 25th April 2002. The bishops of the Metropolitan Province of Kolkata, along with numerous priests of the archdiocese, religious, and laity attend the ceremony.

1.3.4.6 The passing away of a zealous, and saintly missionary: Fr. Francis Convertini on 11th February 1976

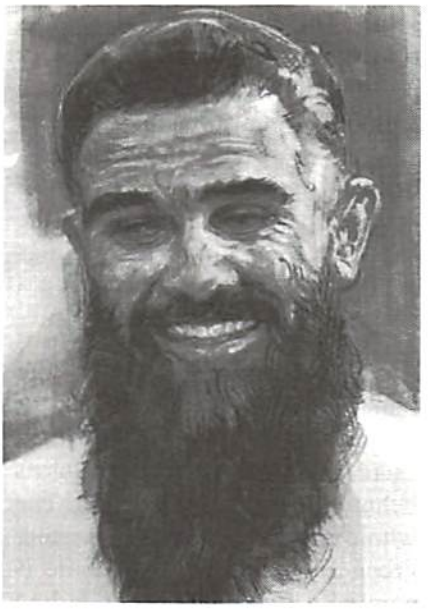
Just as 750 years ago when Francis dies at Assisi, the whole town weeps, similar is the sense of loss and sorrow of the people of Krishnagar when Fr. Francis Convertini dies on 11th February 1976, at the age of 78. Such is the sorrow of the people at the loss of a man who loves them as his own. He is a priest who belongs to all the people of Krishnagar, irrespective of religion, caste, and social status. He passes away at the Clinic of the Sisters of Mary Immaculate surrounded by his dear confreres and the sisters who have nursed him with care these past years.

On the 12th there is a constant flow of people to the Cathedral, where his body lies in state, to pay homage to their friend and father. Nearly all the priests of Krishnagar diocese and many from Calcutta are present for the funeral Mass presided over by Bishop Baroi. During the Mass Msgr. Baroi speaks of the great work done by Fr. Francis. At the funeral

[83] Cfr. SNC, 7-1/'75, 5.

Fr. Provincial wishes him goodbye in the name of all his Salesian confreres, thanks him for the work he has done in Bengal and for the inspiration he has been to all the confreres with his life of prayer and zeal for souls; and asks him to continue to pray for all from heaven.

Before his death Fr. Francis expresses his desire of remaining with his people even after his death and the people, too, would not part with his mortal remains. So he is buried in the little garden adjoining the sacristy of the Cathedral.



Rev. Fr. FRANCIS CONVERTINI
(1898-1976)

Fr. Francis is born on 20th August 1898. During World War I he serves in the army as a soldier. After the war, when he is in Turin as attendant to a Captain, God calls him to be a Salesian. Francis enters the *aspirantate* at Ivrea on 6th December 1923 at the age of 25. After four years, he comes to India to make his novitiate. He does his philosophy and theology studies in Shillong and is ordained a priest at Shillong on 29th June 1935, at the age of 37.

The missionary ideal is his dream. After ordination he is sent to Bhoborpara (Bangladesh) as Asst. Priest. His zeal for souls has no limits. He goes on foot, often without food, from place to place to contact people, administers sacraments, offers Holy Mass and preaches the Gospel. He is well known in Bhoborpara, Jaypur, Karpondanga, (all in Bangladesh now), Maliapota, Ranabondo, Gongra, Ranaghat, Chandra, Barasat, Jalalkhali, and many other places, where he works hard for the good of the people.

He comes to Krishnagar in 1950 to help as confessor in the Cathedral church, and the many religious institutions of Krishnagar. He avails himself of his free time to go around and contact his Hindu and Muslims friends in the town. Many non-Christians have the joy to have Fr. Francis in their

home and feel the warmth of his charity and friendship. Even when he is sickly and advanced in years, he goes round the town of Krishnagar visiting his friends.

In his last hours of semi-consciousness the only two clear and audible words he utters are 'Forgive me,' and 'Mother I never displeased you in life – help me now.' He passes away peacefully at 2.30 p.m. on 11th February, the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes.[84]

1.3.4.7 The Santal Mission

"Bishop Baroi's tenure of office sees the steady growth of the newly started Santal Mission in Murshidabad District. The Santals look forward to his pastoral visits, which are a source of encouragement to them. He, though not knowing the language, celebrates the liturgy for them in Santali. Our young missionaries in the Santal missions receive his encouragement and support in all their initiatives."[85]

Worthy of note are two meetings held at Bandel of all the missionaries working among the Santals, organized by Bishop Joe Rodricks of Jamshedpur and attended by several bishops, Vicar Generals, Provincials, missionaries, sisters and catechists, about 60 in all. The Salesians present are Msgr. Mathew Baroi, Fr. Provincial, Frs. Gimenez and John Topno from Azimganj. The first meeting is held on 6th and 7th August 1973. The second one is again held at Bandel from 19th to 23rd August 1974, and is attended by six bishops, about five or six major superiors, priests, sisters and catechists. The Salesians present are Bishop Baroi, Fr. Provincial, Frs. Gimenez, John Topno and Nedumattathil Scaria. Fr. Gimenez presents a paper.[86]

1.4 Cossipore

On 6th August 1971 at 9.30 p.m. Fr. George Alakulam and Bro. V. D. Varkey leave the house of Cossipore for good. The house remains closed. Is it a dead end for the Cossipore project? Subsequent events show that it is not so.

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[84] Cfr. Supplement of SNC, 15-1/'76.
[85] Cfr. Fr. Joseph Kezhakkekara's letter is to be found before SNC 75-6/'83.
[86] Cfr. Chronicle of the Province, *Provincial Archives* 10.1.3.

In the deliberations of the Provincial Chapter of 1975, the Youth Centre at Cossipore is listed as priority No. 13 in the list of proposals.[87] The Provincial Chapter 1977 recommends the following with regard to the property at Cossipore, "If negotiations for the sale of the property at Cossipore cannot be entered to with the government by the month of December 1977, let it be used as a hostel for working boys.[88] The question of Cossipore is on the agenda of the Provincial Council meeting of 21st February 1979 and of 29th and 30th March 1979.[89]

The reopening of Don Bosco Cossipore takes place after Easter in 1979.[90] For the past one-year the diocesan seminarians of Calcutta occupy the premises. On 23rd April 1979 they move out to their new seminary at Madyamgram on the Calcutta-Krishnagar Road. The Salesians move in on 24th April 1979. The boys seem to be very keen to have the Salesians back. The immediate plan is to start a non-formal training centre with the help of Don Bosco Liluah.

The yearlong stay of the diocesan minor seminarians in the house serves as a preparation to the function of 24th April. For a month, Fr. George and his assistant work hard to put the house in order. Eighteen boys of the locality attend the non-formal training course as day-scholars.[91]

1.4.1 The Club

When the Salesians arrive the club members spontaneously surrender all the keys they have in their possession and show great willingness to cooperate with Fr. George Alakulam. Earlier when the Salesians give up the direction of the Club and go away from Cossipore, the boys keep the Club going. They carry on using the house as their 'Club room'. In February 1978 they register the Club as 'Cossipore Don Bosco Club', with a governing body of its own. Shri S. K. Khanna, Special Judicial Magistrate and a very influential and rich man, is made the President of the Club.

When Fr. Sheehy, as secretary of the Don Bosco Society, and Fr. George Alakulam, as founder of the Club, call on Shri Khanna to discuss

[87] Cfr. Acts of Provincial Chapter 1975, 37.
[88] Cfr. Acts of Provincial Chapter 1977, 16.
[89] The results of these meetings are seen in SNC, 37-3/'79, and in that of 38-4/'79.
[90] Cfr. SNC 37-3/'79, 3 and SNC 38-4/'79.
[91] Cfr. SNC, 38-4/'79.

the issue of bringing the Club under our direction, he is most polite and offers all help. The fathers make it clear that as the Salesian Society is already a 'Registered Society' with a governing body of its own, they cannot accept another governing body. The Club members, especially the executive members are adamant on keeping the registration of the Club. After three weeks of negotiations fraught with many ups and downs and moments of tension and anxiety, it is finally agreed that the Club's registration number will be kept, but the Salesian Society will constitute the governing body.

1.4.2 A possible Parish

Pastoral activities too are not lacking in Cossipore. On Sundays the little Chapel is filled to capacity. About 50 Catholics live in the area around the Youth Centre. Besides, there are some 40 Protestant families living in the area that have no one to look after their spiritual welfare. They approach Fr. Alakulam to cater to their spiritual needs. They show willingness to come over to the Catholic Church.

From 16th to 18th December 1979, a leadership camp is conducted for the Club members of class ten and above by Fr. Bertie Fernandez and Fr. Robin Gomes. The camp is a big success. What the boys appreciate most is the prayer session. "Before we did not know what to pray and how to pray, now we know both."

Early January 1980 sees the arrival of three lathes from Don Bosco Liluah to the small workshop at Cossipore Youth Centre. This generates new enthusiasm and interest among the boys.[92]

On 24th January 1980, Fr. George Alakulam gives a detailed report to the Provincial Council on the life and activities of Don Bosco Cossipore Youth Centre (DBCYC). The following are the salient points:

1. Don Bosco Club: its origin and its present administration.
2. Self-employment scheme, non-formal training.
3. Night School: spoken English and adult education.
4. Boarding for about 25 boys. There is room for about 50 poor and abandoned boys.

[92] Cfr. SNC, 45-2/'80, 12–13.

5 Hostel for middle class Christian boys studying in schools and technical schools.

6. Parish: there are about 34 Catholic families. Fr. George contacts over 150 Protestant families. Two SMI sisters and two Sisters of Charity help him.

On 24th February 1980, Fr. L. Colussi, the Vice-Provincial, gives to the Council a report that he has prepared. He mentions practically the same points mentioned by Fr. George in the previous report: "It is our new presence in Calcutta in favour of the poorest and most abandoned boys of Calcutta, especially of the Cossipore area."

However, notwithstanding these excellent reports, difficulties and problems continue to hamper the work in Cossipore. On 4th March 1982, Fr. Sheehy, present at the Council meeting, brings forth another problem. The confreres are experiencing grave difficulties with regard to the running of the non-formal training in the mechanical line. The boys undergoing it are most irresponsible and troublesome. The Council, however, decides not to change its policy with regard to the non-formal training. Nay, in the meeting of 26th August 1982, the Council grants the request to extend the building

Fr. Sheehy is again invited to the Provincial Council meeting of 16th June 1983, and here he presents a report by the community of Cossipore on the state of affairs in the place. From the very beginning in 1979, the confreres are experiencing considerable difficulties from the local people by way of trespassing and unjust demands. "We have not been able to carry out any real worthwhile apostolic work there."

After studying the report made by the community of Don Bosco Cossipore, in its meeting of 21st July 1983, the Provincial Council feels that we cannot continue in Cossipore under the prevailing circumstances. We should therefore study the possibility of disposing of the present property. Let the Province be informed of the present situation in Cossipore.

Fr. Thomas Panakezham, present at the meeting of the Council of 8th August 1983, agrees with the decision of the Council to dispose off the property. On 17th November 1983, M. B. Pal, the agent for the buyers, informs the Provincial Council that they are prepared to buy the entire property as we have suggested, for 22 lakhs. They are able to pay in two

instalments. The immediate disposal of the property may pose some problem due to the existence of the self-employment project in our premises. Efforts are made to wind up the project as soon as possible.

The confreres of Don Bosco Cossipore transport by bus the valuables of the house to the Provincial House and come away from there at midnight of 26th January 1984.[93] A seven page detailed report prepared by Fr. Sheehy tells us about the various events that lead to the closure.[94] The minutes of the Provincial Council of 15th November 1984 give us the last bit of news about the centre. Mr. Paul, the purchaser of our property at Cossipore has still to pay back the bulk of money. The situation at Cossipore is not peaceful yet, hence the delay in getting our dues.

The sale of Cossipore property dominates the discussions of the Provincial Council meeting of 28th November 1985, 10th and 11th April 1986, and 10th July 1986. Fr. Sheehy presents reports at these meetings. Again on 22nd November 1990, Fr. Sheehy reports to the Council and the minutes read: "Fr. Sheehy comes in to report that the previous person negotiating the sale of land has withdrawn, and another person representing a Housing Society has agreed to conclude the same for the sum of Rs. 20.5 lakhs that would come to the Province after deducting all the expenses to be met in the process. Fr. Sheehy asks if the Province would be willing to accept these terms although the price offered is Rs.7 lakhs less than what is agreed with the previous negotiator. The Council expresses its willingness, provided the whole procedure can be concluded within a year. The Province is eager to see the conclusion of such a long drawn business that has caused much pain and worry."

1.5 Bandel

Two important events take place in Bandel: the establishment of a new Don Bosco School, and the division of the Bandel community into two: the Seminary community, and the Shrine community to attend to the Shrine, the Retreat House, and St. John's High School.

1.5.1 The New Don Bosco School

The idea of opening the school to outsiders is discussed for the first time in the Provincial Council meeting of 14th June 1973, but no decision is made.

[93] Cfr. SNC, 81-1/'84, 3.
[94] The report is attached to SNC, 82-2/'84.

On 25th July 1974 Fr. Provincial and his Council discuss again about the new school at Bandel. The Rotary Club of Chandarnagore expresses the desire to have an English medium school at Bandel. They would supply or pay for the land and the building. It is suggested to have this school in the playground in front of the Shrine. Many feel it should be on a separate plot close to the Bandel Church. This topic is to be discussed at the rectors and parish priests' meeting. The rector of Bandel in the meantime is asked to look for a suitable site.

In the evening of 21st November 1974, Fr. Provincial accepts an invitation by the President of the Rotary Club of Chandarnagore to be present at one of their meetings with members of the Rotary Club of Hoogly and Serampore. Fr. A. Doro and Fr. Mathew Manianchira accompany him. The Rotary Club members ask Fr. Provincial what are his suggestions with regard to the proposed school. Fr. Provincial replies that the school would be in Bandel on our own land, it would be from class V onwards for about six or seven hundred boys. Its cost would be around 12 lakhs of rupees, inclusive of building, equipment, furniture, etc.

The Club members raise some points, such as, that the name of the Rotary Club be associated with the name of the school, that the school should also help the poor people who cannot afford the full fees, that a number of 'free places' be allotted to the three Rotary Clubs for which scholarships should be established, that the school be built up in stages as need arises. They ask also whether the Salesians would also contribute financially, to which the answer is given that this point has not come in previous discussions, as it was clear that the financial burden would be all on the Rotary Club. The Salesians will contribute the land.[95]

The location of the school is discussed at length in the rectors and parish priests' meeting and in the Provincial Council. The last proposition is to have it built in a corner of the Seminary farm on the road to Dunlop.[96]

The Provincial Council discusses again the problem of Bandel *aspirantate* in its meeting of 19th February 1976. It is decided that the rectors of Bandel, Liluah and Park Circus and a few others meet to discuss and find out what course to follow. It may be necessary to start classes XI and XII (or junior College) in Bandel, Liluah and Park Circus.

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[95] Cfr. Chronicle of the Province; *Provincial Archives* B.10.1.3.
[96] Cfr. SNC, 5/'74, 2.

Fr. Paul Padamattumel, rector of Bandel, raises once again the problem of a new school at Bandel at the meeting of the Provincial Council of 13th August 1977. Besides the Provincial Council members, present at this meeting are eight other confreres, among whom are Fr. Stroscio, Fr. Sheehy, and Fr. A. J. Sebastian Alancheril. Fr. Paul speaks of the need of having a new school, which is opened also to the public. Dunlop and Kesharam come forward with financial help.[97] There follows a discussion on finance, conditions, and location of the school. If the contribution of Dunlop and Kesharam is not sufficient for the whole project, we will have to approach other interested firms for help. We must lay down our policy rather than ask them what they expect from us:

- Their representative would be in the Managing Committee.
- Their children, including the children of employees and their dependence in the place, will have preference, provided they fulfill the conditions.
- They help to build, but we remain the owners and run the school according to government rule and our method.

As regards the location, after a prolonged discussion, the final decision is to have the school erected in the farmland as mentioned above. The name of the present school may have to be changed to Don Bosco School. At this stage it is considered better to remain with the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education rather than to change to ICSC.

The Provincial Council meetings of 8th September 1977 and of 6th October 1977, consider once again and finalize the new school project. At the meeting of 6th November 1977, after listening to the proposal of the House Council of Bandel, Fr. Sheehy reads out the agreement prepared by him. After some discussion, the Council agrees to accept the finance offered by Dunlop (Rs. 5 lakhs) and go ahead with the project. If no further help comes from them the Province will put in the balance needed. It is agreed to open the new school to outside boys from 1978, by starting two sections of class V with 40 boys each. The required documents (site-plan, project, application by the House Council, estimate, and report of the Provincial Council) are to be prepared and sent to Rome as soon as possible.

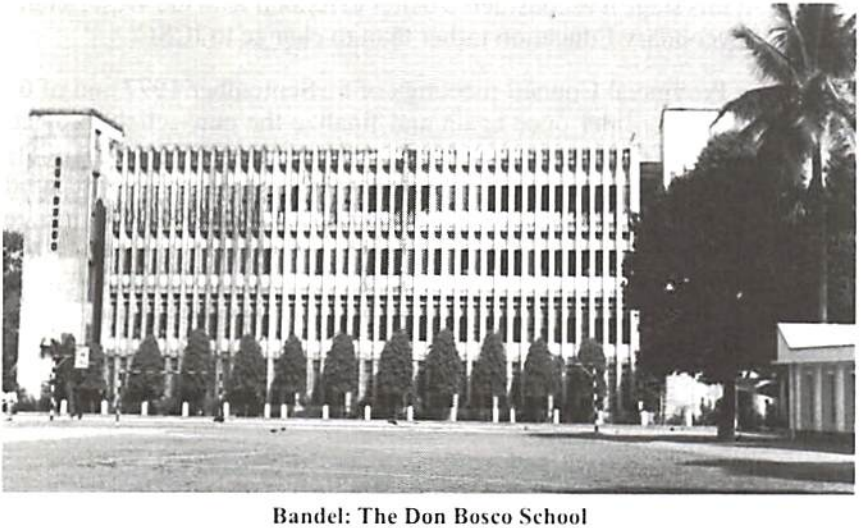
In the morning of 20th July 1978, before the meeting of rectors and parish priests, in the presence of all rectors and priests of the Bandel

[97] At this meeting no mention is made of the Rotary Clubs, from which we may conclude that that project did not take off.

community and of the boys, Fr. Provincial blesses the foundation stone of the new school building on the Northeast corner of the compound.[98]

On 2nd October 1978 Fr. Sheehy explains to the Provincial Council how we have gone through the process of getting the school at Bandel affiliated to the Indian Council in Delhi. There should be no difficulty. Due to the floods the scheduled inspection of the school could not take place. Boys of class VIII should start preparing for the ICSE stream, finish class X in 1980, and do class XI and XII in 1981 and 1982.

By April 1979, the work on the ground floor of the new school building is over.[99] On 11th June 1979, the cherished dream of many Salesians and not a few people of the locality is materialized. Our Lady's School, Bandel, is shifted to the new Don Bosco School building.[100] The question of classes XI and XII occupies the Provincial Council in two of its meetings. In the meeting of 29th and 30th March 1979, there is a feeling that we should not lose the Board's recognition and since there is no news after the inspection, we should approach the Council to let Bandel have classes XI and XII only in Arts stream as a branch or section of Don Bosco School, Liluah. In the meeting of 20th and 21st July 1979, after much discussion in other fora, like the meeting of the Headmasters of our schools, the Provincial Council decides that Bandel should go in for ICSE and ISE.



Bandel: The Don Bosco School

[98] Cfr. Chronicle of Province, *Provincial Archives*, B.10.1.3.
[99] Cfr. SNC, 38-4/'79, 4.
[100] Cfr. SNC, 38-5/'79, 2.

1.5.2 Division of the Bandel community

On 6th August 1983, the Provincial Council is faced with a problem, which though not new, becomes more pressing as a result of the Provincial's Canonical Visitation: the problem of the complexity of the Bandel community. Various possibilities to cater to the local boys in a more congenial atmosphere are discussed. The possibility of having another house for the smaller boys is thought of, but greater would be the difficulty of having a school approved for the purpose. Sending them to other Bengali medium schools, even St. John's School, is not considered practical. Finally, it is agreed that at this moment a serious thought should be given to dividing the Bandel house into two communities: Shrine, Retreat House, and St. John's school to form one community, and Don Bosco School and the *aspirantate* to form the other community.

On 1st September 1983 the Council agrees that the Provincial would meet the Bandel community on 2nd September, after which the Councillors could visit Bandel to assess the situation there and work out the possibility and modality of the division.

The final draft containing the terms for the division of the community of Bandel is read and commented upon in the Council meeting of 17th November 1983. Time is spent in clarifying the financial terms affecting the two communities, and about the ownership of the plot of land in front of the Fatima Shrine. Fr. Diamond, the Rector, makes a few more suggestions..

The new Shrine community of Bandel comes into existence with the decision by the Provincial Council in the meeting of 1st December 1983. Fr. A. J. Kuriakose Adicherayil is proposed as its Superior. A number of adjustments are studied in the agreement affecting the two communities. The Council restates in no ambiguous terms that both communities shall render all possible mutual collaboration compatible with the specific nature and needs of the said two communities, as done hitherto.

1.6 Delhi: A New Don Bosco High School

The idea of having a highschool in Delhi is not new. Already in January 1973, the Provincial, Fr. Lo Groi, speaking to his Council mentions a suggestion made to have a highschool in Delhi. In the meeting of 18th January 1973, it is suggested that the House Council should study all

possibilities, which the Provincial Council would consider and take decisions accordingly.

The school in Delhi is on the agenda for the Provincial Council meeting of 5th December 1979. It is necessitated by a letter from Fr. B. Diamond, rector of the technical school at Okhla, asking for permission to start classes I–VI in 1980. "Should we start or nor?" the Provincial asks the Council members. "For this work we need the permission from Rome. If we start, we have to send someone immediately to New Delhi to get things moving." In this connection the name of Bro. Maurice Nicholson is mentioned.

Preparations are afoot to start a new school and from 5th January Brother Maurice is already in New Delhi to look after the initial work.[101] On 24th January 1980 the Provincial Council considers the report from Delhi and approves the suggestion to partition the assembly hall with a suitable structure in order to obtain the required classrooms. Similarly the veranda behind the boys' refectory will also be partitioned for classrooms.[102]

While work goes on for the new school in Okhla, efforts are multiplied to find a suitable place in Delhi for the school. The Delhi confreres are in search of a plot of land.[103] On 7th October an application is presented to the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) for the allotment of land in Sheikh Sarai for the construction of Don Bosco School. The DDA requests the school authorities to get the case sponsored by the Directory of Education, Delhi Administration. On 9th December 1980, the Inspection Committee of the Central Board of Secondary Education inspects the school for the approval of the Middle School Syllabus. The Inspection goes off successfully.[104] In February 1981, the Don Bosco School Delhi has received the much-desired 'recognition' and has been affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education.[105]

The school is formally inaugurated on 9th April 1980 with classes from Nursery to VI. At that time the school has 1100 children from Nursery

[101] SNC, 44-1/'80, 2.
[102] Cfr. SNC, 45-2/'80, 11–12. At page 14–15 of the same issue of SNC, Bro. Maurice gives news about the new School.
[103] Cfr. Provincial Council meeting of 8.8.'80, *Provincial Archives* B.8.2.2.
[104] Cfr. SNC, 54-1/'81, 8.
[105] Cfr. SNC, 55-2/'81, 3.

to class VII. The nursery has 4 sections, classes 1–3 have three sections each, classes 4 and 5 have two each, and classes 6 to 7 have one section each. It employs 32 teachers. The school is accommodated in 14 tents in the school compound and 12 other classrooms are adjusted in the corridors and open halls of the technical school.[106]

The school has already secured composite affiliation (10+2) to the Central Board of Delhi. The hope of securing land for the school after obtaining the affiliation has not materialized. Later it is realized that it is essential to get permission from the DDA to open a school in Delhi. With the recommendation of the Director of DDA, the application is forwarded to the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi for his approval. With this approval it will be possible to purchase land from the DDA. The school authorities have in mind a plot or two, particularly a beautifully located plot of land in the Greater Kailash area of Delhi.

The DDA allots a plot of four acres of land for the 'Tent School in Delhi'. The land is at Greater Kailash II, in the Southern part of Delhi.[107] In the Provincial Council meeting of 26th August 1982, Fr. Antony Thaiparambil, rector of Delhi, asks and obtains permission to go ahead with the purchase of 6 acres of land at Greater Kailash for Rs. 18 lakhs. This is the land the Salesians are eagerly waiting to buy for a number of years for the English medium school at Delhi.

On 25th March 1983 The Provincial, Joseph Kezhakkekara, lays the foundation stone for a Don Bosco School at Kalkaji, New Delhi, before a crowd of boys, teachers, parents, civil authorities and Salesians. The stone is blessed by Dr. Angelo Fernandez, Archbishop of Delhi on 25th March 1983, at a ceremony marking the opening of the Holy Year of Redemption.[108]

The transfer of the Don Bosco English medium school from Okhla to greater Kailash II is indeed a memorable event as it is the fulfilment of a long-awaited dream. Thousands of parents as well as Don Bosco lads wait for this day with joy and hope, and it becomes a reality on 10th September 1984. Many a child bid farewell to their nomadic abode in Okhla with tearful eyes. The departure is obviously a painful sight. Boys

[106] SNC, 64-2/'82, 6.
[107] Cfr. SNC, 69-7/'82. 3.
[108] Cfr. SNC, 74-4/'83, 16.

can be seen wishing good-bye to the trees, stones, and all they hold dear. On reaching the promised land their joy is boundless.



Alaknanda (Delhi): The Don Bosco School (front view)

The inaugural function is held on 14th September. The day starts with a short prayer service followed by a colourful fancy-dress competition for the primary school section, in which 399 children participate. The next day Fr. Provincial blesses the building. A solemn prayer service marks the opening of the day's events. The senior boys put up a splendid show with their fancy-dress competition. In their speeches, Fr. Provincial and Fr. Paul Padamattumel, the rector of the new school, give due recognition to the marvelous work accomplished and still being done by Bro. Isaac and his collaborators. With its motto EVER MORE and BETTER EVER, DB School Alaknanda, Delhi, begins its ascent to the horizons of knowledge, truth and love.[109]

1.7 Burma

Fr. N. Lo Groi, the new Provincial, makes his first visit to the confreres in Burma from the 7th to the 13th May 1973. From the 10th to the 13th he is at Anisakan, where he finds the confreres in Retreat. He meets all of them individually, speaks to them as a group and has some meetings, with them.[110]

[109] Cfr. SNC, 90-10/'84, 8.
[110] Cfr. Chronicle of the Province, *Provincial Archives* B.10.1.3.

On 14th June 1973 he gives a report to the Provincial Council on his visit to Burma. He has been at Rangoon, Mandalay and Anisakan and has met all the confreres. He could not go to the new mission station, Namtu, as this is on the border. There is very good spirit among the confreres, notwithstanding their various and serious difficulties. The political situation is bad. Relations with the hierarchy and secular Clergy are not so encouraging, due to misunderstandings. The closure of the *aspirantate* and of the novitiate is another most serious cause of discouragement to the confreres. Economically, the houses are very poor. Gift parcels of clothes and stationery items from India will be much appreciated. They could be sent to different names.

Towards the end of 1973 and in the beginning of 1974, there is a lot of communication between Fr. Provincial and Fr. B. Tohill with regard to the condition of the confreres in Burma. Fr. Provincial tells Fr. Tohill how discouraged the confreres feel for not being able to have aspirants and novices. "It is the uncertainty about their future that depresses them. They see other religious Congregations of men and women going ahead, and they do not see why they cannot do the same."[111] Again in answer to Fr. Tohill's letter of 21st January 1974, Fr. Provincial does not hide that the contents of his letter cause disappointment and have a negative impact on the confreres. He appreciates Fr. Tohill's concern for the formation of the young confreres, but he also points out that the Provincial and his Council are equally concerned about the young confreres, and so are also the leading confreres in Burma. He feels that more trust could be given to the Burmese confreres.[112] But soon another letter of Rev. Fr. Tohill comes, which seems capable of breaking the present impasse.

On 29th February 1974 Fr. Tohill, in the name of the Rector Major, Fr. A. Ricceri, writes of a possible commitment in Burma. The Rector Major wishes to know what answer to give to the requests of the PIME fathers, possibly by going to meet the confreres 'in loco'.[113]

On 13th March 1974 Fr. Tohill replies to the letter of Fr. Provincial dated 27th February. He expresses regret about the letter he wrote on 21st

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[111] Cfr. Letter of 16.11.1973, *Provincial Archives*, A.12.2.

[112] Letter of 27.2.'74, *Provincial Archives*, A.12.2.

[113] Fr. Tohill 'confidentially' sends to the Provincial some letters of some PIME fathers. On 16.11.'73, Fr. Filippazzi, Regional PIME, writes to the Bishop of Keng-Tung that the Salesians should take up Lashio. On 13.10.'73 Fr. Calvani writes also to his Bishop regarding Lashio. This is not the first time that the question of our taking over Lashio is made to us. (Cfr. Ch. X, 400; cfr. *Provincial Archives,* B.12.2).

January, which has had a disconcerting effect on us and probably caused frustration to the confreres. He says that from now on Fr. Williams will deal with this matter. With regard to the request of the PIME fathers, Fr. Tohill seems to be well disposed towards accepting Lashio.

On 5th May 1974 Fr. Provincial writes to Fr. Ricceri mentioning that he will visit the confreres in Burma soon and that there he will study together with them the problem of Lashio, as asked by Fr. Tohill in his letter in the name of the Rector Major.

Fr. Provincial leaves for Rangoon on 30th April 1974 and visits the confreres from 1st to 9th May. Till 6th morning he is in Anisakan, where he is able to meet all the confreres, except Fr. Joachim Ye Maung who is in Namtu and could not be contacted in time. The main point under discussion during these days is whether to accept the Mission of Lashio, which the Church is willing to entrust to the Salesians. The Provincial first asks each confrere privately and then all are asked to express their opinion by a secret ballot, after a thorough discussion introduced by Fr. Jocelyn Madden, the parish priest of Namtu. The Provincial asks him to give the confreres a clear picture of the religious, social, economic, and political condition of Lashio District.

In both cases, the confreres except one agree to accept the Lashio Mission. They, however, want to keep both the parishes of Mandalay and Thyngangyun, and Anisakan for the *aspirantate*. The two Archbishops don't want us to be in Rangoon or Mandalay, and they are very clear about this. The confreres are also begging to be allowed to recruit vocations. Fr. Provincial assures them that he will send a detailed and positive report of his visit to the Rector Major.

On 16th June 1974 Fr. Provincial sends the Rector Major a detailed and positive report of his visit to Burma and the readiness of all the confreres to accept the Mission of Lashio. They give a personal and enlightened answer to the question put to them by the Provincial on behalf of the Rector Major. Their only plea is to be allowed to recruit vocations and have aspirants and novices. The Provincial too adds his own personal appeal to the Rector Major and to the superiors on behalf of the Burmese confreres.[114]

[114] Cfr. *Provincial Archives*, A.1.3.3.

On 20th June 1974 the Provincial also gives a detailed report of this visit to the Provincial Council. On the question whether we should keep the two parishes of Mandalay and Thyngangyun, Fr. Provincial expresses to the confreres the difficulty of keeping these two parishes, if we accept the Mission of Lashio. At the present moment we have too few priests to be able to man the new parishes, plus the two parishes of Mandalay and Rangoon and the formation house of Anisakan, but no decision is taken, as the last word is of the superiors in Rome.

At the meeting of 20th June 1974 the Provincial Council unanimously agrees with the proposal of the Provincial to appoint Fr. Jocelyn Madden as the Provincial Delegate. Fr. Ahkee has asked to be relieved of this responsibility and the majority of the confreres suggest Fr. Jocelyn to replace Fr. Ahkee.

On 1st July 1974 Msgr. E. Cassidy, the Pro-Nuncio of Bangladesh and the Apostolic Delegate of Burma, comes to Calcutta to discuss matters relating to the confreres in Burma. He stays with us for three days. Fr. Provincial has the opportunity of meeting him privately several times and finds him always kind and helpful. He knows the Salesians for many years and holds them in great esteem. The main purpose of his visit is to know whether the confreres of Burma are ready to accept a new mission territory as a separate ecclesiastical unit, the District of Lashio among the Kachins. The Provincial gives him good hopes and discusses with him the report he has sent previously to the Rector Major, after his visit to Burma in May 1974.

About the visit of Msgr. E. Cassidy, the Provincial gives a report to his Council on 27th July 1974. The Pro-Nuncio would propose to the Congregation of the Evangelization of Peoples to make the District of Lashio an independent unit – even a diocese – and would like the fathers there to give up the parishes of Rangoon and Mandalay. At this same meeting of the Council Fr. Provincial reads a letter of Fr. Jocelyn Madden and the letter of the bishop of Mandalay, in which he asks us to give back the parish of Mandalay.

The General Council studies the Provincial's report to the Rector Major and Fr. Tohill sends a lengthy reply to it on behalf of the Council on 9th August 1974.[115] Here is an excerpt from that letter: "You will be glad

[115] SNC 4/'74, 3.

to hear that the Council has decided to let you proceed as you have requested, and open again the *aspirantate* at Anisakan according to the proposals on page 4 of your report of 16th May 1974. Some problems and difficulties could be anticipated regarding the formation of the aspirants and of the future Salesians in such a difficult situation as that of Burma, but we feel that the Provincial and his Council, together with the Delegate and the confreres in Burma, will shoulder their responsibility in the matter so that the best formation possible in the circumstances will be given those who will carry the burden and the salesian message of the Congregation in Burma."[116]

In the Provincial Council meeting of 19th September 1974, Fr. Provincial reads a letter from Fr. Tohill saying that the Rector Major has been officially asked by the Sacred Congregation of the Evangelization of Peoples, whether the Salesians can take up the proposed new Ecclesiastical Unit of Lashio. On 27th February 1975, Fr. Provincial speaks to the Council about another letter from Fr. Tohill in which he writes that the Holy See is considering making Lashio an independent Ecclesiastical Unit – a diocese or a Prefecture Apostolic.[117]

From 7th to 12th May 1975 Fr. Provincial is again in Burma to visit the confreres. He finds all enthusiastic about their work in the parishes of Namtu, Kutkai, and Kyakme. On 15th May1975 Fr. Provincial writes to Rev. Fr. Tohill about this last visit to Burma. "The confreres are doing well, are happy and working with a sense of purpose. They are beginning to work for vocations." In this letter Fr. Provincial writes about the need of a house in Rangoon for the students of theology, who will be attending the Major Seminary. It is urgent to purchase Dr. Tin's house costing US $50,000. On 30th June 1975, the Rector Major gives his n*ihil obstat* to the acquisition of a house in Rangoon for the theology students.[118] From a letter of Fr. Tohill, read to the Provincial Council on 10th July 1975, we come to know that the suggestion to buy a house in Rangoon for $ 50,000 has been approved by the superiors.[119]

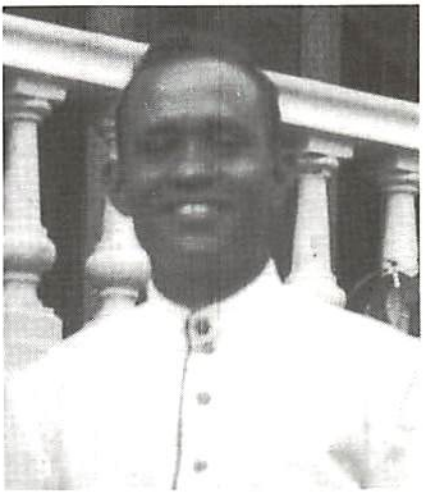
On 9th April 1976 Msgr. E. Cassidy, the Apostolic Delegate of Burma, installs Msgr. Jocelyn Madden as Prefect Apostolic of Lashio. The same

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[116] Cfr. *Provincial Archives*, A.12.2.
[117] For the Letters of Fr. Tohill, Cfr. *Provincial Archives*, A.12.2.
[118] Cfr. *Provincial Archives*, A.1.3.3.
[119] Cfr. *Provincial Archives*, A.12.2.

day he is ordaining two of our Deacons, Bro. Maung Bo Charles and Bro. Sein Myint Edward Gilbert. Through his good offices, Msgr. Cassidy settles the disagreement that has arisen between Msgr. J. Madden and the Archbishop of Rangoon with regard to the buying of the house in Rangoon.[120]

Msgr. Jocelyn gives us some news about the progress of our work in Burma. He reports that he has seven brothers in the Major Seminary, five diocesans and two Salesians. He hopes to have two more aspirants in the coming year. On 18th April 1977, Fr. Malcolm comes down from Anisakan to take possession of the villa bought the previous year for housing our students of philosophy. Our two pre-novices come down on 1st May. The students are attending the Major Seminary at Rangoon. Fr. Malcom is the professor of ontology and psychology in the same seminary. Besides studies, the little community is busy setting up the new house, especially the Chapel.[121]



Msgr. JOCELYN MADDEN, SDB
Prefect Apostolic of Lashio (Myanmar)
(1976–1986)

Fr. John Jocelyn Madden is born on 23.5.1934 in Burma, makes his *aspirantate* at Sonada from 1955 to 1957, makes his first profession on 24.5.1958 at Sunnyside (Shillong), is ordained a priest on 18.3.1967. The Prefecture Apostolic of Lashio is erected in December 1975 and Fr. Jocelyn is made Prefect Apostolic on 9.4.1976. He is Prefect Apostolic of Lashio for 10 years. He dies at Pert (Australia) on 19.2.1987, aged 53.

From 6th to 9th August 1977, Fr. Provincial visits the confreres in Burma. He meets all the confreres, postulants and aspirants. On 12th August 1977, Fr. Provincial sends a report of his visit to Fr. B. Tohill, and on 13th August 1977 he gives a report to the Provincial Council, in which several confreres are also present:

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[120] Cfr. Provincial Council Minutes of 19.2.'76, *Provincial Archives* B.8.2.2; Cfr. also Chronicles of the Province, 29.3.'76, Provincial Archives, B.10.1.3; and SNC 16-2/'76, 3.

[121] Cfr. SNC, 24-3/'77, 11.

Fr. R. Stroscio, Fr. P.J. Sheehy, Fr. Schilder,[122] Fr. Jim Gimenez, and others. We have in Burma 6 parishes: Lashio, Namtu, Loikam, Kutkai, Kyaume, Pong Pou, 24 aspirants, 3 postulants, two more postulants in Rangoon with Fr. Malcom. Their health is good, the spirit is high, and all are enthusiastic. Financially they have just what is sufficient. The superiors do help, and also Fr. Bordin from USA, and Fr. Thomas D'Souza from Australia.[123]



Anisakan:
1. Novitiate and philosophers' chapel (St. Joseph's)
2. Philosophate building
3. The new Novitiate building completed in 2003

[122] Fr. John Schilder is born at Volendam (Holland) on 13.6.1907, is aspirant at Ivrea (Italy) from 1926 to 1929, reaches Bombay on 23.12.1929, makes his profession on 1.6.1931, is ordained a priest on 5.11.1938. He has great love for young people, is interested in the education of the poor boys by getting sponsorships from Holland. Has a great love for Mary. "Ave Maria" is his Motto at Ordination, most regular in reciting the Rosary, especially in his last years. Very cheerful and spreading joy in the community. As a priest he works for a short time in DB Krishnagar, then as a missionary in Khulna, parish priest at Ranabondo for 18 years. He works also at Behrampore as P.P., he is Prior of Bandel in 1968, and Asst. P.P. at Ragabpur, in 1975 he is at the Provincial house. He dies at the age of 76 at Provincial House on 30 July 1983.

[123] Fr. Thomas D'Souza leaves Burma for Australia in January 1975.

The last visit of Fr. Lo Groi to the confreres of Burma is from 9th to 14th June 1978. He spends four and a half days at Anisakan. During these days he makes the Visitation of the Delegation and briefs the confreres on GC21. On the whole the confreres are very enthusiastic and zealous about their work, attached to Don Bosco, and faithful to their religious commitment. In Anisakan there are 24 aspirants, and five students of philosophy are in Rangoon attending the Major Seminary, two are doing the second year of philosophy and three the first year. When the five of them will have finished philosophy, they will make their novitiate in 1980.[124]

On 29th March1980 Fr Provincial, Fr. K. A. Joseph Kezhakkekara, back from Burma, in the goodnight at Provincial House shares news about Burma. He leaves for Burma on March 22nd, finds the confreres very enthusiastic and fervent, but with a lot of difficulties and working constantly in fear. Msgr. Jocelyn is just back from a study trip to Italy. He is in charge of the Liturgical Commission in Burma. In Anisakan we have 27 aspirants who will do their matriculation before the novitiate. There is another apostolic school in Kyakme for the Prefecture Apostolic. On the following year the first diocesan priest will be ordained. We hope to start the novitiate in May with 4 novices and 5 pre-novices. Fr. Ambrose Malcom is asked to teach Dogma in the Major Seminary. Other religious in Burma look at the Salesians for inspiration and leadership.[125] Eventually the novitiate starts on 20th June with 4 novices.[126]

The growth of the Salesians in Burma up to 1984 can be seen from the following data:

- On 10.11.1980 Fr. Bertie Fernandez, visiting the confreres in Burma on his way back from Manila, reports to the Provincial Council: confreres 13, novices 4, pre-novices 7, one formation house.
- On 23-24.3.1981, the Provincial briefing the Council: in Burma now we have two novitiates, one in Anisakan with Msgr. Jocelyn, and one in Rangoon with Fr. Joachim Ye Maung.

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[124] Cfr. Provincial Council Meeting of 21.6.1978, *Provincial Archives* B.8.2.2; Chronicle of the Province, 9-14/6/'78 *Provincial Archives* B.10.1.3; SNC 31-3/'78, 17.
[125] Cfr. SNC, 47-7/'80, 19.
[126] Cfr. Minutes of the Council Meeting of 24.7.1980, *Provincial Archives* B.8.2.2.

- On 21.6.1981 three make the first profession at Rangoon. Now there are 16 Salesians and 6 novices in the 2nd batch.
- On 24.9.1981 Fr. Provincial reports to the Council on his visit to Burma: in the Delegation there are: 16 Salesians (13+3 newly professed), 6 novices, 4 clerical novices and two Salesian Brother novices. There is urgent need to build at Dubern Road, Rangoon, for students attending the Major Seminary. In Lashio there are 3 diocesan priests, financially poor.
- On 29.10.1981, the Provincial informs the Council of the situation in Burma. Msgr. Jocelyn reports a decision of the Bishops' Conference of Burma to request religious not to have ties outside the Country. Our confreres depend on us for very important decisions. What to do in the circumstances? To ask Rome to make Burma an independent unit?
- On 29.12.1981: 6 novices will make their first profession at Anisakan. The number of Salesians will be 22: 12 priests, 3 brothers, and 7 clerics.
- On 29.4.1982 the Provincial tells the Council of the problems and possibilities in Burma. We cannot have our own *studentate* of philosophy. Our brothers must attend the Major Seminary. Perpetual profession will not be made before 6 years of temporary vows. How much autonomy can they have? Now we control only admissions to novitiate, professions, and Orders, plus we conduct the annual canonical Visitation. The office of Delegate and Prefect Apostolic can be separated.
- On 23.10.1982 the Provincial Council decides to separate the Office of the Delegate from that of the Prefect Apostolic. In the Council meeting of 14.11.1982, Fr. Joachim Ye Maung, the present novice master, seems to be the right candidate for the office of Delegate.
- On 8.12.1983 two confreres make their first profession: Brother Joseph Dass and Brother John Pwe Aung, and 9 novices start the novitiate.[127]
- In the meeting of the Provincial Council on 26–27 September 1984, the Vice-Provincial reports to the Council after his recent visit to Burma: Despite difficulties we have 50 aspirants, 8 novices at Anisakan and 3 students of theology at Rangoon. There is the possibility of two confreres,

[127] Cfr. SNC, 81-1/1984.

Fr. Joachim Ye Maung and Fr. Charles Bo coming out of Burma for six months to one year, Fr. Joachim to visit Europe and Fr. Charles Bo to have some short course in India.

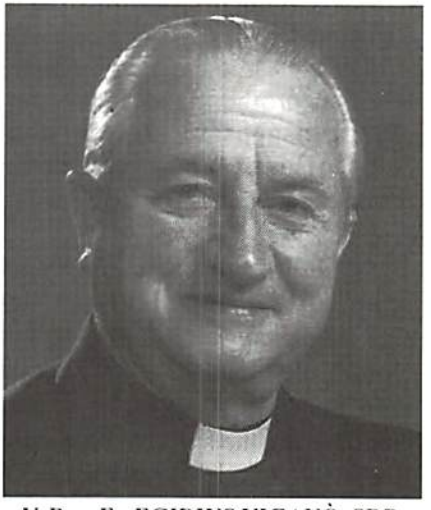
2. Important events in the years 1973–1984

2.1 The Rector Major, Fr. Egidius Viganò, visits Calcutta Province

The editor of the Newsletter of the Province prepares the confreres to receive the Rector Major by presenting him as "A Man of Optimism": 'Fr. Viganò's visit will certainly generate a new enthusiasm and optimism, for he himself seems to possess an inexhaustible reserve of optimism and hope, despite the difficult time in which we live."[128] The author of the editorial bases his above statement on some quotes from Fr. Viganò's letters to the Congregation in 'Acts of the Superior Council'.[129]

In the meeting of the Provincial Council of 28th June 1979, Fr. Provincial broaches the topic of Fr. Rector Major's visit to India and in particular to the Province of Calcutta. It is a Special Issue (SI) of the Newsletter, introduced by Rev. Fr. Provincial, which "brings to the confreres the words of the Rector Major," as he addresses different groups while visiting the Province.[130]

Fr. Viganò arrives in Bombay on 27th September 1979. On 3rd September he is in Bangalore and on 1st October he meets the 'All India Formation Personnel'. On 7th October he reaches Calcutta. In the morning of



V. Rev. Fr. EGIDIUS VIGANÒ, SDB
Rector Major (1977–1995)

Fr. Egidius Viganò is born on 26.7.1920 at Sondrio, (Italy), makes his First Profession on 01.9.1936, and does his philosopy at Rebaudengo Institute in Turin. Invited by Fr. Peter Berruti he reaches Chile on

[128] Cfr. SNC, 41-7/'79, in its Editorial, 4–5.
[129] Acts of the Superior Council, 289, 290, 292, 293.
[130] Cfr. SNC, 42-8/'79, the *Special Issue* (SI), 83 pages, with 5 pages of photos in black and white.

8th October he meets all the rectors of the Province and speaks to them on "The Rector: Animator of the community."[131] In the afternoon of the 8th, Fr. Viganò calls on Cardinal Picachy. In the evening all the parish priests and all those who work in the Missions, get a chance to meet the Rector Major. To them the Rector Major speaks on "The Congregation there and now."[132]

The following morning the Rector Major celebrates Mass in Don Bosco, Tengra. In the homily he deals with promotion of the Salesian Brother's vocation. At 9.30 of the same day he meets the Salesian brothers and speaks on "the indispensable role of the Salesian Brother"[133] Later he leaves for Bagdogra on his way to Sonada.

28.12.1939. From 1943 to 1948 he frequents the Theology Faculty of the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile and crowns his studies with a doctorate in Theology. He is ordained a priest in May 1947. In 1949 he is sent as Councillor and Teacher to the International Theological Studentate at La Cisternas, later transferred to La Canas. He is made rector there in 1962.

He is an expert at the Vatican Council II. For 20 years he is a professor in the Theology Faculty of the Catholic University in Chile. In 1967 he is proposed as the pro-rector of the University itself. On 13.1.1968 he is made Provincial of the Chilean Province. On 9.12.1971 he is elected Councillor General for Formation at the Special General Chapter (SGC XX). On 15.12.1977 the XXI General Chapter elects him as Rector Major. He is re-elected in the General Chapters of 1984 and 1990. Suffering, a veritable Via Crucis, marks the last year of the Rector Major's life. He dies on 23.6.1995 and is buried at the Catacombs of St. Callistus alongside Fr. Luigi Ricceri.

On 10th the Rector Major speaks to the Salesian College community in his homily during Mass. He dwells on two watchwords for students: study and piety. In the morning both the Rector Major and Fr. Giovenale Dho,[134] the Councillor for Formation, meet the staff and the students separately. Speaking to the staff the Rector Major stresses the need of emphasizing the spiritual aspect in the formation of the young Salesians. Excessive stress on the natural and behavioural sciences has brought about negative results. To the students the Rector Major speaks on Salesian formation and unity in formation: "Mission and Consecration are not two

[131] Cfr. SI, 7-18.
[132] Ibid. 20-37.
[133] Ibid. 40-46.
[134] Fr. Giovenale Dho: is born on 18.2.1922 at Roccaforte Mondovi (Cuneo-Italy). In 1937 he leaves for Valparaiso (Chile) to make his novitiate. In Chile he completes his salesian and priestly formation. From 1962 to 1973 he is a professor of pedagogy at the UPS. In 1971 he is Vice-Rector of the University. In 1973 Fr. Ricceri calls him to be a member of the General Council as Councillor for Youth Pastoral. The General Chapter XXI (1977) elects him to be Councillor for Formation. He dies at the Pisana (Generalate – Rome) on 17.5.1980, aged 58.

distinct realities: both must be developed simultaneously. The SGC calls this the grace of unity. Not two realities, but only one: love of God and service to youth and vice-versa, mission and consecration and vice-versa."[135]

On 10th October the Rector Major and party go down to Siliguri, where the Rector Major blesses the foundation stone of the novitiate and of the Savio hostel.

In the afternoon he leaves for Calcutta and on arrival there leaves for Liluah. In Liluah he is given a very joyous welcome by the rector and over 75 Salesians, the youth animators of the Province gathered together to hear him speak about Youth Apostolate. He develops to them the theme: "Apostles of Youth."[136]

On 11th the Rector Major leaves for Gauhati. On 14th October he is back in Calcutta and makes a short visit to Auxilium Dum Dum where he receives an enthusiastic welcome by the sisters, teachers and students. Speaking to the sisters he exhorts them to revive the Spirit of *Mornese*.[137] From Auxilium Dum Dum the Rector Major proceeds to Don Bosco Park Circus for the get-together with the Salesian Family members to whom he addresses the topic of the Salesian Family: "A Spiritual reality".[138]

On 15th and 16th October Fr. Viganò presides over the Provincial Conference of India. The discussions at the meeting are guided by the talks given by the Rector Major himself, Fr. Giovenale Dho, and Fr. John Vecchi, Councillor for Youth Pastoral. The Rector Major is happy with one particular outcome of the Conference, namely, the commitment by the Indian Provincials that Salesian India as a whole will give full support to the African project. The manner of carrying it out is not determined (i.e. whether as a Provincial Conference or as individual Provinces). This decision is relegated to a later meeting.

On 17th October 1979 the Rector Major goes to meet a person he has been longing to see: Mother Teresa. She is waiting for him at the Mother House of the Missionaries of Charity. The visit is indeed short, but it leaves a lasting impression on Fr. Viganò, as he himself later attests.

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[135] SI, 47-53.
[136] Ibid. 56-66.
[137] Ibid. 67-70.
[138] Ibid. 71-75.

From the Mother House he proceeds to Prem Dhan and to Auxilium parish, where he is accorded a hearty welcome. From Auxilium parish he returns to the Provincial House and leaves for Bandel.

Fr. Thomas Panakezham ascribes to a special grace of Our Lady that the Rector Major is able to make the trip to Bandel. It is not originally in the plan and it is made possible only due to the fact that there is no flight to Rangoon from Calcutta on 17th October.

At Bandel he receives a rapturous welcome by the aspirants. After a short cultural programme performed by the aspirants and the girls of Auxilium Convent, the Rector Major speaks to a crowd of nearly 1500 boys and girls and the parents of some of them. He draws a lesson from the large letters he can clearly see over the Chapel portico that read: *Hic Domus Mea*. "It is a phrase," he says, "that is found in the church of our Lady in Turin": *Hic Domus Mea, inde Gloria Mea,* "This is my house; from here my Glory shall go forth." "I have to pray that this Latin may be changed. *Hic Domus Mea, India Gloria Mea*: I have come to pray that India may become the glory of Mary."

In the afternoon Fr. Viganò visits the Shrine of our Lady of Happy Voyage on the Balcony of the church and prays to the Madonna. Later he poses for a photo with the Salesians and the aspirants before giving a short talk to the latter. He then proceeds to the convent where the girls give him a rousing welcome. From the convent the Rector Major is led to St. John's High School, where Fr. K. A. Thomas, the Headmaster, is waiting for him. Fr. Viganò concludes his visit to Bandel with a final visit to the historic Shrine of our Lady.

It is 6.25 p.m. when the Rector Major and party leave Bandel to return to Calcutta, accommodated in an Ambassador car and a Fiat. The first, driven by Bro. V.D.Varkey Villuviruthil, carries the Rector Major in the front seat. Fr. Thomas Panakezham, and Fr. Provincial are also with him. The Fiat accommodates Fr. Angelo Botta, secretary to the Rector Major, and Fr. Francis Alencherry, secretary to the provincial.

At 7.00 p.m. they approach Vivekananda bridge near Bally. After passing the Police check post that precedes the bridge, they are surprised to find a row of boulders placed across the road. As they stop to investigate, they see people approaching the Ambassador car. Never for a moment can they even imagine that they are coming not to help them in their

predicament but to rob them. The ruffians attack Bro. Varkey and Fr. Provincial with knives and demand money and watches. The Rector Major has the presence of mind to close the window on his door. Fr. Panakezham too closes the glass. Hence all the attack is concentrated on the driver's side. Brother Varkey tries to prevent them from going near the Rector Major and in the short scuffle that ensures he sustains a minor injury on his palm. Simultaneously they attack the Fiat car. They place knives against the throats of Fr. Botta and the driver and demand all valuables from them. They conduct a thorough search of their pockets and belongings. Disappointed at finding nothing, they are content to take the watches from Fr. Botta and Fr. Alencherry. From the Ambassador they get the purse of Fr. Provincial and the watch and purse of Bro. Varkey. As they get round to attack the Rector Major's door, Bro. Varkey is able to get free from them, with minor damages to the car. They did not lose much in terms of money or valuables. However, the experience is truly shattering, especially since it happens on the last day of the Rector Major's stay in India. Back home, Bro. Varkey is rushed to the clinic to have his wound attended to. Fortunately, the knife has not done any major damage to his hand.

On 18th a good group of Salesians, sisters and Cooperators gather at Dum Dum airport to bid the Rector Major an affectionate farewell. He leaves for Rangoon by Thai International flight.[139]

2.2 Visits of other Members of the General Council

Besides the two Regionals, Fr. George Williams and Fr. Thomas Panakezham, practically all the Councillors in charge of the various Departments visit the Province in the years 1973–1984.

Fr. Cajetan Scrivo, the Vicar General of the Rector Major, arrives in Calcutta on Ash Wednesday, 20th February 1980. He spends two days giving talks to the rectors of the Provinces of Calcutta and Gauhati. On 23rd February Fr. Scrivo visits Liluah, Bandel and Auxilium Dum Dum. The previous day, in between the talks, he visits Auxilium parish. On 23rd evening confreres from nearby houses gather at Don Bosco Tengra for a farewell dinner with Fr. Scrivo. The following morning he leaves for Gauhati.[140]

[139] Ibid. 77-83.
[140] Cfr. SNC, 46-3/'80, 3

Fr. Scrivo will be in the Province again from 22nd to 26th November 1982. From 23rd to 25th November he speaks on the "Manual of the Rector" to 38 rectors from the Provinces of Calcutta, Gauhati and Dimapur. On 24th November he blesses the Salesian complex in Auxilium parish, Calcutta.[141]

Fr. Paul Natali, Councillor for Formation comes to meet the formators of the various Provinces and to introduce them to the requirements of the new *Ratio* for the formation of Salesians. In Calcutta he conducts a course for formators of the Provinces of Calcutta and Gauhati from 15th to 18th October 1981. From 20th to 22nd October he holds a similar course for the formators of the Provinces of Bangalore, Bombay, and Madras in Bangalore. On 23rd October he leaves for Rome.[142]

Fr. Natali is again in the Province from 17th to 18th and from 22nd to 23rd October 1982. He visits Sonada, Siliguri and Kalyani. He also has a meeting with the Provincial Council on 23rd October. On 22nd October Fr. Natali speaks to the brothers of Vidyaniketan, Kalyani. He is impressed by the youth in our houses. They are the assets of the nation. They must be helped to become more humanly mature. In this situation the brothers are real treasures to the Congregation. "You are the ones for the people and among the people! The formation that you are undergoing here will help you to relate better to youth", he says. "Don Bosco wants you to be evangelizers in work and through work...Love to be a Brother, because Don Bosco loved this vocation."[143]

Fr. John Vecchi, Councillor for Youth Pastoral, presides over the sessions of the four days' meetings of the Salesian Youth Animators of India starting at the Citadel, Madras, on 18th October 1979. He clearly explains the previously proposed themes and replies to questions connected with them. The chosen themes are all the new insights found in GC21, for whose formulation Fr. Vecchi is mainly responsible as the president of the Capitular Commission on 'Youth'. The themes proposed, presented, discussed and clarified are the following: the Youth Delegate, Animation, the Preventive System a Spirituality, the Educative Plan, the Educative Community, Vocational Orientation, and Youth Movements. Rev. Fr. Vecchi offers a report on the various themes and the clarifications.[144]

[141] Cfr. SNC, 69-7/'82, 17, and 70-8/'82, 3.
[142] Cfr. SNC, 61-8/'81, 2.
[143] Cfr. SNC, 70-8/'82, 8.
[144] Cfr. SNC 43-9/'79, 11–14.

A pan-Asian Seminar on 'The Educative System of Don Bosco in the Asian Context' is held in February 1982 in Bombay. There are 39 participants, five each from the five Indian Provinces and Thailand, and two each from Hong Kong, Japan and South Korea. Fr. John Vecchi, Councillor for Youth Pastoral, and Fr. Thomas Panakezham, Regional Councillor for Asia, moderate the meeting. Fr. Chrys Saldhana, Provincial of Bombay, and the community of the Provincial House, Bombay, play host to the seminar.

The original plan[145] was that Fr. Vecchi, Councillor for Youth Pastoral, would visit India in September and October to hold meetings of youth animators from 29th September to 2nd October at Hyderabad. A change of venue from Hyderabad to Bombay takes place in August 1981.[146] When the Provincial Council of Calcutta in its meeting of 25th June 1981, discusses the proposed meeting with Fr. Vecchi, it points out that a more relevant topic than the one proposed by Rome would be, 'The relevance of the Pastoral Educative method of Don Bosco in a non-Christian environment, like that of India.' Fr. Luciano Colussi, Provincial Delegate for Youth Pastoral, would take up the matter with Fr. Vecchi. This explains the topic of the Seminar and also the change of dates from September-October 1981 to February 1982.

Fr. John Vecchi, Fr. Rosario Krishnaraj, Fr. Paul Puthanangady and Fr. Luc Van Looy from Korea present the papers at the Seminar. Fr. Vecchi speaks on the 'Essential features of the Preventive System and their significance,' Fr. Krishnaraj deals with 'Problems and possibilities in the practice of the System of Don Bosco in Asian Countries,' Fr. Paul Puthanangady gives two talks on 'Reason and Kindness, key elements of the Preventive System in Asian Context,' and 'Religion in the Educative System of Don Bosco in a predominantly non-Christian context.' Fr. Luc Van Looy speaks on 'Guidelines for the Incarnation of the Preventive System: The Educational project of the Salesians in Asia.'[147]

Fr. Bernard Tohill, Councillor for the Missions, visits India and Calcutta several times, first as Regional (1965–1971), and then also as Councillor for the Missions. But on two particular occasions he comes to the Calcutta Province to visit the missions of the Province.

[145] Cfr. SNC, 59-6/'81, 3.
[146] Cfr. SNC, 60-7/'81, 3.
[147] Cfr. SNC, 64-2/'82, 14–16.

On 14th January 1977 Fr. B. Tohill arrives from Bangkok. He comes to visit the Missions of Krishnagar. He leaves on the same day for Ranaghat with Bro. Isaac, the Provincial Economer. He is back from this tour on 19th January 1977, after visiting: Ranaghat, Raghabpur, Bongaon (Thakurnagar), Krishnagar, Maliapota, Chapra, Ranabondo, Behrampore, Polsonda More and Bandel.[148] Fr. Tohill has his longest ever stay in Calcutta Province of 14 days from 31st October to 14th November. He has been visiting every house in the Province. The Santal missions impress him. "The dynamism of the young missionaries and the progress they have made", he remarks, "are to be admired and imitated."

"I have found the ideal missionary charism of the Salesian missionary in Fr. John Vaikath. He is a missionary, a builder, a sacristan, an organizer, a social worker and a choir master, all in one." In the farewell dinner hosted at Provincial House, he congratulates the confreres for the fine spirit of missionary activity in the Province. He exhorts all to remain faithful to Don Bosco's ideal and to work as a team![149]

Fr. John Raineri,[150] Councillor for the Salesian Family and Mass Media, visits Calcutta Province from 20th to 23rd September 1981. On 21st he visits the houses of Calcutta and talks to the Salesians at Don Bosco Park Circus. On 22nd he visits Bandel and talks to the FMAs and to the Cooperators at Auxilium Dum Dum. On 23rd he visits Krishnagar and talks to Salesians and to SMI Sisters. He spends four hectic days in the Province. The heavy schedule, combined with power-cuts and unbearable heat leave him 'nearly exhausted.'[151]

The two Regionals, besides their occasional visits to the Province, conduct the Extraordinary Canonical Visitation of the Province during their term of office.

Fr. George Williams arrives at Calcutta from Rangoon on 25th January 1977, after visiting our confreres in Burma. He comes to make

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[148] Cfr. Chronicle of Province, *Provincial Archives* B.10.1.3.

[149] Cfr. SNC, 70-8/'82, 8.

[150] Fr. John Raineri is born on 27.2.1914 at Schilpario (Bergamo – Italy). He is a Salesian in 1931. From 1941 to 1950 he is a professor of History of the Church at the International Theological Centre of *Crocetta* (Turin), from 1950 to 1965 he is Rector and parish priest at *Colle Val D'Elsa* (Siena – Italy). In 1965 he is Provincial of the Ligure-Toscana Province. In 1971 he is elected first Councillor for the Salesian Family. He dies at the Pisana (Generalate – Rome) on 10.12.1983. He is 15 years Rector, 6 years Provincial, and 12 years Councillor for the Salesian Family.

[151] Cfr. SNC, 60-7/'81, 4, and SNC, 61-8/'81, 2.

the Extraordinary Visitation of the Province, and starts the visitation by visiting Auxilium parish on 27th January. He proceeds visiting the Province from 28th January till March 18th, when he completes the visitation of the mission centres.[152]

On 21st March Fr. Williams is in Bandel and in the evening he gives the introductory talk at the evening recollection, with which the Provincial Chapter 1977 begins. After dinner the aspirants welcome the Chapter members and give a send off to Fr. Williams. On 22nd Fr. Williams presides at the Mass of the Holy Spirit and gives the homily. At 8.30 a.m. he inaugurates the Provincial Chapter by addressing all the members. In the afternoon Father Williams addresses the rectors of the houses and the Provincial Council members. In the evening he leaves for Calcutta and early next day goes to Gauhati. On 27th March Fr. Williams is back in Calcutta. On 28th he presides over a meeting of the Provincial Council, which lasts the whole day. This meeting actually constitutes the end of the Extraordinary Visitation. He gives a report of his visit, which is discussed together. His overall impression of the Province is good, but he finds also a number of problems and difficulties to which a solution must be found. In the evening there is a farewell dinner in his honour. On 29th morning he leaves for Bombay.[153]

Fr. Thomas Panakezham makes the Extraordinary Canonical Visitation of the Province in the months of February, March, and April 1982. The Visitation begins on 3rd February and is concluded on 29th April 1982 with Fr. Thomas presiding over the Provincial Council meeting of 29th April, in which he makes his comments and recommendations, after visiting the Province. To be noted are especially his recommendations regarding Bandel and Burma. With regard to Bandel he suggests the division of the big complex into two. He also strongly recommends a separate *aspirantate* for the Bengali boys.

As regards Burma, he says that we cannot have our own studentate of philosophy there. Our brothers must attend the diocesan seminary.

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[152] Cfr. Chronicle of the Province, *Provincial Archives* B.10.1.3; SNC, 22-1/'77, 3, and 23-2/'77, 4.

[153] Cfr. Minutes of the Provincial Council Meeting of 28.3.1977, where the full report by Fr. Williams can be found. *Provincial Archives* B.8.2.2. "Extraordinary Visitation 1977 – *Provincial Archives* B.11.4; January 20–25, Burma; January 25–March 28, India, and Comments and Recommendations for the Provincial Council."

Ordinarily the perpetual profession should not be before 6 years of temporary vows. He also suggests that the offices of the Delegate and of the Prefect Apostolic could be separated. He also touches the question of how much autonomy the Burma confreres could have. At present we control only the admissions to vows, orders, etc., and conduct the annual visitation.[154]

3. Celebrations: Centenaries and Golden Jubilees

During the years 1973–1984 there occur a few Centenaries and two Goldens Jubilee that need to be mentioned: the Centenary of the Salesian Missions (1875–1975), the Centenary of the Pontifical approval of the Salesian Constitutions (1874–1974), the Centenary of the foundation of the Salesian Cooperators (1876–1976), and the Golden Jubilee of Don Bosco's Canonization (1934–1984) and the Golden Jubilee of the Calcutta Province (1926–1976).

We will not deal separately with the Celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the Province, as the programme presented by the Vice-Provincial in the Council meeting of 10th October 1976, covers both the Centenary of the Salesian Missions and the Golden Jubilee of the Province, so also the implementation of the main suggestions in the programme covers the celebration of both events.

3.1 Centenary of the Salesian Missions (1875–1975), and Golden Jubilee of the CalcuttaProvince (1926–1976).

On 8th January 1973 Fr. B. Tohill sends a circular letter to the Provinces presenting the *Strenna* of the year on the 'Missions' and gives some directives to the Provincials on the implementation of the *Strenna*.

In the Provincial Council meeting of 22nd March 1973, Fr. Provincial reads another circular letter of Fr. Tohill to the Provincials asking them to prepare for the Centenary of the Salesian Missions in November 1975. The Council makes the following suggestions:

- To set up a museum consisting of various implements used by the different people in the Missions;

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[154] Cfr. Minutes of the Provincial Council Meeting of 29 April 1982, *Provincial Archives* B.8.2.2; Cfr. also SNC, 63-1/82, 5; 65-3/82, 8; 66-4/82, 5.

- To ask the confreres for suggestions on how to celebrate the Centenary, and
- To have a Salesian missionary day in the formation Houses.

On 20th June 1974 the Provincial Council discusses the contribution of the Province to the celebrations. The rules for the international competition are read and a provincial committee is set up with Fr. Vice-Provincial, Fr. Lucas Sirkar, and a Salesian Sister as members. The committee will also include other members from the Cooperators, Past Pupils, and one from the Sisters of Mary Immaculate, Krishnagar.

Fr. Tohill writes also in connection with the History of the Salesian Missions in India, and a collection of films, photos, geographical maps, etc., to illustrate the development and activities of the Missions. As regards the history of the Missions, Fr. R. Stroscio is doing it. The Vice-Provincial has to find out how far he has reached and whether he will carry on working at it or not. As regards films, Fr. E. Ojer, Fr. Jim Gimenez, and His Lordship Bishop Morrow may have some. Fr. A. Killerman may have slides on the Missions.

On 25th July 1974 Fr. Provincial informs the Council that Fr. Stroscio has not been able yet to start working on the history of the Salesian Missions in Bengal. He needs to be free so that he can dedicate himself to this task. It is necessary that all help to prepare materials for the history of the Missions.

The problem of the history of the Salesian Missions in Bengal is again discussed in the provincial Council meeting of 19th September 1974. Fr. Stroscio will not be able to write the history of the Salesian Missions in our Province. Other names of confreres are suggested. The final suggestion is to put Fr. Uguet in-charge of this work, when he will be back from Spain in the first weak of November. Other matters relating to the Centenary and discussed in the meeting are: choice of the person to be sent to Rome to represent the Province at the Centenary Celebrations, and the need of the Commission in charge of the Missions planning out a programme of celebrations of the Centenary at house level, and at the Provincial level. Some Mission stations could be opened in Azimganj area to commemorate the occasion.

Returning from the meeting of the Asian Provincials at Hong Kong, Fr. Provincial reports to the Council on 14th January 1974 the latest news he could gather from the long interventions of Fr. Tohill on the Centenary celebrations in Rome. The Centenary has been postponed by one year. It will begin on 11th November 1975 with a religious function and will close on the same date the following year. One feature will be a two-months' course for the 'on-going-formation' of missionaries. Two confreres could be sent from each diocese where we have missionaries and the Centre will meet their expenses.

On 6th September 1975 the Council decides that on 11th November 1975, the celebration be held at house level. During the year 1976, at a suitable time, the celebration at Provincial level can be held. Some suggestions are also mentioned: an exhibition at Park Circus, the opening of a new Mission Centre, history of the Province, Golden Jubilee of the Province, opening of the Catechetical Centre, the release of the Souvenir.

In the meeting of 10th June 1976 the Vice-Provincial presents a tentative programme for the celebration of the Centenary of the Salesian Mission and of the Golden Jubilee of the Province:

- Opening of four new works in the Province:
- The new mission of Polsonda More,
- The School of Graphic Arts at Tengra,
- The Catechetical Centre at Tengra,
- The Juniorate or *Magistero* for the Salesian brothers.

External Celebrations:

- In Calcutta:
  - Blessing of the New parish at Tengra on 11.11.1976.
  - Exhibition at Tengra on this occasion.
  - A missionary Symposium on 11th November 1976.
- In Krishnagar:
  - Mission Sunday to be solemnized.
  - A missionary Symposium for religious and catechists in English.
  - An open-air cultural show for all the public in the evening in the Cathedral.

- In Azimganj:
  - Blessing of the new parish at Polsonda More on 7th November.
- In Sonada:
  - Seminar on the Salesian Missions from 20th to 23rd October.
  - Exhibition on the Missions.
- At school level:
  - All the schools to set apart a day for this celebration in their own way and with the available means,
  - An Essay competition in English and Bengali on a missionary topic.

In the course of this history we have already dealt with the realization of some of the main suggestions, such as, the opening of the four new works in the Province: the blessing of the new complex at Tengra, and the blessing of the new complex at Polsonda More. For the other parts of the programme we refer to the chronicles of the houses concerned.

3.2 Centenary of the Official Approval of the Constitutions

In the meeting of 21st February 1974, the Council is fully aware of the fact that on April 3rd would be the centenary of the approbation of our Constitutions. The Council suggests that the occasion be kept in a befitting manner at house level through conferences, hours of adoration, the renewal of our commitment, etc.

3.3 Centenary of the Founding of the Salesian Cooperators

It is on 9th May 1876 that the Pious Union of Salesian Cooperators is officially given recognition by Pope Pius IX. It is in recognition of this Centenary that the Rector Major gives the *Strenna* for 1976 on the Salesian Cooperators.

The Congregation wants to celebrate this important event in a very befitting manner by holding a 'World Congress of Salesian Cooperators' in Rome from 30th October to 5th November 1976.[155]

[155] Cfr. SNC, 17-3/76, 10-11.

As a preparation to the World Congress, each Province will hold a Provincial Congress of Salesian Cooperators and will send a representative to the World Congress elected by the Provincial Council of Cooperators. Since the Calcutta Province has no coordinating secretary and no Provincial Council of Cooperators yet, the Provincial, in consultation with Mother Provincial of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, chooses Mr. Thomas Dias, leader of the Liluah Unit of Salesian Cooperators.[156]

The Provincial Congress of the Salesian Cooperators of Calcutta is held from 1st to 3rd October 1976. The Congress starts with a prayer in the evening of 1st October, continues on 2nd October, and is concluded with Holy Mass followed by lunch on 3rd October. Fr. A.J. Sebastian Alencheril, the Provincial Delegate of Cooperators, organizes it. The Cooperators of DBPC, DBL, Auxilium Convent Dum Dum, Auxilium Convent Bandel, Cooperators in training of Bongaon parish and Auxilium parish Calcutta attend it. There are also Salesians and FMA Sisters.

The venue of the Congress is the would-be Catechetical Centre in the new complex of DB Tengra. The attendance and the spirit of the Cooperators are excellent. Between Cooperators and would be Cooperators there are more than 50 who take part in the Congress. On the last day there is the election of the Provincial Council of Cooperators. Mr. Thomas Dias of Liluah is elected coordinating secretary, and three teachers of Park Circus are elected Councillors. During the Mass a good number of Cooperators make their Promise.[157]

SNC of 11.12.1976 carries a detailed report by Mr. Thomas Dias of the World Congress of Salesian Cooperators held in Rome.[158] The theme for the Congress is: "The Salesian Cooperator and his commitment to the Family, the church, and Society." Fr. Raineri, Councillor for the Salesian Family, in his speech says that the World Congress is convened with two particular aims: one, that every Cooperator and every Salesian may understand the true identity of the Cooperator, and the other, to update the Rules of the Pious Union. The concluding concelebrated Mass is presided over by the Rector Major on the Papal Altar in the Basilica of

[156] Cfr. SNC, 19-5/'76, 9.
[157] Cfr. Chronicle of the Province, 1–3 October 1976, *Provincial Archives* B.10.1.3; Cfr. also a report by Fr. A. J. Sebastian in SNC, 21-7/'76, 14.
[158] Cfr. SNC, 21-7/'76, 15–17.

St. Peter's, after which, at the Papal Audience itself, the Cooperators express their loyalty and allegiance to the Pope.[159]

3.4 Golden Jubilee of Don Bosco's Canonization

On 27th June 1983 Fr. Egidio Viganò writes a letter to the Provincials inviting them to celebrate in a fitting manner two important events: the 50th anniversary of the Canonization of Don Bosco in 1984, and the Centenary of Don Bosco's death in 1988. Three other centenaries may be of help to us in throwing light upon thse events. They are:

- Centenary of the Spiritual Testament of Don Bosco (September 1884).
- Centenary of the famous letter from Rome (10th May 1884).
- Centenary of the Coat-of-arms of the Congregation (12th September 1884).[160]

The Provincial Conference of India that meets at Dimapur from 26th to 29th July 1983 discusses the National level Celebration of the Golden Jubilee of Don Bosco's Canonization. The conference decides to organize a symposium on 'Salesian Spirituality'. The planning Commission meets at Provincial house, Calcutta, on 24th September 1983 to draw up the details of the Symposium. Participants at the Symposium will consist of a selected group from the six Salesian Provinces of India, the 3 Provinces of the FMAs, the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians, the Sisters of Mary Immaculate, the Salesian Cooperators, the delegates from Japan, Korea, Philippines, and Thailand. Fr. Joseph Kezhakkekara, Provincial of Calcutta, is the convener.[161]

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[159] On the Salesian Cooperators' movement during the years 1973–1984 Cfr. (1) SNC, 32-4/'78, p. 3–4, "World Congress of Salesian Cooperators." It deals with a meeting of all the National Leaders from all over the world held in Rome from 15 June to 19 June 1978. The National Leaders form the "World Council of Salesian Cooperators" (WCSC). Fr. E. Viganò, in his keynote address, gives an insight into the Spirituality that is required of the Salesian Cooperators; (2) SNC, 58-5/'81, 4. Mr. Thomas Dias, Coordinating Secretary of the Calcutta Cooperators, is appointed a member of the Central Council of the Cooperators. In this capacity he will represent India and All Asia; (3) SNC, 59-6/'81, 20–23, gives a report by Mr. Thomas Dias of the second plenary session of the World-Consultative-Body of Salesian Cooperators held in Rome from 24 June to 28 June 1981.

[160] SNC, 78-9/'83, 4–5.

[161] Ibid. 3.

On 17th November 1983 the Provincial Council discusses the Golden Jubilee celebrations of Don Bosco's Canonization.

- At national level: the proposed symposium on 'Salesian Spirituality' in the month of July 1984.
- At the Provincial level: a 3-day Seminar on Salesian Spirituality for the Salesian Family at Don Bosco Tengra during the Diwali Puja days in October 1984.
- At the local level: at least one-day commemoration in each house on the same day, either on 31st January or 1st April 1984.

The Symposium takes place from 15th July to 21st July 1984. The Venue is NBCLC, Bangalore.[162]

A 3-day Seminar on 'Salesian Spirituality', is held from 21st October to 24th October 1984 at DB Tengra. On 21st a prayer service opens the Seminar. The central theme of the service is the 'Spiritual Testament of Don Bosco'. Fifty-five members of the Salesian Family participate in the Seminar. The only guest speaker at the Seminar is Fr. O. Paviotti from Shillong, though the papers read are prepared by various others from different parts of India and Rome.

Every group wants an animators' programme to be carried out at the community level, the participants assuring that they would lead the project. This is a very practical follow-up action, since most of the participants have animation roles in the various local communities from which they come. The various groups give themselves a well-defined animation programme to be done in their own local communities.[163]

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[162] For the programme of the seven-day symposium on Salesian Spirituality, the titles of the talks, etc., Cfr. SNC 78-9/'83, 7–8; For a report on the Symposium on Salesian Spirituality, Cfr. 87-7/'84, 11.

[163] SNC, 9-11/'84, 8–9.

CHAPTER XII
TOWARDS A THIRD DIVISION OF THE PROVINCE 1985–1996

A) New Presences: 1. New Presences in Kolkata Province 1.1 Ashalayam 1.2 Monsadah 1.3 Katihar 1.4 Joypur (Suri) 1.5 Boropohari 1.6 Chakung (Sikkim) 1.7 Dharan 2. New Presences in View of the Division of the Province: 2.1 Jokbhala 2.2 Kereng (1987) 2.3 Kuarmunda (1988) 2.4 Jumaikela (1989) 2.5 Jabalpur (1991) 2.6 Lucknow (1992) 2.7 Kauli (1993) 2.8 Jharsuguda (1994) 2.9 Kullu (1996) 2.10 Ashalayam (Delhi 1996) B) Life in the Established Institutions: Auxilium Parish, Azimganj, Bandel, Berhampore, Kolkata – Tengra, Alaknanda, Krishnagar, Liluah, Mirpara, Myanmar, Ranaghat, Ranchi, the Salesian Family, Siliguri, Sonada C) Important Events Affecting the Life of the Province: 1. The International Youth Year (IYY) 2. Boys' Town 3. Centenary of Don Bosco's Death 4. Pope John Paul II Visits Kolkata 5. The Rector Major, Fr. E. Viganò and other General Councillors Visit the Province 6. General Chapters (23 & 24), and Provincial Chapters (PC 86, 89, 92, 96) 7. The Activity of the Provincial and his Council Leading to the third division of the Province: December 1996.

This last chapter of our work on the *History of Kolkata Province* deals with the period covering the terms of two Provincials, namely, Fr. Sebastian Alancheril (1985–1990), and Fr. Thomas Polackal (1991–1996). The chapter is titled *Towards a Third Division of the Province*. In fact, the activity of both these Provincials, especially that of Fr. Thomas Polackal, has this main objective in view, to prepare the Province for its third division, which will be sanctioned by the Rector Major and his Council in December 1996, and comes into effect in January 1997.

For the whole of our work so far we have used the old names of some important cities in India and Burma. For the whole of this chapter and for the Epilogue we shall use the new names: Kolkata for Calcutta, Chennai for Madras, Guwahati for Gauhati, Mumbai for Bombay, Myanmar for Burma, and Yangon for Rangoon.

A) New Presences

First we shall consider the new presences being established in Kolkata Province during the period under consideration. We shall then move on to the new presences or the expansion of some existing presences, such as Jokbahla, in view of carving out the new Province.

1. New Presences in Kolkata Province

1.1 Ashalayam

In the June issue of SNC Newsletter,[1] Fr. Antony Thaiparambil informs the readers about the starting of the Howrah project for the rehabilitation of youth in difficulty. It all begins with the Supreme Court and the CBCI unofficially asking the Salesians of Don Bosco, Okhla, whether the Salesians, being 'Youth Workers', could take up the rehabilitation of under-trial boys by teaching them during the time of their detention some way of earning their livelihood once they are released. The confreres in Delhi pass on the request to the Provincial in Kolkata. Since the project of the Boys' Town had just been abandoned, the Provincial and his Council think it worthwhile to start something in this line in Kolkata itself, in collaboration with Fr. Laborde of Howrah South Point. Fr. Antony's first work is to look for a place and for a possible shelter for the boys.

The work begins on 8th December 1985, with the blessing of a 3-room shelter, a typical *Pinardi Shed*, by Fr. Provincial, Fr. Sebastian Alancheril, in the Pilkhana slum at Howrah. It is the same house that has been used by Fr. Laborde. It is here that Fr. Antony starts his work among the children of Howrah Station by offering them a night shelter.[2]

Gradually as the number of boys increases, the shelter is shifted to the present location at Kadamtala. The first two rooms of the new building are blessed on 1st May 1991. The vagrants at Howrah Station have a home of their own on 25th August 1991, when Mother Teresa and Archbishop Henry D'Souza of Kolkata join State Ministers and well-wishers at the inauguration of Don Bosco Ashalayam at Belilious Road, Howrah. It is the result of a six-year search and of the tireless efforts of Frs. Antony Thaiparambil and George Chempakathinal.[3]

The last sixteen years have seen a phenomenal growth of the work – from a single night shelter for boys to 22 Rehabilitation Homes for boys and girls ranging from 6 to 20 years of age, as well as two Night Shelters,

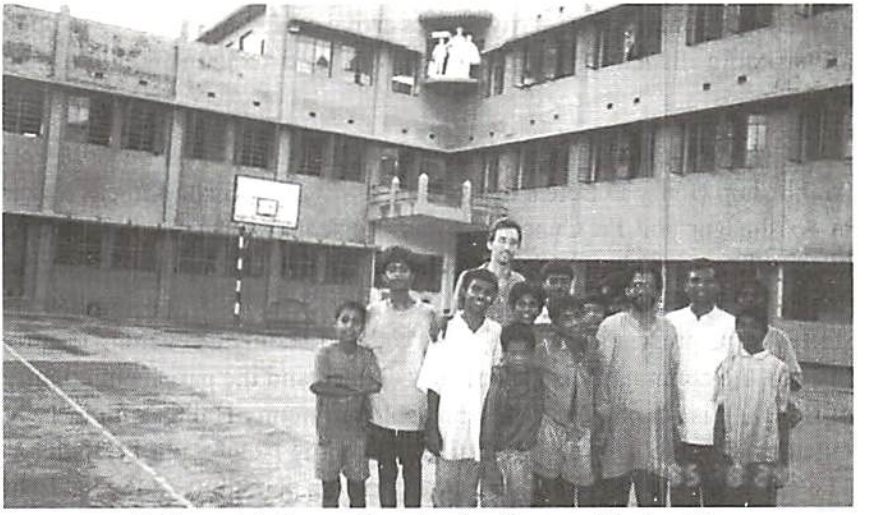
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[1] Cfr. SNC, XII-6/7/'85, 11–12.

[2] Cfr. SNC, XIII-2/'86, and XIV-2/'87, where Fr. P.J. Sheehy gives a very vivid description of the life of the boys and of the impact the Salesian approach in education has on them.

[3] Cfr. SNC, September–October 1991.

of which one is for girls.[4] Some of these homes are taken care of by Sisters, such as, the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (MSMHC), the Sisters of Providence (SDP), the Congregation of the Holy Family (CHF), and initially also the Sisters Adorers (AASC).



Kolkata-Ashalayam: Coordination Centre at Kadamtala

In 1996, Fr. Antony Thaiparambil shifts to Delhi to establish works for street children as he has done in Kolkata. Through the Delegate, Fr. Vellappallil Mathai, he asks the Provincial Council on 28th June 1996, for permission to request the government of Delhi for a 4-acre plot of land for the work for street children. The Council tells him that he can make use of the land lying vacant at Najafgarh to gather the boys and educate them. Starting in a small scale is the best way to make the work appreciated by all.

1.2 Monsadah

The Monsadah mission is opened in 1964 as a sub-station of Bongaon parish. The boarding at Monsadah starts in 1969, but it has to be closed because of the Bangladesh war in 1971. The boarding is reopened on 26th January 1976 and is expanded in1980. In 1982 the boarding for girls is started in a rented home adjacent to the present girls' boarding. The present St. Albert's Home is built by Fr. Scaria Nedumattathil in 1987

[4] Cfr. Directory of the Salesian Province of Kolkata 2001–2002, 38.

with the help of the parish of St. Albert the Great at Leverkussen, Germany. Monsadah is erected as a separate parish with Fr. C. J. Sebastian as its first parish priest on 4th February 1989.

The Salesian Sisters come to look after the girls' boarding in1988, and the Missionaries of Charity Sisters arrive on 19th March 1992 to open a charitable dispensary at Sishu Bhavan, and to help in the village apostolate.

The foundation stone of the church is laid on 31st May 1991. Archbishop Henry D'Souza of Kolkata, assisted by Bishop Lucas Sirkar of Krishnagar and Fr. Cyprian Monis, Episcopal Vicar for the Santals, blesses the parish church, dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, on 4th February 1993.[5] The Rainbow Primary School, begun in 1980, is shifted to its present site in 1993, but today it is only a coaching Centre. In 2001 the community is canonically erected and the parish community of Bongaon is attached to it. The present community Hall is built in 1994 together with the adjoining Vocational Training Centre and Presbytery.[6] The Archbishop of Calcutta gives the parish in perpetuity to the Salesian Society.[7]

1.3 Katihar

The parish of St. Michael, Katihar, opens as a sub-station of Purnea parish in 1972, is made a quasi-parish on 31st May 1980. It is erected as a parish on 26th April 1987 and handed over to the Salesians in perpetuity on 22nd January 1990. From the time the Salesians have taken charge, three new parishes of Gopalpur, Baghela, and Bagwakol have been carved out of the parish of Katihar. The Missionaries of Charity arrive on 11th May 1979 to run a Home for the aged, a T.B. Clinic, and another clinic for the children. Besides the parish, there is a boarding for boys on the parish premises. The Sisters of Mary Immaculate arrive in April 1985 to run a similar boarding for girls and a primary school. The Salesian community is attached to Don Bosco Purnea.[8] On 22nd January 1990

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[5] Cfr. Chronicle of the Province 4.2.1993, *Provincial Archives* B.10.1.4.
[6] Cfr. Directory of Salesian Province of Kolkata 2001–2002, 57–58.
[7] Cfr. Minutes of Provincial Council Meeting 16.4.1991, *Provincial Archives* B.8.2.3 and SNC, XX1-3 May 1991, 1.
[8] Cfr. Directory of the Salesian Province of Kolkata 2001–2002, 61.

Bishop Stephen Tiru of Dumka blesses the renewed church of Katihar and entrusts the parish to the Salesians.

1.4 Joypur (Suri)

Don Bosco Joypur opens in December 1989, is made into a parish in April 1991, and the Archbishop of Kolkata hands it over to the Salesians in perpetuum.[9] Today Don Bosco Joypur is in the diocese of Asansol, which was bifurcated from the archdiocese of Kolkata in 1997. The mission of the Centre comprises a parish and boardings for boys and girls. The Congregation Theresian Carmelite (CTC) Sisters look after the girls' boarding. Two of these sisters help in the parish work. The children of the boarding up to class V attend the neighbouring government schools. In 2001 Don Bosco Joypur, together with Don Bosco Boropohari, is canonically erected into a community.[10]

1.5 Boropohari

It is Bishop Tiru of Dumka[11] who asks the Salesians to help out with evangelization work among the Santals in his diocese. He offers a new area with Rampurhat as its centre. In its meeting of 17th February 1987 the Provincial Council responds favourably to the request, after listening to the reports of Fr. J. Vaikath, who has been asked to study the project. In October 1989, Fr. John Vaikath, who is appointed to start the mission of Boropohari, close to Rampurhat, submits a general plan he has for the mission. The Provincial Council on 26th October 1989 examines the plan and is in agreement with it except for a few details for which explanations are asked. In December 1990, Fr. John asks and obtains the permission to open a parish dedicated to Mary Help of Christians.

The work in Boropohari comprises a parish with boardings for boys and girls. The Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians look after the girls' boarding. They also help in the parish activities. The children attend the nearby government primary school up to class IV. Since 2001 the confreres form one community with Don Bosco Joypur.[12]

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[9] Cfr. Minutes of Provincial Council Meetings of 27.7.'90, *Provincial Archives* B.8.2.3, 17.1.'91, 16.4.'91; SNC, XXI-3 May/'91, 1.
[10] Cfr. Directory of the Salesian Province of Kolkata 2001–2002, 43.
[11] Minutes of the Provincial Council Meeting, 25.6.'87, *Provincial Archives* B.8.2.3.
[12] Cfr. Directory of the Salesian Province of Kolkata 2001–2002, 44.

1.6 Chakung (Sikkim)

In 1987 the Provincial Council is asked to consider an invitation from Bishop Eric Benjamin of Darjeeling, to take up evangelization work in West Sikkim. The government has offered to the diocese a plot of land for a school. The bishop is now offering it to us. After proper discernment, the Council decides to accept the offer. The motivations are: soon the Province would be divided and would loose several potential areas of evangelization and expansion, we need to work for vocations from among the Nepalese; there is no Salesian Presence in Sikkim and it would be imprudent to lose such a favourable opportunity. Although in principle the Council accepts the offer, still it decides to seek more details from the bishop.

On 16th January 1990 the Council takes the decision to accept Sikkim, after a conversation over phone with Msgr. Thomas D'Souza, Vicar General. Fr. George Tirumalachalil is asked to take the first steps by setting up a temporary shed for a school that would be started in March 1990, in agreement with the bishop's request.



V. Rev. Fr. SEBASTIAN ALANCHERIL, SDB
Provincial (1985–1990)

Born:	At Urulikunnam, Palai, on 5 November 1930
Profession:	16 April 1953 at Shillong
Ordination:	29 June 1962.
Appointments:	
1963–1968:	Financial Administrator and Dean of Studies, Sonada
1968–1969:	Higher Studies at UPS, Rome
1970–1976:	Rector, Don Bosco Liluah
1976–1977:	Asst. parish priest, Auxilium Parish, Kolkata
1977–1980:	Rector, Don Bosco Azimganj
1980–1982:	Rector, Salesian College Sonada
1982–1985:	Vice-provincial, Kolkata
1985–1990:	Provincial, Kolkata
1991–1992:	Refresher Course at Berkley, California
1992–1996:	Headmaster, Don Bosco Purnea
1996–1997:	Asst. parish priest at Monsadah
1997–2003:	Rector, Don Bosco Okhla New Delhi

On 24th March 1990 St. Mary's Chakung starts functioning with the opening of KG and class I. The Cluny Sisters accept the invitation to send two sisters to start classes. Fr. George asks to be allowed to take the

next step, that is, to prepare plans for the new work. The House Council of Sonada suggests to prepare a master plan and to study the possibility of buying the land to be more independent in the changing political scenario, or to ask government to give it to the Salesians Society on a long-term lease.

The subsequent years will see the gradual growth of the school. Presently the school is a full-fledged co-educational school from K.G. to class X. The school is affiliated to the Delhi Board for ICSE. In March 1999 the fist batch of 16 students appear for ICSE and obtain cent per cent results. The community also looks after the parish and a sub-station. The Cluny Sisters run a Boarding for girls.[13] The Salesians run a boarding for boys.

1.7 Dharan

In the meeting of 6th January 1992, Fr. Provincial reads to the Council a letter of Fr. Antony Sharma, Ecclesiastical Superior of the Church in Nepal, in which he invites the Salesians to open a vocational school in a small village, where a Loreto Sister inherited a plot of land.

On 4th January 1992, Fr. Provincial reports to the Council about his visit to Katmandu, where he is shown some plots of land for a possible Salesian presence. The Council suggests sending there a confrere to study the situation and the possibilities. However, the first place chosen for a Salesian presence is not Katmandu, which will come later, but Dharan in South East Nepal.

Dharan is a beautiful small town with small hills on two sides. The population of the town according to the Anchal-Pradhan is about 80,000 people. It is said that in the great earthquake of 1945, this town was razed to the ground, but now it is developing fast. There are two schools built by the Swiss and donated to the Nepal government, and about 18 or more other schools (mostly primary) run by private parties.

Don Bosco Centre opens on 7th October 1992 with Fr. George Alakulam as the pioneer of the Salesian presence and work in Nepal. The property is bought by Fr. A. Sharma and offered to the Salesians. It seems to be an ideal spot for our needs to put up a multi-purpose hall, and a non-formal education centre.[14]

[13] Cfr. Ibid. 55.
[14] Cfr. SNC, XXII-2/'94, 10.

The Mayor, Shri D. B. Rai, Nagar Palika, Dharan, lays the foundation stone of Mount Don Bosco Multipurpose Centre, on 8th December 1994.[15]

Fr. John Berger is installed as priest-in-charge of the vast mission territory on 27th May 1996, succeeding Fr. George Alakulam. The building has the church on the ground floor to cater to the small Christian community, conference halls and dormitory facilities upstairs that can accommodate 20 men and 20 women for lay leadership training programmes. It also has the residential facilities for the Salesian community.[16]

The Mission comprises of 313 Catholics in 93 families, spread over 6 centres. A computer Training Centre for the youth is started in 1997. A boarding is opened in 1999 for the poor children of far-flung villages. They attend the nearby government schools. A primary school is started at Sirsea in 2000.[17]

Evangelization work in Nepal is a joint venture of the Kolkata and Bangalore Provinces. Already in July 1995, the Provincial of Bangalore, through Fr. Thomas Panakezham, communicates to the Kolkata Provincial their readiness to collaborate with the evangelization work in the North, and in particular, in Nepal.

The reaction of the Provincial Council is positive. Fr.Thomas Myladoor, Provincial of Bangalore, offers to send some confreres to work with us in Dharan for some time. Then they will start on their own.[18]

In July 1996, Fr. Sebastian Khuzhipala, the Provincial Economer, and Fr. Myladoor are in Katmandu looking for suitable plots of land for a new presence. They agree to share equally in the Nepal project. They are looking for 2 plots of land, one for the school, and the other for a future Provincial House.[19]

In the past years some confreres of the Bangalore Province, both priests and clerics, have come up to study the language and are now working in Nepal.

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[15] Cfr. SNC, XXII-6/'84, 16–17.
[16] Cfr. SNC, XXIV-6 July/'96, 4.
[17] Cfr. Directory of the Salesian Province of Kolkata 2001–2002, 36.
[18] Cfr. Minutes of the Provincial Council Meeting, 18.8.95–19.8.95, *Provincial Archives* B.8.2.4.
[19] Ibid., 19.7.1996–20.7.1996.

2. New Presences in view of the division of the Province

2.1 Jokbahla

Jokbahla is not a new venture.[20] In this chapter we see how it has developed further in view of the new province.

In August 1986, the highschool is upgraded to Junior College by getting it affiliated for classes XI and XII. A new boarding is under construction to house about 150 boys. There is hope that it will be ready by the end of the year.[21]

In the evening of 15th August 1988, in a simple yet prayerful ceremony, Fr. Mathai, rector and parish priest, inaugurates a small apostolic school at Jokbahla. The 35 boarders, many of whom have expressed the desire to become priests listen attentively to his explanation about the spirit of an apostolic school. One can note the seriousness on their determined faces after the talk, as they come out of the study hall.[22]

In 1992 the Province decides to make the Salesian presence in the school more effective. Though the school will continue to be the property of the Janata, the Salesians will see to the management. On 31st January 1992 Bishop Kindo blesses the foundation



V. Rev. Fr. THOMAS POLACKAL, SDB
Provincial (1991–1996)

Born:	25 December 1936 at Edathuva, Changanacherry
Profession:	10 April 1957, at Shillong
Ordination:	19 December 1966
Appointments:	
1967–1975	Prefect of Studies, Rector - Bandel
1975–1977	Licentiate in Spirituality, Rome
1977–1979	Vice-Rector, Don Bosco Tengra
1979–1982	Rector, Don Bosco Tengra
1982–1985	Rector, Don Bosco Vidyaniketan, Kalyani
1985–1990	Vice Provincial, Kolkata
1991–1996	Provincial, Kolkata
1997–1999	Director of Don Bosco Youth Animation, Delhi
1999 onwards:	Staff member of Yuva Prachodini, Bangalore

[20] Cfr. Part III, Chapter XI, 5.1., p450f.
[21] Cfr. SNC, XIII-8/'86, 11-12.
[22] Cfr. SNC, XV-6/'88, 7.

stone of the new extension of the Gandhi Smarak Higher Secondary School. The work starts with a prayer service on 11th February 1992.[23] The FMM sisters run a Primary and Middle school for girls, a hostel for girls and a dispensary.

An important visit

On 18th February 1994 Jokbahla welcomes some illustrious visitors: The Cabinet Minister for Social Welfare, Women and Child Development, of Madhya Pradesh, Mrs. Jamuna Devi, accompanied by Ms. Mabel Rebello, member of the National Literacy Mission, participates in a large youth rally of about ten thousand strong cheering crowd.

In his welcome address, Fr. John Padinjaraparambil highlights the keen interest the visitors have taken in promoting the socio-economic development of Jokbahla. Fr. Gregory Tigga, the Vicar General of Raigarh, in his frank, powerful yet winning style, presents the problems of the tribals in Raigarh.

Ms. Mabel Rebello addresses a crowd of six thousand students who have come from 22 schools around. In her bold and provocative style, she urges the students not to remain passive spectators but active collaborators of their own development.

The Hon. Minister then addresses the crowd. After winning the audience over with reference to her own Adivasi origin, she praises the Christian institutions for the yeoman service they render, especially for the education of the Adivasis. She urges the people to become aware of their rights and to organize themselves in order to benefit from the numerous government projects. She also announces the opening of a degree College in Kunkuri, and promises to take necessary steps to solve the many grievances presented through the speeches and memoranda.[24]

2.2 Kereng (1987)

In the meeting of the Provincial Council on 20th February 1987, the Provincial presents a letter from Archbishop Telesphore of Ranchi in which he offers two places that the Salesians could take up in his diocese for pastoral work: Kereng and Kurkuria. His preference, however, is for Kereng.

[23] Cfr. SNC, XX-2/'92, 9
[24] Cfr. SNC, XXII-2 March-April 1994, 6–7.

In March 1987 the Council decides to send a Salesian to Kereng by May-June of that year. In the meeting of 15th October 1987, Fr. Robert (Douglas) D'Lima presents a report on the Kereng parish. The Council decides to ask Fr. Robert to settle down at Kereng and not at Katkahi, with another helper to be sent at the earliest.

It is in March 1988 that the Provincial Council decides to give its final approval to accept the parish of Kereng and seek due permission from Rome. On 1st May 1992 the Don Bosco Centre is blessed and inaugurated.[25]

The parish has 7 villages, one primary school, and other educational and developmental programmes through CCF. The Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo run the Hostel for girls, and a dispensary.[26]

2.3 Kuarmunda (1988)

In February 1985 Bishop A. Bilung of Rourkela, sends a letter to the Provincial in which he reminds him of an earlier invitation to the previous Provincial. His great desire is that the Salesians undertake some work in his diocese, preferably a technical school in the industrial complex of Rourkela or nearby.

The Salesians are open to the idea, especially because this would give an opening for recruiting vocations, but they are not able to give a positive answer immediately, due to lack of personnel.

In March 1988 the bishop promises to register for the Salesians about 15 acres of land, 15 kms from the city along the highway to Ranchi.

On 19th June 1988 takes place the inauguration of the parish of Kuarmunda by the bishop of Rourkela, and Fr. John Kakkuzhy is installed as its first parish priest in the presence of Fr. Provincial and the Economer. The parish has 9 sub-stations.

Bishop A. Bilung blesses the Primary school and the boys' hostel on 28th April 1991.[27] The new vocational Training Centre is blessed on 23rd April 1994. The Don Bosco Vocational Training Centre for boys and

[25] Cfr. SNC, XX-2 May/'92, 1.
[26] Cfr. Directory of the Salesian Province of New Delhi 2001–2002, 23.
[27] Cfr. SNC, XXI-3 May/'91, 9–10.

girls offers 11 trades in collaboration with the Holy Cross Sisters of Hazaribag. Besides the hostel for youth, there are also 2 primary and 4 middle schools (Oriya Medium). The hostel for girls, dispensary and programmes for the empowerment of women are conducted by the sisters.[28]

2.4 Jumaikela (1989)

The mission of Jumaikela is launched during the centenary year of Don Bosco's death and is entrusted to the care of Fr. Francis Vadaken. When the Salesians take over the Mission there are only three huts, used as Village Chapel and school.[29]

On 2nd July 1989, Bishop Victor Kindo of Raigarh, blesses the newly constructed community Hall, establishes the new parish, carved out of Jokbahla and Ginabahar, and installs Fr. V. L. Francis as the parish priest.[30] With the completion of the parish church, to which the people contribute with their labour, the entire centre is fully operational by January 1994.[31]

By early 1991, the FMA Sisters, who come to the mission soon after the arrival of the Salesians, construct their residence and a school building.[32]

The parish has now 20 villages, 2 primary schools, Programmes for the empowerment of women, Agricultural Development through irrigation system, Health Camps and Hostel for youth. The Salesian Sisters run the unaided middle school, hostel for girls, and a dispensary.[33]

2.5 Jabalpur (1991)

The agreement for the sale of 3.67 acres of land and a running poultry of about 2500 layers and broilers is signed on 29th October 1991. The property, which is about four kms away from the Bishop's house in Jabalpur, is registered on 23rd November1991. It is purchased to open a study house for the aspirants, class XI and XII, and also as a place for the

[28] Cfr. Directory of the Salesian Province of New Delhi 2001–2002, 23.
[29] Cfr. SNC, XXI-2 March/'91, 8.
[30] Cfr. SNC, XVI-6 July/'89, 5.
[31] Cfr. SNC, 1 January-February/'94, 11.
[32] Cfr. SNC, XXI-2 March/'91, 8.
[33] Cfr. Directory of the Salesian Province of New Delhi 2001–2002, 22.

young Salesians to do their college studies.[34] At present it is the preparatory house for the pre-novitiate.

2.6 Lucknow (1992)

From 8th to the 10th July 1989, Fr. Provincial and the Economer, reach Lucknow to visit Bishop Alan De Lastic who has invited the Salesians to start a Salesian presence in his diocese. On the 10th the two Salesians are taken around Lucknow to look for places and to see to the starting of some work there.

In February 1991 the Provincial Economer goes to Lucknow to see to the purchase of 9 acres of land.[35] In December 1991, Bro. Kurias Cyriac registers the land at Mahanlalganj, 25 kms away from Lucknow and starts the building of a shed with rooms for the confreres. The construction of the shed starts in the middle of January 1992. The blessing of the foundation stone of the Technical Institute by Fr. Oswald Lewis, the Administrator of the diocese, takes place on 31st January 1992. The house is blessed and opened on 12th July 1992 with Fr. AM Jose as priest in-charge and Bro. Kurias Cyriac as in-charge of the technical section.

On 27th October 1994, Fr. Provincial lays the foundation stone of the hostel for boys. In 1995, works begin for the construction of a full-fledged Technical Institute. Regular courses begin in the Institute in 1997 in collaboration with the Ursulines of Mary Immaculate.[36]

2.7 Kauli (1993)

It is in December 1989 that Fr. Provincial speaks to his Council about the invitation of Bishop Hubert De Rego of Chandigarh to establish a technical school in his diocese. On 16th and 17th October 1992, Fr. Vallappallil Mathai reports to the Council of his visit to Chandigarh. Bishop Rego offers a plot of land in the heart of the city and there is scope for pastoral activities.

Kauli is on the road to Patiala, 28 kms from the city. There a plot of land is reserved for the minor seminary and a youth hostel. We are asked

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[34] Cfr. SNC, 5 November-December/'91, 9; Directory of the Salesian Province of New Delhi 2001–2002, 19; Minutes of Provincial Council Meetings, 7.11.91, and 25.6.1995–26.6.1995, *Provincial Archives*, B.8.2.4.

[35] Cfr. Minutes of Provincial Council Meeting, 14.3.'91, *Provincial Archives* B.8.2.3.

[36] Cfr. Directory of the Salesian Province of New Delhi 2001–2002, 24.

to run the hostel and help in the seminary. The diocese is offering 15 acres of land and Rs. 2 lakhs in cash.

A Salesian presence in Kauli starts in June 1993 by the opening of the hostel at Rajpur, the pioneers being Fr. Joy Marangattikala and Fr. James Jainivas. The diocese donates part of the land for the house. In 1994 the property of Bakeman's factory at Kauli is bought, and in 1995, work begins for an agro-oriented Technical Institute. On 31st January 1995, Bishop Hubert de Rego, blesses the new 'Non-formal Training Institute'. Present at the blessing are Fr. Provincial, the Delegate Fr. V.V. Mathai, and Bro. Isaac Puthumana. In his homily Fr. Provincial thanks all those who have been instrumental in realizing the Salesian presence at Kauli.[37]

2.8 Jharsuguda (1994)

The opening of a Salesian presence in Jharsuguda, which could eventually become the centre of a new Delegation, is discussed in the Provincial Council meeting of 4th June 1992. Fr. Mathai, reports to the Council on his visit of the place and mentions that there are possibilities of apostolic work.

In the meeting of the Council on 9th August 1992, Fr. Mathai, the Delegate, presents a request for buying a plot of land in the town of Jharsuguda, the central place of the Delegation. He has already found a plot of 4.20 acres of land on sale. The permission is granted.

The Salesian pastoral work begins with a coaching centre for school dropouts, computer and spoken English classes. The new building is blessed and inaugurated on 16th April 1997. From 16th July 2000, Jharsuguda is the *aspirantate* for post-matric boys.[38]

2.9 Kullu (1996)

The Our Lady of Snows School at Kullu is entrusted to the Salesians in 1995. Fr. George Tharayil takes over as principal from the new session in March 1996.[39]

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[37] Cfr. SNC, XXIII-1st and 2nd January/'95, 6; SNC, XXIV-6 July/'96, 5.
[38] Cfr. Directory of the Salesian Province of New Delhi 2001–2002, 20.
[39] Cfr. SNC, XXIII, 5-6/'95, 14.

In February 1996, Fr. George asks the Provincial Council for permission to start classes XI and XII from the new scholastic year. To this request the Council answers positively.[40]

In May 1996, Fr. Sebastian Kuzhipala, the provincial economer, meets with the Diocesan Committee of Shimla and Chandigarh regarding some difficulties arising in the school just accepted in Kullu. Some type of agreement is reached for purchasing the land necessary for the opening of classes XI and XII.[41]

In June 1996, the confreres in Kullu ask permission to purchase some land for building an extension of the school. But a month later the plan is dropped due to the exorbitant price of the land. With a little adjustment they find place for other classrooms.[42]

In the meeting of the Provincial Council of July 1996, Fr. Mathai reports about a meeting with Bishop Rego of Chandigarh to settle some difficulties that have arisen regarding the agreement with the diocese. The bishop assures him that the letter of a member of the Senate, which is the cause of the problem, is the personal opinion of that member and so the agreement stands.

2.10 Ashalayam (Delhi – 1996)

Fr. Antony Thaiparambil launches an apostolate for the street children of New Delhi in 1996. Don Bosco Ashalayam (Delhi) begins to function in the newly constructed house at Palam Gaon from August 1999.[43]

B) Life in the Established Institutions and in the Life of the Province

1. Auxilium Parish

In the last years of Fr. Joseph Kezhakkekara's term as Provincial, Auxilium parish witnesses an overall growth. A plot of land and a building

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[40] Cfr. Minutes of the Provincial Council Meeting, 9.2.'96–10.2.'96, *Provincial Archives* B.8.2.5.
[41] Cfr. Ibid. 9.5.'96.
[42] Cfr. Ibid. 19.7.'96–20.7.'96.
[43] Cfr. Directory of the Salesian Province of New Delhi 2001–2002, 26.

bordering the church compound are acquired in early 1990, and later, in June, another 12 khatas of land adjacent to the church are acquired.[44]

The pastoral and spiritual growth of the parish is well summarised by the present parish priest, Fr. Sebastian Champanil in his message on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the parish in 1999. He writes: "Twenty five years ago, the small seed planted in Gobra, then not an easily approachable area, came to be known as Auxilium parish church. Truly, within the short span of these past twenty five years, this small seed has grown into a large plant – the present Auxilium parish, with its beautiful Shrine, dedicated to Mary Help of Christians, with schools and social developmental works, with a number of religious congregations engaged in various fields of apostolate, and a variety of activities and organizations, all bubbling with life. Truly, "This is the work of the Lord and it is wonderful in our eyes." (Mt. 21: 42)

1.1 The Shrine of Mary Help of Christians

Fr. R. Stroscio, the main inspirer and force behind the construction of the Shrine, describes its history in the Silver Jubilee Souvenir of Auxilium parish. The project begins in 1985. It took three months to prepare a model of it in plywood. The model is the basis for the technical drawing prepared by the architect, Mr. I. M. Asthana.

Besides serving as a parish church, it is envisaged, from the outset, as *thanksgiving offering* to Mary Help of Christians, who since December 1922 has assisted the Salesians to spread, almost in a miraculous manner.

As it happens with all God's works, the project meets with obstacles right from its start. God, however, sends the right persons at the right moment to help weather the storm.

First in line comes Fr. Sebastian Alancheril, former Provincial of the Salesian Province of Kolkata, who approves the project. The financial problem is mainly solved when Fr. Antony Alessi, founder of the Association *Fratelli Dimenticati – Italy*, and his friend, Prof. Gianni Alessi, promise financial help. The path is blocked by a Municipal Ordinance on 16th December 1989, which for one year blocks construction of buildings rising to the height of more than thirteen and a half meters. At this juncture

[44] Cfr. Minutes of the Provincial Council Meetings, 16.12.'89, and 14.6.'90–15.6.'90, *Provincial Archives* B.8.2.3.

God sends Shri Mihir Kumar Moitra, who, as secretary of local government and Urban Development, West Bengal, gets the Shrine declared a 'Building of Public Interest', and so exempt from the limitations imposed by the Ordinance. Mother Teresa too intervenes personally at every step to secure necessary sanctions for the building. Auxilium church is declared a building of public interest on 26th August 1990. The Kolkata Municipal Corporation formally approves the plans on 27th May 1992.

Though the building looks large and imposing, it actually covers a small area. It is 62 meters long, 19 meters wide, and 37 meters high. It follows a classical church style in which Roman arch prevails. Its simplicity, symmetry and elevated position give the church a majestic look. The foundations rest on 184 concrete piles, 350 and 400 mm. in diameter, sunk to a depth of 14 and 20 meters. The foundation stone is blessed on Thursday, 3rd January 1991, by Fr. Antony Alessi; and laid by Shri Mihir Kumar Moitra.

Besides the Association *Fratelli Dimenticati,* Fr. Stroscio mentions also as main donors, Fr. Lidebrando A. from *Santangelo of Adrano*, Italy, Dr. Daniel Scipione, founder of the Association *I Nostri Amici Lebbrosi – Italy*, Fr. Julius Matteucci, Fr. Louis Gobetti, and Vincent Lazzaro. However, it is Fr. Sebastian Kuzhipala, the then parish priest of Auxilium parish, whom God uses to clear occasional blocks, organize, harmonize and direct all these precious energies to success.

It must not, however, be imagined that the building of the church is at the cost of neglecting the cause of the poor. God has rewarded the efforts to construct a beautiful Shrine by supplying the means necessary whereby the parish has been able to take care of the education of hundreds of poor children, open community centres and primary schools, procure medicines for the sick, and construct about a hundred houses for families, without a roof over their heads.

The Shrine is solemnly blessed on 29th January 1995. It attracts numerous devotees of the Blessed Virgin, even non-Christians, and it is a fitting monument to her in the city of Kolkata. Below the church is the main primary school at Auxilium parish, managed by the FMA Sisters. They have their convent built on a filled-up pond, which they bought, adjacent to the church compound. Besides the parish school, they have boarding, Typing and Computer courses, Spoken English, work room, parish apostolate, MCH programme, and Salesian Cooperators.

1.2 The Pre-Novitiate



Auxilium Parish: The Shrine of Mary Help of Christians

In 1995 Fr. Thomas Polackal looks for a place to begin the Pre-Novitiate for the candidates to Salesian life. The newly constructed shrine is just blessed and, along with the church, the Auxilium Convent building adjacent to the church is also complete. The Salesian Sisters vacate the building next to the Presbytery and take up residence in their new convent. The parish then agrees to the proposal of the Provincial to begin the Pre-Novitiate in the building vacated by the Salesian Sisters. Necessary modifications and alterations are made to make it convenient for the pre-novices to live in there. Fr. Francis Alencherry, together with Fr. James Pathiyil,[45] begins the work for the Pre-novices in June 1995.[46]

2. Azimganj

2.1 The Santal Mission

On 25th March 1987, the annual meeting of the Santal missionaries opens at Don Bosco Azimganj animated by the Provincial and Vice-Provincial. The main points of discussion are:

1. Priorities in parishes in view of Don Bosco's death centenary in 1988. In this connection Fr. Sebastian Kuzhipala circulates a plan of activities for DB88 for the Santal region. As regards 'youth work', they discuss

[45] Fr. James Pathiyil is born on 11th January 1965 at Koorachund (Kerala), makes his first profession on 24th May 1984, is ordained a priest on 1st January 1994. His first assignment as Asst. Director of the newly established pre-novitiate at Auxilium Parish. In October 1997 he joins the community of Ashalayam. A very promising young Salesian, he dies in an accident on 8th November 1998.

[46] Cfr. Silver Jubilee Souvenir – Auxilium Parish 25 years 1974–1999.

on the growth of the Past Pupils'Association and other youth groups and movements.

2. Expansion of the Salesian community at Azimganj. Fr. Francis Munnamvayalil parish priest and rector of Don Bosco Azimganj, highlights the problems of growth in the parish and in the school, which will eventually necessitate a bifurcation.

3. Expansion and growth of the Santal apostolate in Birbhum. Fr. Cyriac Manianchira briefs the assembly on the growing scope of evangelization in the Rampurhat sub-division of Birbhum that falls under Dumka diocese. There are requests for a Catholic presence in Rampurhat sub-division. He expresses his inability to look after the area from Suri.[47]

2.2 Silver Jubilee Celebrations of Don Bosco School

Twenty-nine Salesians are present at the colloquium on the Santal Mission of Murshidabad-Birbhum held on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of Don Bosco School, Azimganj, on 16th and 17th July 1991. Brothers Joseph Pauria and Peter Mardy, the first Santal Salesians, are present.

Bishop Lucas Sirkar of Krishnagar, Fr. John Topno, the pioneer of Murshidabad mission, and Fr. Bertie Fernandes, the Vice-Provincial, chair the sessions. Fr. Mathew Manianchira and his team organize the symposium.[48]

2.3 The College Hostel for Santal boys

The work on the hostel starts with the blessing of the foundation stone by Fr. Provincial on 7th May 1988 as part of the DB88 venture. The dream of the missionaries of the Santal belt of Kolkata Province comes true on 15th January 1994 with the blessing and inauguration of the College Hostel for tribal students of the Santal belt. The simple ceremony is conducted immediately after the ordination of Fr. Peter Mardy, SDB. Fr. Thomas Polackal, the Provincial, inaugurates the hostel, and Bishop Lucas Sirkar blesses the building.[49]

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[47] Cfr. SNC, XIV-4 April /'87, 5-6.
[48] Cfr. SNC, XIX-4 September-October/'91, 1–2.
[49] Cfr. SNC, XXII-1 January-February/'94, 14.

2.4 Shanti Nir (Abode of Peace)

The unwanted and the untouched in the region of Murshidabad cry for cure from leprosy. To reach to these people, the diocese of Krishnagar makes an adventurous start by opening a centre named *Shanti Nir* (Abode of Peace), blessed by Bishop Lucas Sirkar on 15th August 1993. It is situated at Barala, a sub-station of Azimganj parish, and 30 kms away from Murshidabad town. People of all castes and creeds are cared for there.

2.5 Opening of Savio Bhavan

On 25th March 1987, on the feast of the Annunciation, Fr. Provincial blesses and inaugurates the new building for the apostolic school of Savio Bhavan at Azimganj. Fr. Joseph Gomes is officially installed as rector of the new apostolic school on 26th October 1987.[50]

It is in the meeting of 6th December 1984, the last meeting presided over by Fr. Joseph Kezhakkekara, that the Provincial Council discusses the need for a new *aspirantate*, for fostering vocations in West Bengal, strongly recommended some time earlier by Fr. Thomas Panakezham. The discussion leads to a decision by the Council to make a small beginning at Azimganj. Fr. Joseph Gomes is proposed to be the 'in-charge' of it.

The opening of the new *aspirantate* for local vocations, Bengalis and Santals, is held on 31st January 1985. On this day, Fr. Thomas Polackal, the new Provincial, blesses the wing of the Don Bosco School, which temporarily will house the new *aspirantate*. It starts with 18 boys, 10 Bengali boys from Don Bosco Krishnagar, five Santali boys and three aspirants from Bandel. On 23rd January a truckload of dining tables, bedsteads, chairs, etc. arrives from Bandel, and on 29th January another truck from Provincial House brings house utensils and furniture removed earlier from Cossipore.[51]

This arrangement, however, could not continue for long, due to the increase in the number of boys. After some search, seven bighas of land are bought, not too far from the present Don Bosco School, for a new

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[50] Cfr. Chronicle of the Province, 25.3.1987, *Provincial Archives*, B.10.1.4; SNC, XIV-5 May/'87, 6; and XIV-11 December/'87, 3.

[51] Cfr. Chronicle of Province 31.1.'85, *Provincial Archives*, B.10.1.4, and a write-up titled 'A dream comes true' in SNC, XII-2 February/'85, 10.

building. To this plot another piece of land suitable for the purpose and adjacent to the property in our possession is added in January 1990.[52]

3. Bandel

3.1 Bandel Shrine: a Minor Basilica

In May 1988 Fr. A. Gobetti is made the Prior of the Bandel Shrine. His coming to Bandel marks the beginning of the transformation of the Bandel parish into a throbbing centre of Christian life and of an increased devotion to our Blessed Mother.

Fr. Gobetti brings within himself from Ranaghat a great love for the Blessed Virgin. His love for our Lady of Guadalupe moves him to build a church in her honour at Ranaghat, and now it is his love to our Lady of Bandel, imbibed during his year of novitiate at Bandel in 1937, that inspires him to undertake the renovation of the Bandel parish, both in its external appearance and more so in its spiritual relevance, thus fulfilling the expressed desire of the Holy Father in raising the Bandel Shrine to the status of a Minor Basilica.

The Vatican does not grant the repeated requests by previous Priors for this privilege considering the precarious condition of the church building and the lack of Catholic population at Bandel. His Grace Henry D'Souza, Archbishop of Kolkata personally visites the Vatican and moves the Holy See to finally elevate the Bandel Shrine to a Minor Basilica. The Decree of John Paul II declaring Bandel Shrine a Minor Basilica is dated 25th November 1988. The Pro-Nuncio Agostino Cacciavillan proclaims it publicly on the Feast of our Lady of Bandel on 7th May 1989. On



The Most Rev. Dr. HENRY D'SOUZA
Archbishop of Kolkata

[52] Cfr. Minutes of the Provincial Council Meeting, 15.1.'90, *Provincial Archives*, B.8.2.3.

16th February 1989, it is decided with the Archbishop of Kolkata to invite on the occasion of the proclamation, all the Salesian bishops of India, all the bishops of Assam, Bihar, Orissa, and Bangladesh; and also all the major superiors of religious congregations residing in Kolkata.[53]



The Basilica of our Lady of Bandel

The great 'honour' of Bandel Shrine being made a Minor Basilica, brings with it the *onus* – burden, if we can call it so, of removing the two obstacles which caused the delay in granting the status so far, namely the precarious condition of the building and the lack of a Catholic population around.

Fr. Gobetti with great tenacity and through the generosity of his benefactors works hard to restore to the Shrine the dignity proper of a Minor Basilica. He does it by the renovation and beautification of the Shrine and its surroundings.[54]

In July 1980 the Shrine community presents a plan to the Provincial Council for reclaiming the playground in front of the Shrine. The first priority is the building of a boundary wall, for which Rs. 2 lakhs are granted.

[53] Cfr. Minutes of Provincial Council Meeting, 16.2.'89, *Provincial Archives*, B.8.2.3.

[54] Cfr. History by Fr. Gobetti in "400 Glorious Years", a brochure brought out on the occasion of the 4th Centenary of the Bandel Shrine 1599–1999; Cfr. also 'Beautification of Basilica' in SNC, XVII-4 July/'90, 1–4; XVII-5 September/'90, 7–9.

The construction of the boundary wall begins on 8th December 1986 but trouble starts immediately.[55] The Court ruling alienates the people, and the wall is demolished on 5th April 1996.[56] The wall is rebuilt and it is completed in October 2002. For an update of the Bandel case we refer to various issues of Salesian News Calcutta in the note.[57]

In trying to increase the Catholic population Fr. Gobetti adopts a two-pronged strategy: by developing the Salesian presence among the many Santals living in the villages within the Bandel parish area, and by attracting Catholic families from Kolkata and nearby places to settle down close to the Shrine. He buys for them a small plot of land on which they can build their own houses. The good results of this double policy can be seen from the number of people filling up the Basilica at the various Masses on Sundays.

3.2 Solution of some Problems Affecting the Seminary and the Don Bosco School

On 27th July 1989 there takes place a joint meeting of the Provincial Council and the Council of the Bandel Seminary during which the Bandel confreres have a fruitful dialogue with the Provincial Council. The main problem presented by the Bandel House Council concerns the aspirants. They do not have a fair deal in Don Bosco School. Since most of the aspirants did not have an early English education, they labour under a heavy handicap when joining classes with the day scholars, who have had mostly an English medium education. This gives the aspirants an inferiority feeling.

To meet this problem the house suggests that the aspirants of classes XI and XII be taught separately in the seminary premises, forming, however, a part of Don Bosco School. It is also suggested that the prefect of studies of the aspirants be relieved of being the vice-principal of the School, so at to be able to give his full attention to the aspirants.

In the following Provincial Council meeting of 7th August 1987, some decisions are taken with regard to the two suggestions proposed by the Bandel House Council. It is right and opportune that the aspirants get

[55] Cfr. details in SNC, XIV-3/'87, 4–6.
[56] Cfr. SNC, XXIV-4 and 5 May June/'96, 1–2.
[57] SNC, XXIV-6 July/'96; XXIV-9 October/'96; XXIV-10 November–December/'96; XXV-1-2 Janaury–February/'97; XXV-3-4 March–April/'97.

extra attention. However, interaction with day scholars should not altogether be cut, but fostered with due precautions. It is not possible to give an extra priest to act as vice-principal. The Science Stream in classes XI and XII can be discontinued substituting Commerce in its place.

3.3 Merger of DBPC Coadjutor Aspirants and Bandel Clerical Aspirants

Accommodation for the coadjutor aspirants at DBPC becomes a problem. The increased number of aspirants makes it imperative that a suitable place be found for them. Due to financial constraints no building venture is possible at the moment. The idea of having these aspirants in Bandel seems a viable option, after seeking opinion of the confreres in Bandel. May be as a temporary measure the aspirants could be sent to Bandel.[58] The Council in its meeting on 26th June 1986, discusses the same problem of numbers at Park Circus and sees the need of some permanent solution.

In September 1987, the Don Bosco Park Circus confreres in a letter ask the Provincial and his Council to decide on a suitable set-up for the coadjutor aspirants. The Council on 17th August 1987 decides to get the opinion of the whole Province on this matter. Accordingly a questionnaire is sent to the confreres.

The Provincial Council of 12th November 1987 considers the replies to it:

1. The questionnaire does not ask for the location.
2. The possibility of an inter-provincial location is ruled out for various reasons,
3. The location should not be in the Hindi belt, as standards of study would be lower than those in Bandel.
4. It is a mistake to separate the brother aspirants from the clerical aspirants. The mixture, instead, will be beneficial.

The study conducted to know the mind of the Province reveals that a good majority opt for a merger of the two *aspirantate*s. On 25th January 1988 the Council decides to place the coadjutor aspirants in Bandel. DBPC would help financially.

[58] Cfr. Minutes of the Provincial Council Meeting, 18.12.'85.

In April 1988 a joint meeting of the Provincial Council and of the Bandel House Council is held to discuss modalities and clarify various points regarding the merger. The merger takes place on 15th April 1988.

3.4 Starting a Nursery-cum-Primary School in Don Bosco School

The Bandel confreres ask permission from the Provincial and his Council at a meeting on 10th and 11th October 1996 to start a nursery-cum-primary school in order to occupy the empty space in the building of the *aspirantate*. The suggestion is to arrange things in such a way that the smooth running of the *aspirantate* is not hindered. The answer of the Council is that such proposal should be renewed after the division of the Province, and that they should present a plan for the remodelling of the infrastructures that they think of using for such a school. The Council recommends that the old building be used and adapted for it, and that the priority of the Seminary be preserved. In 1999 the suggestion becomes a reality.

4. Behrampore

4.1 Youth Centre at Behrampore

In July 1995 Fr. Scaria Nedumattathil of Monigram makes the request to the Provincial Council at its meeting of 14th and 15th July 1995, to be allowed to open an institution for juvenile delinquents in Behrampore. Government authorities have approached the Salesians to start such an institution. Government will help to some extent. Fr. Scaria offers himself to start this work that is a true Salesian work. The Council decides to take up the work and asks Fr. Scaria to do the needful with an understanding with the Council.

The land for the new presence is available at a cost of Rs. 7 lakhs. The Provincial Economer will make the purchase. The work will develop slowly.[59]

A further request is made by the confreres in Behrampore to buy another 10 bighas of land at the cost of Rs. 1.6 lakhs per bigha for the project in favour of young prisoners. The Council asks the confreres to get the funds required by selling the unused land adjacent to the National Highway.

[59] Cfr. Ibid. 18.8.'95–19.8.'95, *Provincial Archives*, B.8.2.4.

In January 1996 Fr. Scaria Nedumattathil makes a proposal for a trade school in Behrampore meant for young prisoners. He is advised to start in a small way, avoiding huge buildings. He is asked to make a master plan to be implemented in stages.[60]

Today Fr. Scaria's dream is a reality. Don Bosco Yuva Jyoti is inaugurated in 1998. The Centre offers non-formal vocational training courses in Driving, Motor Mechanics, Electricals, Auto-electrical, and tailoring. Each course lasts 6 months. Prison ministry is the new Apostolate undertaken by the community.

The confreres of the parish, which is entrusted *in perpetuum* to the Salesians on 29th October 1996, form one community with those of Don Bosco Yuva Jyoti, with Fr. Scaria Nedumattathil as rector, and Fr. Kariyattil Antony as parish priest.[61]

5. Kolkata: The Don Bosco Complex at Tengra

5.1 The Extension of the Provincial House

In its meeting of 26th June 1986, the Provincial Council discusses ways to solve the problem of lack of accommodation at the Provincial House. One suggestion is to adapt rooms 41 and 42 by making them into 4 rooms, to restructure the balcony near the present library and turn it into a self-contained room. Another suggestion is to build a new Provincial House on the vacant land near Don Bosco Park Circus called 'Tiny Tots', which offers greater facilities and is more approachable for the confreres who want to meet the Provincial.

The second suggestion comes up again for discussion when Fr. George Tharayil, the Economer, after his visit to the said land reports that it is more than adequate for the Provincial House, but no decision is taken at their meeting held on 10th July 1986.

A third suggestion is discussed by the Provincial Council in its meeting of 23rd October 1986, to build an annexe to the Provincial House. This proposed annexe would have 32 rooms.

It is in the meeting of 17th December 1987 that the Provincial Council takes the final decision to build the present extension to the Provincial

[60] Cfr. Ibid. 19.1.'96–20.1.'96, *Provincial Archives*, B.8.2.5.
[61] Cfr. Directory of the Salesian Province of Kolkata 2001–2002, 35.

House. Fr. Alancheril, Provincial, blesses the new wing of the Provincial House on 26th January 1989, Republic Day.[62]

5.2 Closure of the School of Graphic Arts at Tengra, and opening of a non-formal school for the Children of the Neighbourhood.

On 4th March 1989 the Provincial Council is presided over by the Vice-Provincial, authorized to do so by the Provincial who is recuperating after an operation. The Council seriously questions the viability of the school of Graphic Arts at Tengra. Bro. T.V. Mathew Thaiparambil, Delegate for Technical Education, is asked to meet the Salesian personnel of the school to assess the situation and submit a written report.

Basing itself on the study of Don Bosco Tengra House Council and on the findings of the Technical Commission set up by the Provincial Council to study the viability of the school of Graphic Arts on 11th May 1989, the Provincial Council decides that the said school be closed down with effect from 31st July 1990. The assets of the same are to be transferred to some other part of the Province, as shall be decided by the Provincial Council.[63]

As for the shifting of the press, even at the end of 1989, no time can be fixed, as the Council has not yet found a suitable location for the same. Eventually, the press is shifted to Don Bosco Okhla, Delhi.

In the Council meeting of 18th and 19th August 1995, The Provincial Council discusses a plan presented by the confreres of Don Bosco Nitika, for the restructuring of the ground and first floor left vacant with the shifting of the Press to Okhla. The plan for the ground floor (class rooms for a non-formal school for the children of the neighbourhood) is accepted and will be implemented. For the first floor, the Council asks for a better plan.

Under the leadership of Fr. Aymanathil Joseph, the entire ground floor has been converted into 10 classrooms and a small hall. "About 600 children predominantly Muslim fill the Don Bosco green patch in the concrete city-jungle. They spend their time in recreation and wait for the school to open at 2 p.m. every working day. About 300 of them attend the non-formal education every afternoon. Another 300 come to study in the

[62] Cfr. Chronicle of the Province, *Provincial Archives*, B.10.1.4.
[63] Cfr. SNC, 6 September/'90: DBSGA stops functioning, motivation for the shifting.

evening. A team of 18 teachers assists in the coaching classes. ... Another popular initiative is the spoken English Course."[64]

6. Don Bosco – Delhi

6.1 The School of Graphic Arts

In the meeting of 18th February 1992, the Provincial Council discusses on the necessity of starting the school of Graphic Arts at Okhla at the earliest. The machines to be bought are expensive and without help from some agency it is not possible to start. This is the cause for the delay.

During his journey to Europe, Bro. Mathew Thaiparambil will approach *Misereor* for help. The Salesian brothers who will work there must be sent to Italy for further training.[65]

In the meeting of the Council on 17th and 18th October 1993, all are of the opinion that there is no need for buying land for a new house in Delhi. A building for the school of Graphic Arts must start soon in the Okhla compound. In the meeting of 25th to 27th October Fr. Provincial announces the good news that *Comide* of Belgium has practically agreed to fund the Press at Okhla. They will give Rs. 22 lakhs in instalments.

The blessing of the Foundation stone of the new school of Graphic Arts by Archbishop Alen De Lastic takes place on 30th April 1994. "The plan envisages facilities for 100 students to start with. The Diploma given will be the ITI in printing Technology. A very important section will be non-formal. Both the sections will cater to boys and girls in keeping with the stipulations of *Comide,* since they hold education of women in particular esteem and urgency. ... The Building will be of three floors, mostly for the printing school as such, and the hostel is expected to utilize the existing facilities."[66]

6.2 Alaknanda

The first phase of the building being completed, a lot of building material is left still. Fr. Paul Padamattumel, the rector of the house, is in favour of building at least the ground floor of the hall, where the assembly

[64] Cfr. SNC, XXIV-3/'86, 12.
[65] Cfr. Minutes of the Provincial Council Meeting 31.3.'92, *Provincial Archives* B.8.2.4.
[66] Cfr. SNC, XXI- 5 September-October/'93. 14.

can be held. But, for various reasons, the Provincial Council is not of the same opinion.[67]

Three years will pass before the auditorium takes shape. Fr. Provincial on 20th August1988 inaugurates it. On 1st February 1989 there takes place the unveiling of the monument to Don Bosco in front of the school in the presence of Fr. Provincial. The Chairman of the Delhi Corporation is the Chief Guest. It is a DB88 event.[68]

7. Krishnagar:

7.1 Centenary Celebrations of Krishnagar Diocese (1886–1986)

The centenary celebrations of Krishnagar diocese are held on 15th February 1987. At 10.00 a.m. Bishop Lucas Sirkar inaugurates a 3-day exhibition on the theme 'For me to live is Christ' in the Cathedral Hall. The 11 parishes of the diocese, four religious congregations (Sisters of Charity, SMI, FMA, and SDB) and the lay Institute display their respective services in spreading the Good News in Nadia and Murshidabad Districts.

At 2.00 p.m. an open-air Thanksgiving Mass is Concelebrated in front of the Cathedral. Bishop Lucas Sirkar and Bishop Linus Gomes of Baraipur diocese, Fr. Sebastian Alancheril, the Provincial, and more than 40 priests concelebrate.

At the offertory procession led by a group of dancers, representing all parishes and congregations, offers gifts and have their spokesperson express a prayer in their respective languages.

Bishop Lucas Sirkar blesses a new open-air stage. Each parish presents an item. In between, a slide programme of the hundred years history of the diocese is presented.

The diocese of Krishnagar is erected on 1st September 1886. Msgr. Pozzi is appointed its first Bishop. He builds the first Cathedral in Krishnagar, dedicated to the Most Holy Redeemer.[69]

7.2 Diamond Jubilee of Don Bosco School (1934- 1994)

On 30th January 1994, at 10.00 a.m. Fr. Thomas Polackal, Provincial, presides over a solemn Mass, with which he inaugurates the Diamond

[67] Cfr. Minutes of Provincial Council, 31.8.1985, *Provincial Archives*, B.8.2.3.
[68] Cfr. Chronicle of the Province, *Provincial Archives* B.10.1.4.
[69] Cfr. SNC, XIV-3 March/'87, 9–10.

Jubilee of Don Bosco Krishnagar. Some 20 confreres concelebrate with him.[70]

8. Don Bosco, Liluah

8.1 Remodelling of Structures: the Residence

In October 1993 the House Council of Don Bosco Liluah asks the Provincial Council at its meeting from 25th to 27th October 1993, for permission to demolish part of the old building and build in its place quarters for confreres and facilities for school and parish.

The building plans are sent for final approval in October 1994. Before the approval the plans will have to be submitted to Rome, as the cost of Rs. 71 lakhs is beyond the ceiling within which the Provincial Council can take decision.[71] On 8th December 1994, the Provincial blesses the Foundation stone of the new wing.[72] In January 1996, permission is asked to start the 2nd floor of the building.

In August 1995 the house council presents to the Provincial Council meeting on 18th and 19th August 1995, a project for the expansion of the workshop and technical school. This project, though started in 1996, is realized only after the division of the Province. So also the demolition and reconstruction of the Auditorium.

8.2 The West Bengal Government seeks support from the Salesians

When the District Administration of Howrah gets to know that Don Bosco Technical School, Liluah, is running a Don Bosco Self-Employment Training Institute (DBSETI), they contact the confreres and go to see the set up under which the DBSETI is working.

During the visit the authorities are surprised to find that the eighteen or twenty year old boys who have never gone to school can write the letters of the English alphabet, can draw well, and are efficient in geometrical drawings and reading. One is emotionally moved when he learns that some of the boys had the jail or Howrah Station as their home before reaching DBSETI.

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[70] Cfr. Chronicle of the Province, *Provincial Archives*, B.10.1.4.
[71] Minutes of the Provincial Council Meeting, 21.10.94–22.10.94, *Provincial Archives* B.8.2.4.
[72] Chronicle of the Province, *Provincial Archives,* B.10.1.4.

The District Planning Committee introduces a scheme titled the Integrated Urban Employment Programme (IUEP) and requests the Salesian Province of Kolkata to help run it. On 31st January 1986 an official agreement is signed between the government and the Salesian Province of Kolkata according to which the Salesians undertake the full responsibility of the direction and administration of the non-formal training aspect of the IUEP, instruction to the trainees, and, as far as possible, the marketing of the finished products of the IUEP trainees. The government on its part will provide land for the extension of the training facilities, provide funds for the necessary buildings, tools and all needed facilities and fittings, as well as funds for the payment of all employees.

For security, a clause is inserted in the agreement according to which, "if either party wishes to terminate its association with the other in implementing the IUEP, a two-months' written notice of the same shall be submitted to the other."[73]

8.3 The Golden Jubilee of Don Bosco School, Liluah (1937-1987)

On 8th December 1987 Don Bosco School Liluah celebrates its Diamond Jubilee. The grand celebrations last for a week. The newly painted school and its surrounding look great with decorations and illuminations.

A cycle-rally, sponsored by Dunlop India, precedes the inaugural function. 250 boys with colourful flags and special T-shirts, go to Serampore and Shibpur and back giving wide publicity to Don Bosco School Liluah. With great solemnity, Prof. Nurul Hasan, Governor of West Bengal, arrives to preside over the opening ceremony of the Jubilee Celebrations.

The Science, Technical and Arts and Crafts exhibition organized by the community service group (class XII) is opened by the Governor. Next there is the release of the Golden Jubilee Souvenir by the Chief Guest. The cultural programme prepared by the students follows after that. *The Show Must Go On*, staged by the boarders proves to be a great hit. In the evening Fr. Provincial presides over the Concelebrated Solemn Thanksgiving Eucharistic Celebration, especially arranged for the Salesians.

[73] Cfr. SNC, XIII-1 January–February/'86.

Each day of the weeklong celebration has its own particular characteristic and meaning. On 13th December, the popular hit songs sung by Mrs. Usha Uthup, bring the whole celebration to its climax, and marks the *Grand Finale* to the memorable celebrations at Don Bosco School, Liluah.[74]

9. Don Bosco, Mirpara

9.1 The DBSERI at Mirpara

In chapter XI of this history (461) we have seen how Bro. Mathew Thaiparambil started the 'Self-Employment' project in the hired premises close to Don Bosco School, Liluah.

In 1988 the Don Bosco Self-Employment Research Institute (DBSERI) moves to Mirpara, still remaining part of DBL. The Rector Major formally erects Don Bosco Mirpara as a full-fledged Salesian community on 21st July 1992.

The hostel houses 25 boys who are attending ITI classes at Don Bosco Liluah. There are 18 boys in the non-formal training, 14 in the self-employment, and 10 in the welding section. Thirty-four young men and women of the locality attend the spoken English course conducted by the Salesians. On Sunday afternoons, the compound is invaded by the small boys and girls of the locality making it a place of games and fun, laughter and noise.[75]

Today the DBSERI runs 15 non-formal trades. The Ministry of Human Resource Development, government of India, and Ministry of Municipal Affairs, government of West Bengal, recognizes the Institute.[76]

9.2 Parliamentarians visit DBSERI Mirpara

A group of seven Members of Parliament belonging to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Human Resource Development deputed by the Central government visit DBSERI, Mirpara, on 10th October 1996. The rector and staff give them a short briefing after which they visit the premises and meet the trainees at work. While some are interested in the syllabus, others are eager to know the funding sources in running

[74] SNC XV-1 Janaury/'88, 5–6.
[75] Cfr. SNC, XX-6 October/'92, 3.
[76] Cfr. Directory of the Salesian Province of Kolkata 2001–2002, 42.

the Institute. Still others are surprised to see that Bro. Mathew is running the non-formal courses just like formal courses.

Mr. Kailash Pachina, a past pupil of Don Bosco Liluah, is near to the truth when he puts dedication as the real secret of Bro. Mathew's success. During their sharing session back at the Taj Bengal, Mr. S. B. Chavan, the chairman, is told by Dr. Aram that the DBSERI Mirpara is a model Institute which can be tried out elsewhere in the country.

The sixty-strong audience listen spellbound to the explanations given by Bro. Mathew, the Technical Director and project founder.[77]

9.3 Salesian Brothers' *Aspirantate* at Mirpara

The Salesian community at Mirpara, near Liluah, is agreed upon as the location for the Salesian brothers' *aspirantate*. The Salesian brothers, in a meeting held at Provincial House, from 1st to 3rd October 1991, are unanimous in this decision.

Twenty-two perpetually professed brothers attending the meeting feel that whenever a special *aspirantate* for brothers is operative, a few vocations survive. But whenever it is amalgamated with Bandel, no one survives. In fact, there are no Brother aspirants in Bandel; The few brother vocations that go to Bandel, either leave or change over to clerical aspirants; Mirpara is preferred for the housing of the aspirants because of its work for poor boys, the hostel, and the study facilities at DBL.[78]

The *aspirantate* for brother vocations starts at Mirpara on 3rd July 1992. There are 21 of them, of whom 16 are from the South and 5 from the North.[79]

In January 1993 Fr. Provincial in the presence of his Councillors, the staff and the students, lights the lamp to inaugurate the first floor of the new *aspirantate*. The 22 brother aspirants (10 post-matric and 12 who have passed class XII) have already occupied the dormitory and the study hall and feel that their goals are different from the 24 ITI hostel boys they have been so far staying with.

On the same day, the Provincial, together with the house, council chalks out the specific aims and objectives of the *aspirantate*.[80]

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[77] Cfr. SNC, XXIV-10 November–December/'96, 5.
[78] Cfr. SNC, XIX-5 November–December/'91, 3.
[79] Cfr. SNC, XX-3 October/'92, 3.
[80] Cfr. SNC, XXI-1 January–February/'93, 6.

10. Myanmar

A number of events take place in Myanmar during the 12 years under consideration in the present chapter, which affect both the Lashio Mission entrusted to the Salesian Congregation in 1976 and the Salesian Delegation of Myanmar.

The main event affecting the Lashio Prefecture is its being erected into a diocese and the change of its leader. With the departure of Msgr. Jocelyn Madden for Australia in 1985, the Prefecture loses its pastor. On 17th December 1985 news comes from our Generalate in Rome that Fr. Charles Maung Bo, who at this moment is in India for updating, is asked to return to Myanmar to take up his new post as '*Interim* Administrator' of Lashio.

On 27th June 1986 His Holiness Pope John Paul II appoints Fr. Charles as the Prefect Apostolic of Lashio.[81]

On 13th August 1990, the Holy See erects Lashio into a diocese and appoints Msgr. Charles Maung Bo as its first bishop. However, he has a short stint as bishop of Lashio. On 24th May 1996, his transfer from the diocese of Lashio to the diocese of Pathein attached to the archdiocese of Yangon is officially announced. His successor is not a Salesian.[82]



The Rt. Rev. CHARLES MAUNG BO, SDB
Bishop of Lashio (1990–1996)

Fr. Charles Maung Bo is born on 29.10.1948 at Shwebo village in Myanmar. He does his studies at Lafon Memorial School, Mandalay. On 18th April 1962, Charles joins the Salesian Seminary at

With regard to the Salesian Delegation, besides a change of leadership, there are also other events that touch the very life of the confreres themselves, such as the increase and formation of the aspirants, and the ordination of some priests. There is also an

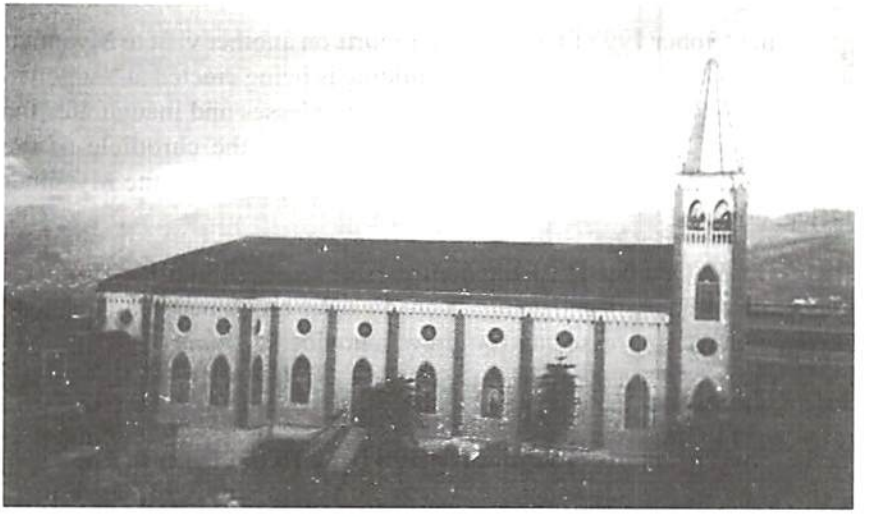
[81] Cfr. SNC, XIII-6 July/'86, 5.
[82] Cfr. SNC, XXIV-6 July/'96, 8.

improvement of the material structures in Anisakan and in Yangon.

In October 1987 Fr. Ambrose Malcom becomes novice master in the place of Fr. Joachim Ye Maung, and Fr. Joachim becomes the Delegate of the Provincial. In June 1989 Fr. Joachim asks to be relieved of being the Delegate and Fr. Victor Bernard is appointed Delegate in his place in September 1989.

Anisakan. In 1969 he begins his novitiate and makes his first profession on 24th May 1970. Rev. Abraham Than, Bishop of Kentung, ordains him a Priest on 9.4.1976. On 27 June 1986, His Holiness Pope John Paul II appoints him Prefect Apostolic of Lashio. On 13.8.1990 the Holy See erects Lashio as a diocese and appoints the Prefect Apostolic. Msgr. Charles Maung Bo as its first bishop. On 24 May 1996, the transfer of Bishop Charles Maung Bo of Lashio to the diocese of Pathein, attached to the archdiocese of Yangon, is officially announced. On 3.4.2002 he is also appointed Administrator "*sede vacante et ad nutum Sancate Sedis*" of Mandalay. On 24 May 2003 he is appointed Archbishop of Yangon, Myanmar. (Osservatore Romano, 22.5. 2003).

The priestly ordinations of three Deacons take place on Sunday 6th April at the parish church of Mamyo by the Archbishop Alphonse, of Mandalay. The last ordinations of Salesians in Myanmar were held in 1976. After ten years period, this ordination marks a day of joy and triumph for the Salesians in Burma. It is an occasion when the enthusiasm, endurance, and optimism of the Salesian are in evidence.[83]



Lashio: The Church

[83] Cfr. SNC, XIII-3 April/'86, 11-12, for the full report by Fr. C. A. Joseph.

On 24th April 1987 the Provincial sets the commencement of the construction of a new extension of a two-storied brick-nogging building, which is meant to provide accommodation to the ever burgeoning number of aspirants at the *aspirantate* in Anisakan.[84]

The Myanmar delegation presents a problem to the Provincial Council meeting of 18th February1988. It is a problem conserning the *aspirantate*. The school that the aspirants are attending has no science section for classes 9 and 10. So they are asked to go home and complete class 10 examinations and then come back, but several do not come back. Hence the need to open an *aspirantate* at Lashio, where the boys can do class 10 examinations with science. The council agrees to the proposal.

On 15th October 1987 the provincial announces to his council that the bishops of Myanmar are now allowing the Salesians to have their own *studentate* of philosophy. In February 1988 the provincial delegate of Myanmar approaches the Archbishop of Mandalay for permission to have a Salesian *philosophate* at Anisakan for our students. In the meeting of the Provincial Council of 17th and 18th December 1992, the provincial reports on his visit to Myanmar. He discussed with the Myanmar confreres the problem of the place where to have the post novitiate formation of the confreres. They will try to arrange to send them to India.

In October 1993 Fr. Provincial reports on another visit to Myanmar and informs the Council that a new building is being erected at Yangon to shelter the students of theology. Fr. Oderico blesses and inaugurates the building on 21st November 1994 as reported in the chronicle of the Province. Today the Yangon studentate is also the seat of the Myanmar Delegation.

On 5th October 1993 the confreres observe a 'Salesian Brothers' Day' with enthusiasm and pomp. There are three brothers: Zeya, a pioneer, Stephen, newly professed and Andrew, a novice.[85]

11. Ranaghat

11.1 The Parish of Ranaghat is given back to the Diocese

On 2nd April 1986 a joint meeting of the diocesan council of

[84] Cfr. SNC, XIV-5 May/'87, 4.
[85] Cfr. SNC, XXI-6 November–December/'93, 6.

Krishnagar and of the provincial council of Kolkata is held at bishop's house Krishnagar with Bishop Lucas Sirkar presiding over it.

The two councils have a long agenda to consider. But what is pertinent to us at this moment is the agreement reached by the combined council regarding the canonical status of the two parishes of Kalyani and Ranaghat.

The Ranaghat parish was given to the Salesians *in perpetuum* with the proviso that any parish that would be bifurcated from the parish of Ranaghat would first be offered to the Salesians. Now, the parishes of Raghabpur and Kalyani grew out of Ranaghat. The Salesians ask to return to the diocese the parishes of Ranaghat and Raghabpur and retain only the parish of Kalyani. Due to the small number of the diocesan priests, the Salesians would still man the parishes they wish to give back until the diocese can replace the Salesians with diocesan clergy. The two councils adopt the following statement as official:

"Hereby the Episcopal Council and the provincial Council of the Province of Calcutta decide that the parish of Kalyani, bifurcated from the parish of Ranaghat, will belong to the Salesians of Don Bosco *in perpetuum*. The parishes of Ranaghat and Raghabpur will eventually belong to the diocese of Krishnagar, notwithstanding the previous agreement of 8th January 1975. The property of the parish of Kalyani shall be transferred to the Salesian Province of Calcutta by registration. It is also agreed that all money coming from Mr. Arvedi for Kalyani would be diverted to the Salesian Province of Calcutta for the development of Kalyani."

In the Provincial Council meeting of 26th June 1986, a correction is made to the minutes of the joint meeting of the two councils: "One important remark is that the minutes should show that the Don Bosco Para at Ranaghat belongs to the Salesian Province of Calcutta." This is an important remark because the Don Bosco Para is bought on 6th February 1964 by the Salesian Province of Kolkata for its own use. And only later in March 1977 on request by the then parish priest, Fr. A. Gobetti, it is officially exchanged with the property that Fr. Gobetti has bought at Kalyani for the diocese. So the property of the whole land at Kalyani is already the property of the Salesian Society previous to the resolution of the joint council.[86] In the same joint meeting of the two councils a similar

[86] Cfr. Ch. X, 391.

resolution is made regarding Monigram grown out of the parish of Azimganj, which is a Salesian parish. The parish of Polsonda More is entrusted to the Salesian Society *in perpetuum* and the property of the parish is transferred to the Salesian Province of Kolkata by registration. The parish of Monigram will belong to the diocese of Krishnagar, notwithstanding the previous agreement of 8th January 1975.

12. Ranchi

12.1 The Agreement with the Archbishop of Ranchi

The Archbishop of Ranchi writes in connection with the general agreement concerning the confreres in the same houses. In this regard, he was asked if he would give maintenance to the priests working in his diocese. He replies saying that as a policy he does not give maintenance to religious working in his diocese. The Archbishop also requests the drawing up of clear-cut boundaries of the parishes the Province has. This would be done at the earliest.[87] Eventually, the agreement with the Archbishop of Ranchi for the house and parish of Hatia is signed. For the parish of Kokar, the matter is still pending, because of the clause in the archdiocese Statutes ruling that only one parish should be entrusted to a religious congregation in a particular region.[88]

13. The Salesian Family

Dealing with the topic of the Salesian Family we shall first give the main ideas developed by Fr. Antonio Martinelli at an extraordinary meeting of the Provincial Council held on 21st March 1993. The meeting is presided over by Fr. Provincial; Fr. Martinelli, present at the meeting, makes some pertinent reflections about the Salesian Family. He touches the following points:

A. The Responsibility of the Provincial Council in connection with the Salesian Family:
- In *planning*: the topic of the Salesian Family should come often in the discussions of the Provincial Council.
- In *evaluating* every year's work, both quantitatively and qualitatively.
- In the choice as delegates of *responsible confreres* who are ready to co-operate;

[87] Cfr. Minutes of the Provincial Council Meeting, 17.1.'91.
[88] Cfr. Ibid. 18.4.'91.

- In *animation*: all the members of Council, in the exercise of their duty, must sensitise parishes, schools, youth centres, mission stations, and houses of formation.
- Give *directives* with regard to the practice of art. 5 of the Constitutions on:
  - maintaining unity of spirit,
  - stimulating dialogue,
  - working together in charity,
  - enriching one another with our diversities,
  - searching together for greater effectiveness of apostolate.

B. Organize the Salesian Family by:
- Forming better the Delegates by persuasion rather than imposition,
- Building up 'nuclei' of Salesian Family at Provincial and local level,
- Making significant gestures: having joint meetings of Provincial Council of FMA, SDB, CC... and monthly recollections together.
- Making all the groups of the Salesian Family grow: VDB, ADMA (Association of devotees of Mary Help of Christians), etc.

C. Help the Salesian Family through the Salesian Bulletin, getting interested in their life.

When dealing with the various institutions, we have mentioned how particular groups of the Salesian Family are co-operating in the apostolate of the Salesians. In what follows we wish to mention some important events in the life of members of the Family, especially if this is connected with the life of the Province.

The *Salesian Brothers* of Kolkata Province hold every year their annual meeting. Of particular importance is the one held on 3rd October 1991, in which the strong suggestions of all the brothers present lead to the shifting of lay brother aspirants from Bandel to Mirpara.

The Salesian brothers of India hold two National Meetings during this period: the second 'All India Salesian brothers' Meeting' scheduled from 29th May to 2nd June 1987 is held at Bangalore. There are present at this meeting 76 perpetually professed Salesian brothers and 17 priests including the six Provincials.

Eighteen brothers from Kolkata take part in the National meeting of the Salesian brothers of India held at St. Bede's School, Chennai, from 20th to 24th October 1992. Several topics of relevance to the third millennium are dealt with, leading to some resolutions and statements at the end. This third National meeting of brothers is a spontaneous expression of the complementary functioning of priests and brothers.[89]

The first ever meeting of the *FMA–SDB* Provincials of India, takes place on 22nd October 1993 at DBPC, Kolkata. Five Provincials of the Salesian Sisters and seven of the Salesians participate in the First Indian Regional Congress of Salesian Cooperators held at DBPC from 22nd to 24th October 1993. Since all the twelve Provincials are present, both groups feel the need of exchanging ideas on further collaboration in the orientation of the Salesian Cooperators.

At this meeting, which is more of an icebreaker, it is evident to all that joint initiatives in pastoral work are necessary for greater effectiveness in pastoral ministry. It is generally felt that every opportunity should be seized also to collaborate with the church at the parish, diocesan, and school level, and participate in the activities of other youth movements and organizations. Naturally, the lead would have to be given by the Provincials themselves

Again from 7th to 11th March 1994, a joint Seminar on Evangelization, titled 'Dialogue and Evangelization in the Indian Context' is held at Hyderabad. This is the first Seminar for the SDB-FMA in India. It is organized by the respective Councillors for the Missions, Fr. Luciano Oderico and Sr. Lina Chiandotto.

The objectives set are deeper and updated knowledge of the Church's missionary teachings, interpretations of them for the Indian context, spelling out operative guidelines, fostering of communion in the mission among the FMA and SDB missionary presences. Twenty-five FMAs, including the five Provincials, and thirty-nine SDBs: Provincials, delegates for Evangelization, and Pastors, are present.

Two sessions are dedicated to reports of the missionary activity in the various Provinces. The final session of the first day is a talk of Fr. Odorico focussing on the theology of Evangelization and Inter-religious

[89] Cfr. SNC, XX-4 December/'92, 5.

Dialogue. On 8th March Fr. N. T. Scaria and Fr. C.C. Jose of Dimapur present an experience of first evangelization. On 9th March Fr. Subash Anand from Pune gives input on how proclamation and dialogue can be done in the Hindu context of India. On 10th in other series of sessions Sr. Rosina Susgni FMA, and Fr. Joachim D'Souza present the Christian proposal to students of other faiths. The final sessions dwell on concrete proposals for Proclamation, for Dialogue in general and in the school set up.[90]

On 20th and 21st August 1994 the Provincial Council meets at the Provincial House, Kolkata. The first part of the meeting on 20th is a joint meeting together with the Provincial Council of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Mother Provincial is present with other 5 members of her Council.

The first topic discussed is Youth Pastoral: Formation, Faith. The conclusion of the discussion is the setting up of a Commission, which will be meeting on the second week of October.

The second topic taken up is the 'Lay Project.' Lines of action are suggested to share responsibilities with the Laity, planning programmes with them, giving them direct responsibility in the administration of schools, preparing the pastoral plan with their help.

The third topic is Salesian Family Day.

The fourth topic is Salesian animation. The need of Salesian priests to be ready for confessions, Masses, days of recollection, is stressed. Good relations with each other will go a long way to overcome many difficulties. A Salesian Family Council is envisaged.[91]

A National Congress of *Cooperators* is held at Dhyan Ashram in Mylapore, Chennai, on 4th and 5th January 1985. The specific theme of the Congress is 'The Mission of the Co-operator among youth in trouble.'

Fr. Sebastian Alancheril, the new Provincial of Kolkata, is requested to chair the various sessions of the day. Mr. Paul Chung presents a paper on the theme of the Congress: 'The Co-operator's mission among the young, especially those in trouble.'

[90] Cfr. SNC, XXII-2 March–April/'94, 12–13, and 16.
[91] Cfr. SNC, XXII-5 september–October/'94, 14.

On the morning of the second day, there is an evaluation of the new Regulations of the Cooperators, chaired by Elias, the Delegate of Mumbai. At 9.00 a.m. Archbishop R. Arulappa of Madras-Mylapore, addresses the Assembly and is all full of praise for what the Cooperators are and do in the Church. At 11.00 a.m. Fr. Clive Hurley presents the theme of 'the formation of the Salesian Co-operator.' The last session is taken up with the task of summing up the work done and approving the resolutions.[92]

The World Congress of the Salesian Cooperators is held in Rome from 28th October to 4th November 1985. It has 300 participants in all, of whom only 170 have the right to vote. The Congress clarifies the identity and role of the Salesian Cooperators. They are a vocational group of the Salesian Family that has the responsibility to share the vitality of Don Bosco's plan in the world. Tobe able to fulfill this task, the Co-operator needs to receive an adequate formation that makes him fully conscious of his responsibility to be a Salesian in the world at the service of God and of men, especially of youth.

The Rector Major, Fr. E. Viganò, in his concluding talk, thanks God for enlightening the participants at the Congress with His Spirit, our Lady's motherly care and Don Bosco for his dynamic presence. "At this Congress", he says, "the ideas confirmed that the Association of the Cooperators is the root of the Salesian works, it accompanies its development, intensifies the wholeness, it ensures its efficiency and influences the Society better." Addressing the Salesians he says, "Dear Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, let us never forget that without the help of the Cooperators, we are dangerously weakening our secular dimension, thus losing little by little the special traits of the identity left us by Don Bosco."[93]

The elected Delegates of the Kolkata Province to the WCSCC are Mr. Paul Chung and Mrs Victoria D'Souza. They are elected by the Provincial Council of Cooperators on 14th April 1985.[94]

The first Indian Regional Congress of Salesian Cooperators is held at DBPC from 22nd to 24th October 1993. It is at this 'first Regional

[92] Cfr. SNC, XII-1 Janaury/'85, 10-11.
[93] Cfr. SNC, XII-11 November/'85, 13 and 19.
[94] Cfr. Chronicle of the Province, *Provincial Archives*, B.10.1.4.

Conference of Salesian Cooperators' that Mr. Paul Chung is elected as a member of the Consulting Body of Salesian Co-operators in Rome.[95]

14. Siliguri

14.1 Introduction of Class XI & XII

Already in February of 1985 the rector seeks permission from the Provincial and his Council to start classes XI & XII. For this an extension of the present school building is necessary. Various ways are mentioned in the application on how the finance for the project would be realized. The Council does not approve this application for a number of reasons.[96]

A similar application to have classes XI & XII added to the school is forwarded to the Provincial Council holding its meeting on 17th December 1987. The parents of the boys are insisting on it. The parents have also agreed to fund the building needed for the extension. The Council approves the extension provided the parents are able to collect the needed finance by 31st December 1987.

On 3rd October 1987 the Chronicle of the Province informs us about some contact of Fr. Provincial with some parents of our students in this connection. The Provincial goes to Don Bosco Siliguri for a meeting of the Managing Committee of the school and also for a meeting with some of the parents of the pupils as regards the opening of classes XI & XII. Again on 8th October 1987 the representatives of the parents meet Fr. Provincial regarding classes XI & XII. Finally on 5th April 1988 Fr. Provincial blesses the foundation stone of the extension of the school building for Classes XI & XII.

14.2 Inauguration of the Computer Centre

On August 14th and 15th 1986, at 7 a.m. All India Radio, Siliguri, announcing the events of the day mentions that this year's Independence Day would see the opening of the first computer centre in a school in Siliguri, when it would be inaugurated at Don Bosco School by Dr. Bajpai, Registrar, North Bengal University, in the afternoon.

Representatives from parents and wellwishers, professors from the University, and religious personnel attend the inaugural function. After a

[95] Cfr. SNC, XXI-6/'93, 5 and 16.
[96] Cfr. Minutes of the Provincial Council Meeting, 21.2.'85, *Provincial Archives*, B.8.2.3.

short variety programme, the Registrar cuts the ribbon, inaugurating the computer room. Fr. Thomas Polackal, the Vice Provincial, lights the lamp in a symbolic gesture. And the computer room fully equipped with 10 individual Fico Computers with a network facility enabling computer aided teaching of any subject to boys of any age group, opens to be viewed by the public. Mr Bajpai, speaking at this function says, "Computer studies is not something left optional to choose. If you don't choose it as a subject today, you will be forced to opt for it tomorrow with a sense of regret for not having done so earlier." A local newspaper *Janpath Samachar* and others reporting the inauguration of the computer centre say that the event is a landmark as far as Siliguri and Education are concerned.[97]

15. Sonada

The years 1985 to 1996 witness a number of events that have a bearing on the life of the college and parish at Sonada.

15.1 The remodelling of the Building

From 1980 to 1986 the college undergoes some important remodelling of its structures. By May 1981 we have the addition of a third floor to the main building. It is a suggestion of the engineer to put a roof over the leaking terrace. It is a light structure covered with corrugated iron sheets. The resulting 3rd floor is well arranged for retreats, courses, youth camps, etc.

Soon after the feast of the Immaculate Conception in 1983 starts the demolition of what is left of the old brewery and the construction of a partly two storied and partly three storied building. It houses the new chapel, the new library, the new kitchen and accessories, and a number of rooms below the chapel and other rooms for various activities on the ground floor in line with the volley ball court.

Bishop Eric Benjamin of Darjeeling solemnly blesses the new church and the rest of the new building on 18th May 1986.[98]

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[97] SNC, XIII-8 September/'86, 14.
[98] Cfr. Chronicle of SCS.



Sonada: The remodelled Salesian College, blessed on 18.5.1986 (With new 3rd floor, Library and Church)

15.2 SCS Houses Aspirants for the Second Time

In its meeting of 15th January 1990, the Provincial Council examines various proposals regarding the setting up of an *aspirantate* at Salesian College, Sonada. After examining the various possibilities, the Council takes the following decisions in this regard:

1. Let the community of SCS study how the possible candidates that would come can be housed and looked after by the present community without having recourse to more personnel.
2. There must be some policy before undertaking the project, like the boys having to pay their fees as the diocesan minor seminarians of the diocese are doing.
3. There must be some sort of division between the community of the boys and that of the brothers.
4. Other details like the studies to be undertaken and were to do it, etc., would have to be studied by the community.

On 16th July 1990 the community is expanded with the arrival of six post-matric – local Nepali-speaking aspirants. At present five are

doing their Plus Two, attending classes in Boys' Higher Secondary School, at Ghoom (Darjeeling). This new venture is a long-cherished dream of the confreres of Salesian College, Sonada.[99]

In 1993 the aspirants increase in number: 12 of them will be accommodated in the house in such a way that they are not a hindrance to the smooth running of the brothers' life.[100]

15.3 Gospel Melody (GM) and International Youth Year (IYY) Celebrations[101]

The GM and IYY celebrations are held on 12th May 1985. Over 1000 boys and girls actively participated in the one-day programme organised by Salesian College Sonada under the leadership of Fr. Joseph Thannickal SDB.

By 9.30 a.m. on 12th May the auditorium of St. Theresa's Girls High School at Loreto, Darjeeling is filled with lively youngsters. The GM and IYY85 begin with a solemn Eucharistic celebration. In the absence of Bishop Eric Benjamin who is out on an urgent visit to Bhutan, Fr. E. P. Burns S.J., the Vicar General, presides over the celebration, flanked by 8 concelebrants. Songs and prayers are in Nepali, English, and Hindi, enabling the whole congregation greater and fuller participation.

An eloquent Youth forum in held at 11.30 a.m. During the hour-long programme, 9 youngsters from different schools, enlighten an enthralled audience on their understanding of Peace, Participation and Development – the IYY theme.

The Gospel Melody begins at 1.30 p.m. Items from 13 centres are a presentation of the IYY themes as Evangelical Messages of 'Self Gift,

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[99] Cfr. SNC-6 September/'90, 4.

[100] Cfr. SNC-3 May-June/'93, 3.

[101] Gospel Melody (GM) is a novel idea of spreading the message of Christ among today's youth by making use of their enthusiasm, their various talents in the field of art, music, dance, and drama. Fr. L Robin Gomes and his team in SCS organize it for the first time on 3rd November 1983. Thirteen Schools take part in it. From then on, the event becomes an annual feature. In 1985 it is combined with the celebration of the International Youth Year. GM 1986 celebrates the International Year of Peace. In the last two years GM could not be organized due to the un-favourable political situation. (Cfr. Diamond Jubilee Brochure 1938–1988, SCS Diary, 1983 – box) A Bible Quiz and a 5th edition of Gospel Melody is held on 17th September 1989, not in Darjeeling, but in SCS on the theme "Who is Jesus for me?" Cfr. SNC, 7 October 1989, 2.

New Kingdom, and Peace'. The items, lasting 10 minutes, are capsules of entertaining, educative and exhorting Gospel Messages. The day is concluded with hymns of praise and thanks to God animated by the Salesian College brothers.[102]

15.4 DB88, Golden Jubilee of SCS, and Silver Jubilee of Youth Centres

The Salesian community celebrates the centenary of Don Bosco's death on 4th August 1988 in the presence of Fr. Provincial.

The Golden Jubilee Celebrations are held from 9th to 11th October 1988. On 10th Fr. Provincial presides over the cultural programme attended by the students of various institutions around Sonada and Darjeeling. The solemn Eucharistic Concelebration on 11th is presided over by Bishop Eric Benjamin. Bishop Robert Kerketta, Bishop Lucas Sirkar and 45 priests concelebrate. About 175 people, mostly Religious, take part in the Holy Mass. It is immediately followed by the opening of an exhibition on Don Bosco and SCS history by Bishop Robert Kerketta, one of the eminent past pupils of Salesian College.[103]

The year 1988 marks also the Silver Jubilee of the Oratories. The House Oratory starts in 1938 animated by the dynamic Fr. Usai. After his departure from Sonada, the Oratory continues to live till November 1942, the year when most of the Salesians have to go to the concentration camp. It is revived after the war but confined to the house premises only.

Only on 25th August 1963, after the new bishop of Darjeeling, Eric Benjamin, opens the door and entrusts to the Salesians the quasi-parish of Sonada, the oratories can be launched outside the house. Thus start the first four youth centres: Ghorabari, Shantirani (Hope Town), Margaret's Hope and Rangbul.

The people around welcome the Youth Centres with great enthusiasm and their number multiplies in the course of time. In the first 25 years more than forty villages have been contacted through the youth centre activities by the brothers. In 1988 there are fifteen youth centres, each manned by three students.[104]

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[102] Cfr. SNC, 5 May/'85, 6 and SNC, 7 July/'85, 9–10.
[103] Cfr. SNC, XV-7 November/'88, 4.
[104] Cfr. Brochure – Salesian College Sonada – 1938–1988, SCS Diary – box after September 30, 1962.

15.5 Dhajea

In the Provincial Council Meeting of 28th July 1988, the Provincial reads a request by Fr. Jellici, the parish priest of Sonada, to be allowed to purchase three and a half acres of land that include an orange grove in the Dhajea Valley for the use of the parish. The council sanctions the purchase, but it is to be made for the Province of Kolkata and therefore entrusted to the care of Salesian College Sonada.

The House of Salesian College Sonada presents to the Provincial Council meeting on 15th and 16th July 1993, a 14 lakh Rupees project to build a community Hall and four rooms at Dhajea *Busti*. The project is passed to the Finance Commission for study and comments.

On 18th March 1994 Fr. Thomas Polackal, Provincial, lays the foundation stone for a new Salesian presence at Dhajea *Busti*. Dhajea is presently one of the sub-centres of the parish of Sonada. It is located in the heart of the Balasun Valley and figures prominently on the new road to Darjeeling from Siliguri under construction. Fr. Jellici, marking the occasion of his dianond jubilee of religious profession and the gplden jubilee of his priestly ordination, blesses the foundation stone. On the same day Fr. Mathew Pulingathil, rector of Salesian College Sonada, blesses a small cottage, built as the priest's residence.

In July 1994 the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians establish their first presence in the diocese of Darjeeling. Two sisters are sent on a scouting mission to assess the various possibilities for work.[105]

The draft of the Agreement between the Salesians and the MSMHC for their presence in Dhajea is read, discussed and accepted at the Provincial Council meeting of 25th and 26th June 1995.

15.6 The Parish

On 16th June 1988 Fr. Provincial communicates to his Council the need of a new parish church at Sonada expressed by the Sonada community. They have the necessary funds for it. The Council agrees to its construction.

Bishop Eric Benjamin blesses the newly erected parish church of Sonada on 15th October 1989. Nearly 1000 people take part in the function.

[105] Cfr. SNC, XXII-3 May–June/'94, 4.

Fr. Thomas Polackal, Provincial, and Fr. Thomas D'Souza, the Vicar General of Darjeeling, are among the distinguished guests present.[106]

On 4th and 5th May 1994 the Provincial Council agrees to pass 9 lakh Rupees to Salesian College with which they are authorized to buy the Taylor's Villa in the name of the parish. A request to buy the villa has been made and accepted by the Council in its meeting of 25th to 27th October 1993.

The last request sent by the Salesian College community to the Provincial Council, presided over by Fr. Thomas Polackal on 23rd September 1996, is to divide the parish of Sonada from the College since the number of Christians has risen to more than 700 and in Sonada a residence is ready near the sisters' school. They make six suggestions on how to do it. The council sees such a division possible if the Province will not be loaded with new financial problems. The division will take place later after the division of the Province.

C) Important Events Affecting the Province

1. The International Youth Year 1985

The United Nations declares 1985 as the International Youth Year (IYY), something that cannot but have a deep resonance in the heart of Salesians who made their own Don Bosco's love for youth, especially for the 'poor and abandoned'.

The declaration does, no doubt, arouse the enthusiasm of the Salesians of the Kolkata Province. On 10th January 1985, the Provincial Youth Commission meeting at Don Bosco Tengra focuses its attention on the celebrations of the IYY.[107]

We mention here only some of the points of the report of the meeting that more directly touch the Province.[108]

1) At Provincial Level the commission does not suggest new 'events' for the youth year, but it exhorts to intensify the events that already exist in the Province or in the dioceses where we work.

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[106] Cfr. SNC, XVI-7 October–November/'89, 1.
[107] SNC, 93 Jan/'85, 6–8.
[108] For the full report of the meeting, Cfr. SNC 93-1 January/'85, 6–8.

At the Local Level: Let all our institutions and parishes extend their action beyond the pale of their ordinary activity by having other schools, groups, clubs and associations participate in their programmes.

2) The Salesian National Meeting of the Provincial Youth Delegates formulates various resolutions. We mention here a seminar for Salesians and Salesian Family youth animators from each Province to be held at Don Bosco Tengra (Kolkata) from 24th to 26th February 1985.

Other subtitles in the report are:

3) The Identity of the Youth Fest, Calcutta,

4) Special Proposal,

5) Youth Literature and audio-visual aids for Youth.

The Provincial Council at its meeting of 24th January 1985 listens to Fr. Luciano Colussi who presents the report of the Youth Commission. He suggests that a Salesian be set apart only to co-ordinate the youth activities in the Province. The Council feels that a circular letter should be sent out to get the opinion of the Province as to what could be done for youth in Kolkata in the IYY85. One possibility is to go in for the project of rehabilitation of the handicapped youth (boys) as suggested by the Howrah South Point Governing Body as presented by Fr. Laborde.[109]

The Chronicle of the Province and most of the issues of SNC 1985 tell us what is done in various parts of the Province such as Krishnagar, Don Bosco Hatia, Sonada, Don Bosco Park Circus, Krishnagar diocese, Bandel, etc., in answer to the call of the Provincial Youth Commission.

The chronicle of the Province tells us that on 24th February 1985 Fr. Provincial inaugurates the Salesian Youth Animators' Seminar at Don Bosco, Tengra. About 30 participants from the various Provinces including the FMAs take part. Our Province is represented by Bro. Charlie Sen

[109] 'Howrah South Point' is a Non-Governmental Organization engaged in social work, founded by a French priest François Laborde in 1983. It runs several homes for physically and mentally handicapped children in Howrah and Jalpaiguri, Dispensaries, Mobile Health Clinics, as well as educational and rehabilitation centres in Kolkata and other parts of West Bengal for the poor and the destitute.

Win[110], Frs. P.O. Jose, Robin Gomes, K.C.John, C.M. Paul, K.J. Dominic and Dictus Correya. In the fulfilment of our mission as evangelizers of the young, several practical proposals are made.[111]

2. Boys' Town

It is early in 1976 that Fr. Van, the Founder of Boys' Town, Kolkata offers the work of Boys' Town to the Salesians. Fr. Lo Groi, the Provincial, tells him that the work of Boys' Town is indeed a Salesian work and that the Province would be happy to accept it. However, it will consider it only if the offer is made by the local Ordinary, the Archbishop. Only then would we present it to the superiors in Rome for approval. As the Extraordinary Canonical Visitation is in progress, if the offer comes fast, the place can be shown to the Visitor who would thus be better able to recommend it to the Rector Major and his Council.

Eventually, the Archbishop has a meeting with his advisors, at which Mother Teresa is also present and is in our favour, but the proposal is not accepted.

In November 1983 the offer is renewed and this time by the Archbishop himself.[112] The Council discusses the offer[113] and, after listening to the report of three confreres who have gone to see the work, decides on the immediate steps to be taken: to inform the Province about the request by His Grace, Cardinal Picachy, and to ask for volunteers. A decision is taken to assign two Salesians, Fr. Bertie Fernandez and Fr. George Nadackal, to take up residence at Boys' Town by mid-March. The two confreres will work hand in hand with the two diocesan priests working there. By the end of 1984 we shall take up the project completely, if we find the work feasible.

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[110] Bro. Charles Sen Win is born on 31.10.1924 in Myanmar. He makes his first profession on 10.4.1957 at Sunnyside. From his profession till 1960 he is at Don Bosco Shillong. In 1966 he is in Krishnagar. In 1972 he is sent to *Istituto Agnelli*, Turin to do Electronics, TV and Radio Engineering. He sets up the Electronic Department in DBL until it is shifted to DBPC in 1980. Later he goes to Mumbai to qualify himself in computer technology. He loves to be with the young. He gets himself trained to animate youth groups especially the YCS. He learns guitar. Enthusiasm and infectious optimism are his characteristic traits. He dies on April 1, 1993, aged 68.

[111] Cfr. SNC, 3 March/'85, 3, 5-6.

[112] Cfr. Minutes of the Provincial Council Meeting, 17.11.'83, *Provincial Archives* B.8.2.2.

[113] Ibid. 1.12.'83.

On 16th February 1984 the Council suggests that Fr. Bertie Fernandes and Fr. George Nadackal take up residence at Boys' Town from second half of March 1984, and this is done on 24th March, a Saturday, which is also the anticipated feast of the Annunciation.

On 29th March 1984, five days after the work is started, Fr. Bertie Fernandes gives a brief report to the Council. The picture is not all that glorious and the venture will call for a lot of patience, talents, and hard work from us.

Our future involvement at Boys' Town is again discussed on 21st June 1984 after being there for three months. All feel that there is a strong opposition from a particular priest, Fr. Van, a diocesan priest, the founder of Boys' Town. It is evident that unless this hurdle is cleared, it is not possible for us to continue. Fr. Provincial will approach the archdiocesan authorities regarding the problem.

On 7th August 1984, Fr. Provincial informs the Council the latest situation in Boys' Town. Forty-seven big boys who are unlawfully staying in the Boys' Town premises are asked by Fr. Van to move out and stay under his control at Kollasarak, where the mechanical section of Boys' Town is situated. One boy refuses to go out and this causes a few others who had gone out to come back, thus creating indiscipline among the big boys.

On 26th and 27th September 1984, Fr. Provincial reads out a comprehensive report on Boys' Town prepared by Fr. Sheehy. It is proposed to give to the confreres an up-to-date picture of the situation. Fr. Bertie Fernandes present at this meeting feels that it is time for the Salesians to decide whether we should take over full responsibility of Boys' Town or give it up altogether.

The last brief discussion on Boys' Town is had in the Council Meeting of 15th November 1984, and this is a sort of *post-mortem*. We come away for good from Boys' Town on 31st October 1984. A number of reasons militate against our taking it permanently. From all indications it can be now said that at least some of the diocesan priests are not in favour of the Salesians taking full charge of the Boys' Town project.

In September 1986 the Archbishop asks if we Salesians would reconsider our taking up the Boys' Town from the diocese. After discussion

it is decided that as things are in the establishment and in the same place we would not feel prepared to accept the offer of the Archbishop. [114]

3. Centenary of Don Bosco's Death

In the letter of 27th June 1983 Fr. Viganò writing to the Provincials exhorts them to keep in mind and celebrate in a befitting way two anniversaries that have a special significance for us Salesians:

1984: the 50th Anniversary of DB's Canonization (1.4.1934)
1988: the Centenary of His death (31.1.1888)

The two celebrations should be given a different emphasis. While the first one should have preferably the same theme of Salesian Holiness, the Centenary of Don Bosco's death should preferably aim, during the four years of preparation, at highlighting 'the historical figure of Don Bosco' in its relationships with the Church and Society, by means of public celebrations which offer a message worthy of the consideration of the world today.[115] About the first we have written in chapter XI.[116] In this chapter we want to present briefly how seriously the second exhortation of the Rector Major is taken by the Salesians in India and in particular in the Province of Kolkata, which Don Bosco saw in his Barcelona Dream of 1886.

In the meeting of the Provincial Council of 20th March 1986, Fr. Provincial briefs the members on the result of the meeting of Provincials of India at Kolkata on 7th March that year regarding the celebration of DB88 at the National level. This celebration will be held in Mumbai from 29th to 31st January 1988. Besides the above, at the Kolkata Meeting various events are contemplated. Of these some are particularly worthy of note: a) The official launching of a Salesian National Youth Movement; b) A brief symposium for SDB and FMA, on a Salesian topic like the Preventive System or Salesian Contribution to the National Stream of Education; c) Don Bosco Centenary Award (Shield), Cash and Citation, to the most deserving teacher retiring from our schools in the six Provinces (one teacher from each Province); d) Releasing of a Souvenir: 'Don Bosco in India';

[114] Ibid. 25.9.'86.
[115] Cfr. SNC, 78-9/'83, 4.
[116] Cfr. Ch. XI, 507.

e) A Postage Stamp on Don Bosco; f) Preparation of a picture book on Don Bosco in colour in many Indian languages, besides English.[117]

On 11th November 1986, Fr. Dictus Correya reports to the Council on the meeting he has attended in Madras that dealt with the publication of a pictorial edition of 'Don Bosco in India'. He is chosen from our Province by the Council to be a sub-editor for this publication as requested by Madras.[118]

The planning at Provincial level is done by a 'Steering Committee' chaired by Fr. Provincial on 21st January 1987, and by a Salesian Family Commission meeting on 1st March 1987.

The year 1988 is marked by various events at world level, National, Provincial and local level.

The most important event at worls level that filled the whole Salesian Family with a deep sense of pride and joy, is the 'Pope's visit to the land of Don Bosco'. Our rector Major, Fr. Viganò, announces this happy event in his letter of 21st July 1988. "We are deeply grateful to the Holy Father who declared the year of grace to celebrate the centenary. He enriched it with many indulgences. Besides this, he has also sent us a letter (*Juvenum Patris*) on Don Bosco dated 31st January 1988, highlighting his contributions both as Father and Educator. His visit will take place from 2nd to 4th September, when he will visit the *Colle Don Bosco* parish. At *Colle Don Bosco,* on Saturday 3rd September, the Pope will beatify Laura Vicuña, a Chilean girl barely 12 years old. She is yet another fruit of the Preventive System just like Dominic Savio. In the afternoon of the same day at the Stadium in Turin the Pope will meet thousands of youth. The next day he will celebrate the Eucharist recalling the social and ecclesial contribution of Don Bosco."[119]

The National celebrations are held at Matunga, Mumbai, from 29th to 31st January 1988. From our Province the celebrations are attended by 12 Salesians and Cooperators and 10 boys each from DBPC and DBL, with their escorts. For the cultural programme we will be performing a combined item together with the group of girls from the FMA Province of

[117] Cfr. SNC, XIII-3 April/'86. 11
[118] Cfr. Minutes of the Provincial Council Meeting, 20.3.'86, *Provincial Archives* B.8.2.3.
[119] Cfr. SNC, XV-5 August/'88, 3.

Kolkata. It will be a music and dance presentation titled: "His Vision, a Venture" derived from a story written by Fr. Dictus Correya.

On 29th January at 10.00 a.m. there begins a 3-day symposium for the Salesian Family on the theme: "The Challenges Don Bosco poses to the Members of the Salesian Family Today": 1. Education of poor youth; 2. Social Communication, and 3. A Spirituality of Work.

On 30th January, at 7.00 a.m. there is a cultural programme with items from all the SDB and FMA Provinces of India. On 31st January at 6.00 p.m. there is a concelebrated Mass of St. John Bosco. The main celebrant is His Excellency, Agostino Cacciavillan, Apostolic Nuncio of India.[120]

Other All India Seminars or Symposia meant to mark the centenary of St. Don Bosco's death are:

1. An All-India Study seminar on 'Salesian Charism and the Indian Situation', held at Retreat House, Bandel Church, from 22nd to 27th October 1988, organized by the Director of the Retreat House, Fr. Jose Parappully.
2. The symposium on the 'Salesian Priest in India Today', held at Sacred Heart Theological College, Shillong, on 22nd and 23rd September 1988, meant to mark the centenary of Don Bosco's death and the Golden Jubilee of the foundation of Sacred Heart Theological College, Mawlai, Shillong, attended by 87 Salesians.[121]
3. A 'Symposium on Education in India' is held in Chennai at the Citadel from 27th to 30th December 1988 as part of the Centenary celebrations of Don Bosco. Animators and participants are drawn from all parts of India. The purpose is to study and analyse: 1. The present educational trends in India; 2. The contribution of the Church to the Education in India; 3. The relevance of the concept of prevention in the educational system of Don Bosco. Eminent speakers are: Shri C. Subramaniam, former Minister (Defence), Rev. Gian Carlo Milanesi, professor of UPS, Rome; Prof K. Jalaluddin, joint Director NCERT, New Delhi.[122]

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[120] Cfr. SNC, XV-1 January/'88, 3–4.
[121] Cfr. SNC, XV-7 November/'88, 5–6.
[122] Cfr. SNC, XVI-1 January/'88, 3–4.

The celebrations at the Provincial level are held at Kolkata and New Delhi.

On 28th January 1988, the grand public *finale* of DB88 Celebrations in the Province takes place in Netaji Indoor Stadium, Kolkata, from 5 to 10 p.m. A total of 1200 students, boys and girls, from nine schools honour Don Bosco through songs and dances in the indoor stadium that has a seating capacity of 12,000. There is also a troop from Sonada.

The Delhi Doordarshan programme on Don Bosco is scheduled in the last week of January. The Kolkata Doordarshan also telecasts a programme on Don Bosco.

The grand *finale* of the celebrations in Kolkata is the solemn Pontifical Eucharistic Celebration presided over by the Archbishop of Kolkata. The bishops of the region are invited for the Concelebration. All the Salesians, the diocesan priests, and the Religious of Kolkata are also invited.[123]

The crowning events of DB88 are held in New Delhi. Lots of planning, celebrations at local, provincial, and national level dot the entire 1988. All these are crowned by a unique distinction showered on our Founder by the government with a TV programme on him on 24th January, and in the morning of 31st January 1988 by the Prime Minister himself releasing a 60 *paise* postage stamp on Don Bosco in the presence of about 700 people, VIPs, staff, students, SDBs, FMAs at his residence in New Delhi. On this occasion, the Prime Minister Shri Rajiv Gandhi gives a message on 'Education as the key to development.' But to be such, development must not be identified merely with economic development, but it must be "the development of the human being, of his personality, of his spirituality, of his relationship with other human beings". For this kind of development 'quality education' (is needed) and relating education to the needs of the youngster. "This is where, in all these areas, Don Bosco really did very good pioneering work and set education on the right line..." [124]

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[123] Cfr. SNC, XVI-2 February/'89, 2

[124] Cfr. SNC, XVI-2/'89, 3–4. To get the Postal Department to issue a stamp is not an easy task. It is made possible only by the tireless, persevering efforts of several confreres, especially of Fr. Joseph Kezhakkekara. Cfr. also Chronicle of the Province, *Provincial Archives*, B.10.1.4.

4. Pope John Paul II visits Kolkata

Writing on 'Visitors' in the 12 years under consideration the first place this time goes to His Holiness John Paul II. His visit to Kolkata is a unique event that has a tremendous impact on the Catholic Church in Kolkata, on the Church in the Northeast, and also on the Salesians of the Kolkata Province in a particular way.

On the evening of 3rd February 1986, the Holy Father is accorded a very enthusiastic reception by a crowd of about 10,000 people at St. Xavier's. On 4th February Fr. Provincial is one of the 60 concelebrants with the Pope at the open air Mass on the Brigade Parade Ground, attended by about 2 lakh people. He is not the only Salesian concelebrating with the Pope that day. As each bishop of the Kolkata Metropolitan See can send 6 of his own clergy, other Salesians are chosen by the bishop of Krishnagar, and one Salesian is chosen by the bishop of Darjeeling, the rector of Salesian College, Sonada.

The Salesians of Kolkata are not present only at the reception at St. Xavier's and at the solemn Pontifical Mass, but are very much involved in the preparations for the Pope's visit.

At the Provincial's meeting with the Archbishop Fr. Luciano Colussi is appointed to be Publicity in-charge to prepare the Pope's coming to Kolkata together with Fr. Bruylants, S.J. as the co-ordinator. He is the chairman of the Media Commission with Fr. Cheruthottupuram Paul as secretary. There are also other Salesians who are involved in these preparations.[125]

5. The Rector Major and Other General Councillors Visit to the Province

The Rector Major, Fr. E. Viganò, visits India three more times during these 12 years: In 1986, 1988 and in 1994.

It is in 1986 that he again visits Kolkata Province. It is on the occasion of the Team Visit held at New Delhi from 3rd to 8th November 1986. The Province has the privilege to host this Team Visit and it does it in a very efficient manner.[126]

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[125] SNC, XII-1/'86, 8.
[126] SNC, XIII – 10 December/'86, 13–14.

The deep impression the Rector Major creates on this eye-witness is well expressed when he writes: "The 7th successor of Don Bosco, Fr. Egidio Viganò, was quite fascinating and perfectly Salesian-like Smiling and robust, this gentleman has a face full of grace. Soft-spoken and gentle to the greatest extent, he was most impressive. Even though he spoke only Italian, one could feel the warmth and fervour behind his impressive profile."

The Provincial and his Councillors prepare themselves very well for this important Team Visit by doing their home work quite diligently, that is, by spending the greater part of two Council Meetings discussing the various points of the report to be submitted at the Team Visit: study and assimilation of the Constitutions, the Contemplative dimension, spiritual direction, pastoral activity among the young, lay involvement, formation, Salesian Family and Communication Media.

After visiting the Province of Dimapur from 9th to 14th November, on 14th November the Rector Major arrives in our Province for two days on his way to Bangkok. For the night he goes to Don Bosco Kalyani to visit the brothers. On 15th he returns to Kolkata and in the afternoon he is taken to DBPC to see the coadjutor aspirants. At 6.00 p.m. the Rector Major speaks to the Salesians gathered together at Don Bosco Tengra. In the morning of 16th there is a concelebrated Mass in Latin. Immediately after Mass, the Rector Major blesses the foundation stone of the extension called *Nitika* of the Catechetical Centre. In the morning Fr. Viganò speaks to the FMAs, SMIs and two representatives of the MSMHC, and after them to the Salesian Cooperators. At 9.00 a.m. he leaves for Bangkok together with the Regional, Fr. Thomas Panakezham, and his secretary, Fr. A. Botta. The Rector Major visits India for the second time in November 1988 to preach a Retreat to Salesians from all Provinces at Tirupattur. On 7th November 1988, Fr. Provincial and Vice Provincial together with Fr. Stroscio, go to Tirupattur for this Spiritual Retreat preached by Fr. Viganò. Nine Salesians from our Province attend this retreat.

The third and last visit of Fr. Viganò to India is in 1994, when he comes once again together with some of his Councillors to preside over the Team Visit held at Madras from 6th to 11th November 1994.

On 14th November 1994 the Provincial Council meets to discuss ways of implementing the Team Visit's conclusions. To motivate the whole

Province to take seriously the conclusions of the Team Visit, it is decided to give a copy of the resolutions to each confrere. There are three groups of resolutions: one on Ongoing Formation, a second group on Contextualization, and a third on Laity.

5.1 Other Members of the GC visiting the Province

Besides the Regional superiors, nearly all the Councillors in charge of various Departments visit the Province during this 12-year period, especially in the first six years.

Fr. John Vecchi is the one who comes to India and to Kolkata more times to animate the Provinces on matters relating to his Department of Youth Pastoral.

From 12th to 14th February 1985, Fr. Vecchi has a meeting with the rectors of Kolkata, Guwahati, and Dimapur on the new Constitutions. From 7th to 11th October, Fr. Vecchi gathers the provincial Delegates for Youth Pastoral at Lonavla in order to:

1. Evaluate the progress made so far,
2. Plan topics of study and lines of action at provincial and inter-provincial levels to make common progress in the next five years,
3. Study ways and means of ensuing liaison and exchanges between one Province and another, and between the Provinces and the Youth Pastoral Department in Rome.

Twenty-three Salesians are present at the meeting. As a result of their meeting, the participants draw up and present a summary of their proposals to the six Provincials of India, who join them for the last two days. SNC gives us a report of what they propose to share with the confreres.[127]

A 'memorandum' is the fruit of a meeting convened by Fr. Vecchi with the vocation promoters and rectors of *aspirantates* of the six Indian Provinces at Chennai, from 21st to 23rd October 1986. Twenty-eight delegates attend the meeting.[128]

On 3rd August Fr. Vecchi and G. Milanesi arrive from Rome. They come for the Seminar on 'Salesian Pedagogy and Marginalization.' The Seminar is from 4th to 9th August. About 30 Salesians from India and 10 from Hong Kong, Philippines, Korea and Thailand attend. Japan is also

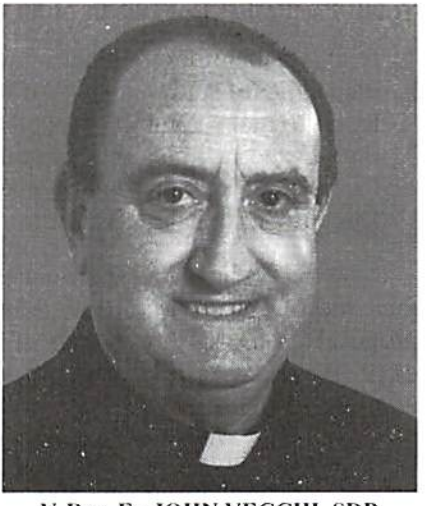
[127] Cfr. SNC, XII-11 November/'85, 15–19.
[128] Ibid. 10–12.

invited but does not send anybody, and Australia cannot attend due to visa problems. Two FMA Sisters from Kolkata Province also attend. From the impressions of the participants, it can be concluded that it was a success. The Provincial Council makes its own reflections on the report and draws its own conclusions in its meeting of 16th August 1986.[129]

A Youth Pastoral Seminar is held at the Provincial House from 5th to 11th March 1989 for the benefit of the 3 Northern Provinces. Fr. Vecchi, Fr. Chrys Saldanha, and Fr. Joseph Kezhakkekara animate it. There are about 30 participants.[130]

On 7th February 1991, Fr. Vecchi, the new Vicar General, comes to Kolkata on a short visit. On 8th February he addresses the rectors and parish priests on GC23 from 9 to 12 o'clock. In the afternoon he visits Kalyani and on 9th he visits the new site where Ashalayam is building a temporary shelter, and then on the same day he leaves for Dimapur, to address the rectors and parish priests of that Province on GC23.

After the death of Fr. Viganò in June 1995, GC 24 elects Fr. John Vecchi as the 8th Successor of Don Bosco.



V. Rev. Fr. JOHN VECCHI, SDB
Rector Major (1996–2002)

Fr. Juan Edmundo Vecchi is born at Viedma (Argentina) on 23rd June 1931, is sent to the Salesian school at Fortin Mercedes, where, after his novitiate, he makes his first profession on 28.1.1948.

On 27th January 1986, Fr. Luc Van Looy, Councillor for the Missions comes to this Province for a brief visit. On 28th January Fr. Provincial accompanies him to Kalyani, Krishnagar and the Santal Missions around Azimganj. In the afternoon of 30th January 1986, he speaks to the Council about this visit to the Santal Missions. He praises the good done, the importance given to the Santal Missions and the excellent men manning the mission. He also speaks on 'Project Africa', on the

[129] Cfr. SNC, XIII- 7 August/'86, 1–24
[130] Cfr. Chronicle of the Province, *Provincial Archives* B.10.1.4.

paucity of confreres, and the difficult pioneering work of the entire Project.[131]

Fr. F. S. Cuevas, General Councillor for the Salesian Family and Social Communications, arrives from Rome on 11th April 1986. He presides over the meeting of the National Councillors of the Salesian Past Pupils.

Fr. Luciano Odorico, new General Councillor for the Missions, meets the provincial Council on 31st March 1992 to give his impressions on his weeklong visit to the houses of the Province, especially the mission centers. The aim of his visit is to come to know the Salesian missions of Kolkata Province, to do missionary animation in the Province, especially in formation houses, and to get a particular knowledge of the new Delegation in the Hindi belt.

After the study of philosophy and practical training, he is sent to the Salesian Pontifical Athenaeum at Turin-Crocetta. He is ordained a Priest on 1st July 1958. On returning to his own country he holds various offices: Catechist from 1958 to 1960 at Fortin Mercedes, rector in the secondary school 'Dominic Savio' of General Roca (1961), of 'Don Bosco' school at Bahia Blanca (1962–1965); rector of the Formation Centre for young Salesians at Viedma (1966–1970). In 1971 he is elected Delegate to the Special General Chapter. Almost immediately after the Chapter, he is called to Rome by Fr. Ricceri and entrusted with the office of Regional Councillor for the Provinces of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay (1972–1977).

GC21 elects him as Councillor for Youth Pastoral. In 1990 he is chosen by GC 23 as Vicar General and elected Rector Major by GC24. He is a man of vast horizons, openness of mind and heart. He must remain in the history of the congregations for the new direction he gives for youth pastoral work. He shows to be a man of culture and a convinced animator, shown especially in his inspiring letters as Rector Major. He is deeply human and deeply spiritual. He dies of cancer on 23.1.2002.

The starting of the New Delhi Delegation, he says, will go a long way to expand the salesian work, so that in due time the Delegation will bloom into a Province.

He carries with him positive impressions about the Province. He finds a serious missionary endeavour, a deep Salesianity in the confreres. He sees them truly dedicated to the youth. He sees a community mentality, love for the Preventive System, Sacramental life, care for vocations, especially local vocations, a clear priority for the poor, a good endeavour for inculturation.

He also has some suggestions to give: make a plan for first evangelization and for consolidation of established parishes, take care of

[131] Cfr. also SNC, XIII-1 January–February/'86, 2.

the catechists, as far as possible have three confreres in mission stations. First priority is to be given to Hindi-speaking regions so that slowly a Vice-Province or a Province may be prepared. Let a steady and constant inculturation carry on.

Fr. Paul Natali, Councillor for Formation, is one of the Councillors who accompany the Rector Major for the team visit held at New Delhi from 3rd to 8th November 1986. After the team visit he flies to Kolkata and from 9th to 12th November 1986 he holds a meeting for formators of Kolkata, Guwahati and Dimapur.

Fr. Joseph Nicolussi, new Councillor for Formation, visits the Province from 15th to 22nd September 1992. During the visitation he recovers soon from his indisposition and is able to attend to his duties.[132]

On 22nd September 1992 he is present at the first part of the meeting of the Provincial Council held on 21st and 22nd September 1992. He develops briefly three points of view or lines of action to be kept in mind in all the works of the Province:

1. Interest in all the stages of the salesian formation: initial, novitiate, post-novitiate, practical training, ongoing formation;
2. Priorities in the Province: how to implement them,
3. A plan for the ongoing formation.

From 10th to 12th March 1993, Fr. Antonio Martinelli, new General Councillor for the Salesian Family and Social Communication, presides over a National Consultation on Social Communication at Provincial House, Kolkata. All the Provincials (7), all the Provincial Delegates for Social Communication (7), and one more person interested in Social Communication from each Province, participate. Dimapur has no Delegate. Kolkata has three participants. The methodology used by Fr. Martinelli is: See-Judge-Act.

On 28th October 1987, Fr. Omero Paron, Economer General, makes his first visit to the Province. On 29th he speaks to the Economers of the Province.

In the years from 1985 to 1996 Fr. Thomas Panakezham, the

[132] Cfr. SNC, XX October/'92, 1.

Regional Superior, comes twice as Extraordinary Visitor, in July 1988 and in June 1993.

The Extraordinary Visitation in 1988 begins on 29th July 1988, by his presiding over part of the day's meeting of the Provincial Council. The Visitor explains the procedure of his visit. He wants first to meet the Provincial Council as a whole and individually to assess the state of the Province as they see it. He asks the opinion of the Council on a number of points: acceptance and observance of the Constitutions, assimilation and following the teachings and directives of the SGC, GC21, GC22, attachment of the confreres to the Congregation, formation, the Salesian family, the Salesian Brother, relationship between the Provincial Council and confreres.

On 29th September 1988 Fr. Provincial and the Council go to Don Bosco Krishnagar for a meeting with Fr. Thomas Panakezham, who is halfway through the Visitation of the Province.

On 4th November 1988, Fr. Thomas meets the rectors and parish priests at Bandel for sharing his views on the Province. On 5th November, the Visitor presides over the Provincial Council held at Bandel itself. He further shares his ideas on the Province with the Provincial and his Council. In the evening Fr. Thomas presides over the Eucharist that concludes the Visitation.

On 10th August 1993 he arrives at the Provincial House for his second Visitation of the Province.[133] He reports about this Visitation to the provincial Council at its meeting held from 25th to 27th October 1993. His general impression is that the confreres are zealous, there is regularity in the Houses, and the work done is planned.

He gives also some suggestions for their work. There should be more evangelization in the schools, which is hindered if there is division among the confreres. There should be some reflection on what is done, on what cannot be achieved or is left undone. Work-holism should be tempered. Remote preparation must be done in order to form would-be rectors. Construction of buildings should be done only in response to a real need. Phase out with determination communities made of only one or two confreres. Rectors should be encouraged to hear confessions,

[133] Cfr. SNC, 4 July–August/'93m 5.

especially of the young people as a means to be more fatherly in their task. Every house must work in order to get some vocation from among their pupils.

On 13th September 1996 Kolkata welcomes the new Regional, Fr. Joaquim D'Souza. He addresses a large gathering of confreres in Kolkata, spelling out his vision for Salesian India.

The Australasia region is one of the biggest regions, both in territorial dimension and in the number of confreres. We are 3000 Salesians in the region. As we are growing, formation is an important aspect to be assured. Hence formation both initial and ongoing is one of our priorities. Indian missionaries must go to the West. In the past we have been receiving help, support, and missionary growth for our Province from the West, like Italy and others. They have given their best and have planted the Salesian charism here. Now that they are in difficulty, as a sign of solidarity, we must consider how we can help.

The Chapter is asking us to consider lay collaborators as our partners and co-responsible with us. In this regard we have to make a jump in our mentality. By so doing we are moving forward to the authentic mind of Don Bosco. Right from the beginning, Don Bosco sees his mission greater than what his Salesians can do. He wants to make his co-operators part of the Salesian Congregation. Why not promote Salesian Secular Institutes?

Administration must not kill pastoral initiatives. On 14th September Fr. Joaquim addresses a group of 40 Economers. He develops the following points:

1. Not administrators, not owners, but stewards;
2. "I am still to find an Economer after my own heart." (Don Bosco) Those close to us must see that we are men of God.
3. I don't believe in divine providence, I experience it, Fr. Careño once said.[134]

6. General and Provincial Chapters

6.1 General Chapters XXIII and XXIV

The two General Chapters that are held within the 12 years under consideration and the Provincial Chapters that either precede or follow

[134] Cfr. SNC, XXIV-9 October/'96, 1–2 for first conference; 3 for second conference to Economers.

the General Chapters, have a great impact on the Province of Kolkata. This is due to the special characteristics of these two chapters as compared with the three preceding General Chapters: SGC20, GC21, GC22.

The latter Chapters, in answer to the directives of Vatican II, calling all the congregations for renewal and adaptation, deal with the charism and mission of the Congregation. This results in the entire updating of the Constitutions. General Chapters 23 and 24, instead, deal with only one aspect of the charism and mission. This is very well expressed in the particular theme of each Chapter.

General Chapter 23, held in Rome from 4th March to 5th May 1990, has as its theme: 'Educating young people to the Faith.' The approved document consists of an Introduction and three parts:

Part I: The Youth Reality challenges the Salesian community
Part II: The Faith journey. In this second part there is a synthetic presentation of the Salesian Youth Spirituality
Part III: Practical commitments of the community, and a Conclusion.

General Chapter 24, held in Rome from 19th February to 20th April 1996, has as its theme: 'Salesians and Lay People: Communion and sharing in the Spirit and Mission of Don Bosco.'

The approved document consists of an Introduction and three parts:

Part I: Salesians and Laity Today: the situation (3 chapters)
Part II: Salesians and Laity: memories and prophecy
Part III: Towards the future (3 chapters), and a Conclusion.

6.2 Four Provincial Chapters: PC 86, 89, 92, and 96.

Provincial Chapter 1986 is held in Bandel from 10th to 15th October 1986. Fr. Joseph Chittattukulam is its Moderator. General Chapter 22, no. 2, sets the theme of this Chapter: "The next (ordinary) Provincial Chapter has as its principal theme the renewed Constitutions and Regulations."

Fr. Cajetan Scrivo, Vicar General, in Acts of the General Council No. 315, gives precise directives to the Provinces on the way of conducting the Chapter, directives which are given by the General Council at its meeting in June-July 1983. This will be the first Provincial Chapter taking place after the promulgation of the new text of the Constitutions.

It is observed by the General Council that among the tasks entrusted to the Provincial Chapter, attention must be given to the one indicated in Constitutions art. 171, 4: "to formulate and revise the Provincial Directory in matters left to be decided at provincial level."

Fr. Scrivo gives clear guidelines in the above-mentioned Acts of the General Council on how this is to be done under the caption, 'The Provincial Directory'. These guidelines guide the work of PC86 of the Kolkata Province in formulating its own Provincial Directory.

Provincial Chapter 1989 is held at Salesian College, Sonada, from 15th to 19th April 1990. The Moderator of the Chapter is Fr. George Tharayil, Provincial Economer.

The theme of the Chapter is the same as that of the forthcoming General Chapter 23: "Educating Young People to the Faith: a task and a challenge for today's Salesian community."

The Moderator writing to the confreres on 12th December 1988, gives the scope of the General Chapter 23, as given by the Rector Major in AGC. No. 327, 1: "To verify the efficacy of Salesian Education with regard to the life of faith of the people with whom we work, so as to revise with greater incisiveness the education and pastoral project of each Province and of the individual houses."

The Moderator expresses the expectations of the Province from the work of the Chapter: "We are looking forward from the Chapter to a collection of 'practical guidelines'." "A double series of considerations," he adds, "will help us develop the theme":

1. A framework of values, which define our identity as missionaries of the young;
2. The daily practical realities, the reality of the young whom we meet inside and outside our establishments.

Provincial Chapter 1992 is held at Bandel from 3rd to 8th August 1992. Fr. Bertie Fernandes, the Vice-Provincial, is its Moderator.

It is the theme of GC 23 that determines the work of PC92. It demands of the Salesian community to reformulate the Educative Pastoral Plan (EPP), so that the dimensions of faith formation are given the central place.

It is with GC21 that a definitive way of action on behalf of youth is spelt out with the name of 'Educative Pastoral Plan' (EPP). GC21 gives it to the Salesian community to formulate it: "Every Province will draw up an educational plan suited to the local conditions as a basis for programming and evaluating its own works, in line with the basic options made by the Congregation" (no. 105). GC22 in Constitution art. 31 and Regulations art. 4, commissions Provincial and local Communities to prepare an educative and pastoral plan.

The Province of Kolkata, in its PC80, undertakes the task of studying the directives of GC21 and of drawing up a provincial educative and pastoral plan. After much animation and consultation with several communities in the Province and several groups of confreres gathered together for the purpose, the initial educative and pastoral plan is drafted by 1st January 1983.

Due to the ever-changing needs of the young, the EPP needs also to be re-thought and adapted. This is the main task of PC92, which, after much discussion and re-drafting, accepts it almost unanimously.

Provincial Chapter 1995, is held at *Nitika* and it has 2 sessions – I Session: 12th–15th February 1995, and II Session: 26th March to 1st April 1995. Fr. Mathew Pulingathil is the Moderator chosen by the Provincial and his Council in agreement with art. 168 of the Regulations. He presides over the preparations to the Chapter and moderates the fist Session. At the inaugural meeting of the second session he receives news of the serious illness of his mother and immediately leaves for home. Fr. Provincial with the consent of his Council invites Fr. N. Lo Groi to take his place as Moderator.

The theme of GC XXIV: "Laity and Salesians in Don Bosco's spirit" is also the theme of PC95. The theme of GC24 is chosen from information coming from various countries and taking reality into account. At this point there exists already a lay presence in many countries in the works of Don Bosco, collaborating with Salesians in the field of human and educational betterment. A second motive for the choice, according to Fr. Martinelli, Moderator of GC XXIV, is the new role that the layperson is entrusted with in the Church, backed by the Pontifical *Magisterium*, the local and continental Synods, and some Episcopal Conferences.

The second session of the PC95 is mostly dedicated to the discussion of the theme and of the resolutions to be voted and sent to the Pre-Capitular Commission in Rome. During this session lay observers are present having the possibility of intervening in the Commissions and in the discussions at the General Assembly, except for the last 2 days, which are reserved for voting.

In the afternoon session of 27th March 1995, there is a panel of five lay people. The Panellists are:

- Mr. Roshan Joseph, a Catholic, Vice-president of sales and marketing, Union Carbide,
- Mr Sebastian Joseph, a Catholic lawyer,
- Mrs Grace Williams, YCS animator and headmistress of Loreto Entally, junior school,
- Mr. Antony Dally, an active catechist with Fr. Joseph D'Souza,
- Mr. G. I. De, a Hindu, mechanical engineer and presently a staff member of DBSERI, Mirpara.

On the same day, at 6.00 p.m. Mrs. Menon, SDO, ADM, DM Kolkata Corporation, speaks to the Chapter members and answers questions put to her.

On 28th March, at one of the sessions, Fr. Vallappallil Mathai, the Superior of the New Delhi Delegation, reads to the Assembly a letter to the Rector Major asking him for the speedy erection of the new Province. After a discussion and an answer to the requested clarifications, all the members of the Chapter duly sign the letter at its last session.

7. The Activities of the Provincial and his Council leading to the Third Division of the Province in December 1996

We can look at the activities of the Provincial and his Council during the past 12 years from three different angles.

The Provincial Council meets every month, sometimes even more than once a month, and the well-recorded minutes of each meeting clearly show the seriousness of the members and mature way of dealing with the various issues. The minutes show a triple function of the Council in collaborating with the Provincial in the government of the Province: the administrative function, the animating function, and, especially in the

second *sexennium*, the function of preparing the Province and the confreres for the division of the Province, with which this chapter and this 'History of the Kolkata Province' end.

The administrative function is shown in matters, such as, admissions to vows, finalization of transfers, consideration of requests by various houses for financial help, information, invitations by bishops to open works in their dioceses, reports of the Provincial's visits and yearly visitations, etc.

The administration of a Province is not the only task of a Provincial and of his Council. "With the help of his Council the Provincial animates the religious life and apostolic action of the provincial community, cares for the formation of the members, especially the novices and young confreres." (C.161)

In compliance with this duty imposed by the Constitutions, the Provincial and his Council dedicate the whole or a good part of some sessions of the Council to topics of animation, such as:

- Preparation for the Team Visit by reflecting together on the various themes proposed: study and assimilation of the Constitutions, Contemplative Dimension, Spiritual Direction, Pastoral activity among the young, the lay component (promotion of the Salesian Brother), Formation (Enculturation), Salesian Family, Communication Media.[135]
- *Scrutinium Paupertatis*, at Provincial level and discussion on *Scrutinium Paupertatis*, done by the communities.[136]
- Study of the report of the Rector Major after visitation by Fr. Thomas Panakezham. In the same Council meeting also the study and discussion on Contextualization of Salesian Formation.[137]
- The first part of the meeting in August 1994 is a joint meeting with the provincial Council of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians on the following topics: Youth Pastoral, Formation to Faith, the Lay Project, and Salesian Animation. At the same meeting the Council discusses the three documents that will be presented and discussed at the next

[135] Cfr. Minutes of the Provincial Council, 27.2.'86 and 20.3.'86, *Provincial Archives* B.8.2.3.
[136] Ibid. 10.7.'86 and 11.9.'86.
[137] Ibid. 21.1.'94–22.1.'94.

Team Visit: Contextualization, lay involvement in our Apostolate, Evaluation of the last Team Visit.[138]

- Discussion on three groups of Team Visit conclusions: ongoing formation, Contextualization, and Laity.[139]
- Evaluation of the last six years of the life of the Province: a frank and useful discussion, achievements and setbacks.[140]

The process for the division of the Province is set in motion by Fr. Sebastian Alancheril and his Council during the last two years of his term as provincial.

On 22nd November 1988 the provincial Council is asked to study the possibility of the division of the Province. The Council decides to set up a Commission to study this.

In March 1989 Fr. P.O. Jose, the head of the commission, and Fr. P.J. Sheehy submit their findings to the Council. From the discussion that follows, the following points emerge:

- It is decided to present this report to the Provincial Chapter, to be held in April,
- The Council is in favour of a Delegation,
- Delhi, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh States can be placed under the authority of the Delegation. The Delegation can be asked to develop these areas so that it can eventually become a Province.

The Provincial Chapter 1989 is more in favour of a Vice-Province than of a Delegation.[141] With regard to expansion in the North, the Council decides to set up a three-member Committee, headed by Fr. Joseph Chittattukulam, to study the various offers by bishops and present their findings to the Council.[142]

In the Provincial Council meeting of 16th August 1991, the topic of the Division of the Province is taken up. A letter of the Rector Major is read and the opinion of the rectors and parish priests at Bandel in July is

[138] Ibid. 21.8.'94–22.8.'94.
[139] Ibid. 14.11.'94.
[140] Ibid. 8.11.'96.
[141] Ibid. 11.5.'89.
[142] Ibid. 16.1.'89.

made known. After a discussion, a straw vote is taken. The result is five positive votes in favour of starting a Delegation.

The geographical map of the Delegation is chalked out. To the Delegation can be allotted: Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan and all the districts of Orissa and Bihar which do not have a big concentration of Santals. The Kolkata Province would retain W. Bengal, Sikkim, the districts of Orissa and Bihar that have a concentration of Santals. Also Bangladesh and Nepal can be included. The houses which will go to the new Delegation are: three in Bihar, one in Orissa, three in Madhya Pradesh, and three in Delhi. A Fax message will be sent with these details and the result of the straw vote to the Rector Major for his approval, after which the consultation for the Superior of the Delegation will be started. The autonomy, the power of the delegation, and the division of the economic resources are discussed.

At the meeting of the Provincial Council on 12th September 1991, the letter of the Rector Major in answer to the petition for a new Delegation is read. A discussion follows to chalk out the powers of the Delegate, his duties and his sphere of activity as per request from the Rector Major. After giving the final touches the draft will be sent to Rome.

It is in his Circular Letter dated 5th January 1992, that Fr. Thomas Polackal announces to the confreres that the Rector Major has given approval to the setting up of the 'Hindi-Belt' delegation, that Fr. Mathai Vellappallil has been appointed as delegate and that Fr. Joseph Chittattukulam will assist him as Economer.[143]

In the Council meeting of 18th February 1992, the tasks and priorities in the work of the Delegate are chalked down in a systematic manner. The priority should be the strengthening and the expansion of the Salesian work, caring especially for local vocations. Jabalpur and Jokbhala must become slowly full-fledged houses of formation. Other directives are given with regard to financial matters.

[143] The letter of the Secretary General informing the Provincial of the approval by the Rector Major is dated 12.12.1991.

In the meeting of 31st March 1992, Fr. Mathai, the Delegate, presents to the Council a paper regarding the clarifications to be given to the confreres about the new Delegation. Fr. C. A. Joseph of the Delegation is present. The following are the clarifications sought for and given importance to regarding the *Goals* of the Delegation: the strengthening of the Communities, especially those not having yet a sufficient number of confreres, such as, Najafgarh, Kokar, Jabalpur, Mandla, Kuarmunda, Kereng and Jumaikela; expansion in Christian areas, like Gumla and Jharsuguda; looking for new areas for first Evangelization; work for promoting vocations. Jokbhala should develop into a regular formation house for the Delegation.

In the meeting of the Council of 7th July 1992, the report is read on the meeting of the Delegation at Don Bosco Alaknanda. The meeting starts on 25th June 1992, preceded by a day of recollection. There are three sessions. Each house presents a report about its work and plans for future developments. The discussion that follows stresses the point that both the Christian and not yet christianised areas must be developed, formal and non-formal technical schools must be fostered. The place chosen for the Delegate is Don Bosco Alaknanda.

Another point discussed at length is the fostering of vocations. Till Jabalpur is well established, Hatia should be the place for the aspirants. The problem of the Pre-novitiate is also much discussed and the opinion of the Provincial Council is sought by a vote: all are in favour of a full year devoted only to preparing the candidates for the Novitiate.

From 6th February to 6th March 1993, Fr. Thomas Panakezham makes an Extraordinary Visitation of the Delegation and on it he reports to the Provincial Council in its meeting of 6th and 7th March 1993. His impressions on each house and Mission centre are very positive. He makes a few suggestions as to how to improve our work and see things in view of future developments: like preparing a place, both in Delhi and Ranchi, where the confreres of the future Province once the Delegation has grown can be gathered, earmark personnel for the Delegation and qualify the needed persons for various posts. It is desirable that new presences be not too scattered.

In the meeting of 21st and 22nd January 1994, the Provincial Council approves the Delegation Council. Fr. Mathai first gives some details about the consultation conducted regarding the Council of the Delegation. Fr. George Xalxo, Bro. Simon Lakra, Fr. C. A. Joseph, and Bro. Cyriac are members of the Council, which will have its first meeting on 4th February 1994.

On 10th February 1994, the Delegate, Fr. Mathai, gives a report to the Provincial Council on the first meeting of the Council of the Delegation. The regular houses of the Delegation at present are: Alaknanda, Okhla, Jokbhala, Hatia, Kokar and Jabalpur. Luknow must have a hostel and therefore space must be provided for it. It is wise to start first with a Youth Centre at Jharsuguda and later on develop also other initiatives. Don Bosco Okhla needs to start the additional residence for the confreres as soon as possible.

Practically all the Council meetings of 1994, like those of 1992 and 1993, have on the agenda 'Delegation Matters'. Also the Provincial Chapter 1995 deals with the topic of the new Province. As mentioned above, it does it by sending a letter signed by all the Chapter Members to the Rector Major asking him to expedite the creation of the New Province.

In the meeting of 18th and 19th August 1995, Fr. Provincial informs the members of his Council that the General Council has accepted favourably the idea of a New Delhi Province. This proposal will be presented to the new Rector Major and his Council.

In July 1996, the new Rector Major begins the process for the division of the Province by asking the new Regional to consult the Province on two points:

1. Feasibility of the division;
2. Names of possible confreres to be appointed as Provincials.

On 13th September 1996, the new Regional, Fr. Joaquim D'Souza, addresses the Provincial Council and in thought-provoking words gives to the confreres of the Province a three-fold task for the years ahead:

1. Divide the Province using charity and understanding,
2. Attend to the formation of personnel,
3. Give support to all the various works started in the Province.

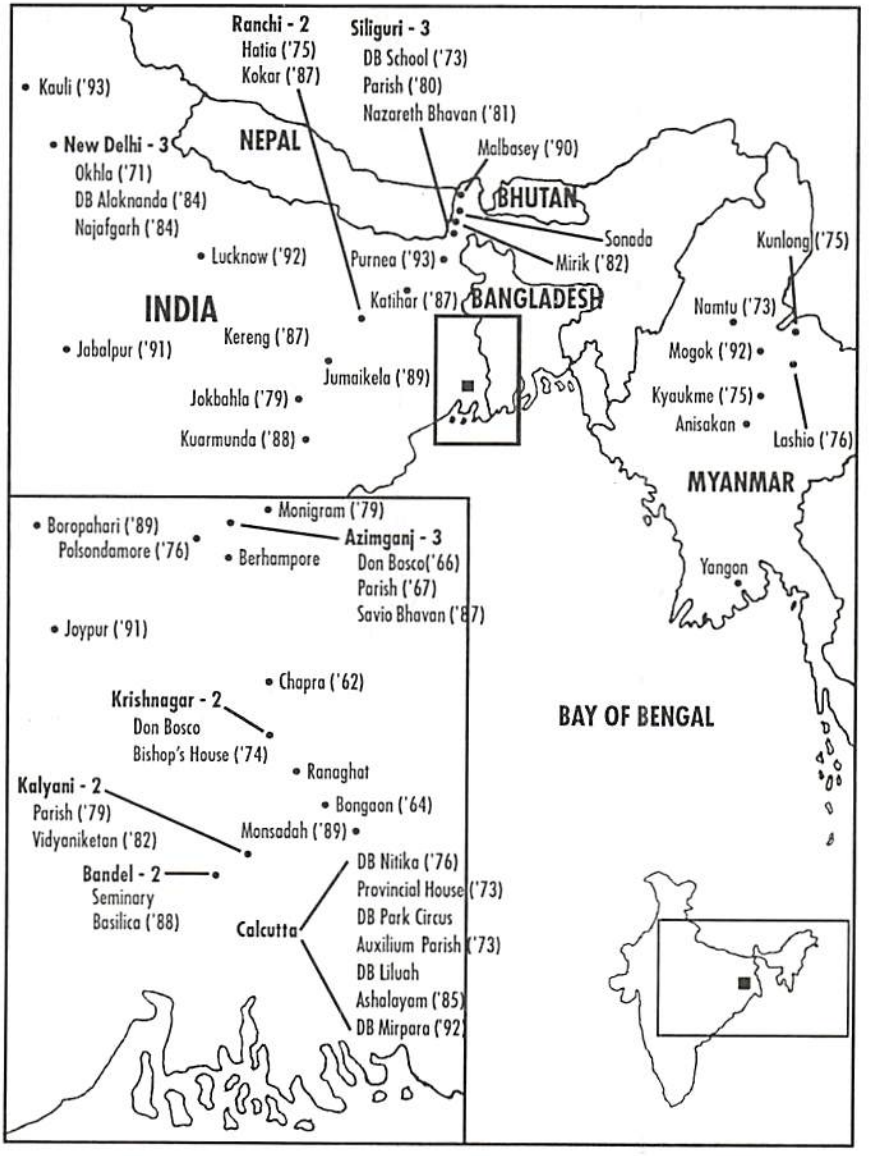
On 10th October 1996, two members of the Delegation of the Delhi Council, who are not already members of the Provincial Council, namely Fr. K.C. John and Bro. Cyriac, join the meeting of the Provincial Council. The discussion centres mainly around three points with regard to the division of the Province. This meeting is suggested by the Regional, Fr. Joaquim, to get a consolidated opinion on three areas:

1. Division of territory,
2. Division of personnel, and
3. Division of assets in view of the splitting of the Province. The opinion of the Council will be forwarded to the Regional.

In the meeting of the provincial Council of 6th April 1996, it is strongly recommended to place the new Province under the patronage of Blessed Philip Rinaldi. It is agreed that the projects approved by the Council or not yet implemented, be estimated and the money passed on to the Delegation. The projects approved are: Gumla and Kalevira (Rs. 5.00 lakhs), Lucknow (Rs. 5.00 lakhs), Jabalpur house (Rs. 4.50 lakhs). This amount will be added to the Rs. 75 lakhs agreed to. The total will be Rs. 89.50 lakhs to be passed on to the Delegation within 3 years.

On 24th December 1996, Fr. Thomas Polackal announces that the Rector Major and his Council have divided the Province of Kolkata and have appointed Fr. Francis Alencherry, as the 13th Provincial of Kolkata and Fr. Kezhakkekara Joseph, as the first Provincial of the New Delhi Province, comprising the Hindi-speaking area.

PROVINCE OF CALCUTTA
BEFORE THE 3rd DIVISION IN DEC. 1996



Fr. Francis Alencherry is installed as Provincial of Kolkata with 266 Salesians working in 35 centres in West Bengal, Sikkim, Bihar (Purnea and Katihar Districts), Nepal and Myanmar, on 9th January 1997.

Fr. Joseph Kezhakkekara, the first Provincial of the new Province of Jesus the Good Shepherd, will have 66 Salesians in 14 centres, spread out in Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, and Delhi.

Fr. Joaquim D'Souza, the Salesian Regional Councillor for Australasia, will be present at the installation of the new Provincial and erection of the New Delhi Province scheduled for 24th January 1997.[144]



V. Rev. Fr. FRANCIS ALENCHERRY, SDB
Provincial (1997–2002)

Fr. Francis Alencherry is born on 29th August 1950 at Turuthy, Changanacherry, joins the *aspirantate* in Bandel, makes his first profession on 24.05.1969, is ordained a priest on 18.12.1978. After completing his Doctorate in Biblical Theology from the Gregorian University (Rome) he is professor at Sacred Heart Theological College, Shillong, and later, rector of the Mathias Institute of Theological Studies in Shillong. In December 1996 he is appointed Provincial of Kolkata Province. In 2002, General Chapter 25 elects him as General Councillor for the Missions.

[144] Cfr. SNC, XXV-1-2 January–February/'97, 1–4.

EPILOGUE

As we come to the end of this presentation of the detailed history of Kolkata Province, I am reminded of the picnics we used to have in the 1950s at Salesian College, Sonada, to the Balasun River. When trekking back home we used to stop halfway for a little rest and also for our tea. It was natural at that moment to look back to the river at the bottom of the valley, from where we had started, to calculate the distance already covered, to admire the surrounding panorama, and also to look at the College and at the distance still to be covered.

The purpose of this Epilogue too is similar: to *look back at what has taken place* in the past 80 years, to make *a quick mention of the most important events* of the last six years since the third division of the Province, and to take *a look ahead* in order to have a clearer idea of the *way* along which the journey has to proceed, so as to make it a journey of healthy growth for the Province.

1. A look back

The phenomenal growth of the last 80 years can be compared to the growth of a tree: starting from **a small seed** – the first eleven Salesians who reach Shillong on 13th January 1922 – to the present state of the Salesians in India, with over 2000 Salesians spread out in India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Nepal. Whenever the tree is getting too big, one of the bigger branches is cut off to make it grow into another tree in some other part of the region.

The first division takes place in 1934, when the single Indian Province of St. Thomas the Apostle, is divided into two: the North-Indian Province of St. John Bosco, with headquarters in Shillong, and the South-Indian Province of St. Thomas the Apostle, with headquarters in Chennai.

The second division takes place in September 1959 with the division of the North-Indian Province into Kolkata Province of St. John Bosco, with headquarters in Kolkata, and Guwahati Province of Mary Help of Christians, with headquarters in Guwahati.

The third division takes place in December 1996, with the creation

of the New Delhi Province of Jesus the Good Shepherd, with headquarters in New Delhi.

A question that comes naturally to anyone who looks at this marvellous growth in such a short time is this: What is the source of this rapid growth?

We have a first answer to this question, when we consider the source of any Christian Apostolate. There is and there cannot be but one source: the Grace of God, as St. Paul tells us, "I planted, Apollos watered, but *God gave the growth.*" (I Cor. 3:6)

However, when we look at the question from a Salesian view point, we can still add one more source, which flows from the first: *the maternal protection of Mary Help of Christians*, of whom we can say with Don Bosco, "Mary did it all!" and *the love* of the First Salesians *for Don Bosco and* their *fidelity to his spirit*, which they tried to instil into the hearts and minds of their followers.

Fr. Mathias, the leader of the first group of missionaries leaving for India is a cent per cent Salesian grown in contact, already in his initial formation in Sicily, with Salesians who had known Don Bosco and who had been inspired by Don Bosco's life and teaching. This, we may call, 'Salesian blood-transfusion' increases enormously, when during his theological studies at *Foglizzo,* he comes into contact with the leaders of the Congregation at the time, such as, Fr. Michael Rua, the rector Major, Fr. Paul Albera, the Catechist General, Fr. Philip Rinaldi, the Prefect General, Fr. Peter Ricaldone, General Councillor for professional schools, and other eminent Salesians who had lived with Don Bosco.

When he receives the call of the superiors to lead the first group of missionaries to India, he is overjoyed. "To become a missionary? To go to India?...But this is my dream as a young man!"[1] His greatest resolve now is to bring Don Bosco's name and spirit to India, 'to fill India with Don Bosco,'[2] as he will be told later by the Apostolic Visitor to India, Msgr. Lepicier, and to be a missionary and a leader of missionaries who 'act Don Bosco' in India.[3]

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[1] Cfr. Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 1.
[2] Ibid. 155.
[3] Cfr. Anecdote of the boy lying in the empty tomb of Don Bosco in Valsalice. Ibid. 278–79; Cfr. Ch. V, 125.

Before leaving for India, gathered around the tomb of Don Bosco and of Don Rua at Valsalice, the missionaries are invited by Fr. Mathias, their leader, to promise Don Bosco and Don Rua:

1. Always to do honour to our beloved Congregation.
2. To spread everywhere devotion to Mary Help of Christians.
3. To remain faithful to the vows and to the Constitutions.

Fidelity to this promise accounts for their success in their missionary ventures. So also fidelity to the recommendations of Fr. P. Ricaldone, on the eve of their departure for India. Fr. Ricaldone asks them to be *evangelizers of peace*. To preserve and spread peace, it is important to take care of certain relationships:

1. With God: a true spirit of piety
2. With the representatives of God: obedience, respect, and love
3. With one's neighbour: charity among the confreres, spirit of sacrifice, and total dedication to the young. "Devotion to Mary Help of Christians," he concludes, "must be the characteristic of the Salesians and especially of the missionaries."[4]

Fr. Mathias begins to put into practice the given programme on the very first day of his arrival in Shillong on 13th January 1922, when he starts with the first item of the programme, to spread devotion to Mary Help of Christians. Our Lady herself gives him the opportunity when the new missionaries visit the beautiful church of the Divine Saviour in Shillong, and find to their surprise the little *Statue of Mary Help of Christians* on a side altar. [5]

The first opportunity for all the group to begin to put into practice Don Bosco's advice to his missionaries, "Spread devotion to Mary Help of Christians and you will see what miracles are", is the preparation to and the celebration of their first feast of Mary Help of Christians on 24th May 1922.[6]

From this day on, the Salesians will work zealously to spread devotion to Mary Help of Christians. The first formation house built by

[4] Ibid. 46; Cfr. Ch. I, 37.
[5] Ibid. 66; Cfr. Ch. II, 44.
[6] Ibid. 85–86; Cfr. Ch. II, 55.

Fr. Mathias is *Our Lady's House* at Shillong, which will be reduced to ashes by a devastating fire in April 1936. Together with it the church also will go, but later Bishop Fernando will dedicate a more splendid Cathedral to Mary Help of Christians in 1954.[7] Other churches will rise up in honour of Mary Help of Christians in many parts of India. Fr. Maschio will build a magnificent church dedicated to Mary Help of Christians at Matunga, Mumbai. Archbishop Henry D'Souza blesses a beautiful and imposing church in honour of Don Bosco's Madonna at Auxilium parish, Gobra, Kolkata, on 29th January 1995.

When Msgr. Mathias is made Prefect Apostolic of Assam, Bhutan and Manipur, he is fired by Don Bosco's *Da mihi animas* – "give me souls." To achieve this he needs two essential means, *personnel and funds.* We have seen[8] how he tries to meet both these needs. The first by setting up a *propaganda office.* The second by looking for vocations, both from India and from abroad. The first novitiate with 13 novices (five from India and eight from Europe) starts on 20th January 1924. When Msgr. Mathias' dream of getting young recruits from Europe and from India to make their novitiate in Shillong is realized, his preoccupation is to put solid traditions for the apostolic and Salesian formation of these young men. Quantity is important, but quality is even more important.

While Fr. Stephen Ferrando, the novice master, takes on himself the responsibility for the Salesian and missionary formation of the novices, Msgr. Mathias takes on himself the direct Salesian and missionary formation of the clerics.

The means used by Msgr. Mathias to give a solid missionary formation to his young clerics are the 'apostolic tours'[9] and the festive oratories.[10]

With regard to the Salesian formation Msgr. Mathias is keen to instil in all a well-understood *family spirit* by gathering after supper the whole community around the table – *in circuitu mensae* – and spending some time with them in an atmosphere of joy and healthy relaxation.[11] It

[7] Ibid. 66; Paviotti, *The Work of His Hands*, 114f.
[8] Mathias, *Quarant'anni in India,* 119–122; Cfr. Ch. III, 63f.
[9] Ibid. 145–148; Crf. Ch. III, '76.
[10] Ibid. 195–199; Cfr. Ch. III, '87.
[11] Ibid. 176–179; Cfr. Ch. IV, '77.

is to the great *family spirit* reigning in those years among the Salesians that Bishop Mathias ascribes the secret of success in the first twelve years of missionary activity. [12]

Great are the fruits of this missionary and Salesian formation that Bishop Mathias has painstakingly tried to instil into his Salesians: priests, clerics and brothers. There is a long list of valiant missionaries, some of them real heroes, such as Msgr. Bars, Fr. Piasecki, Bishop Ferrando, Fr. Vendrame, Fr. Scuderi, Fr. Pianazzi, Fr. Alessi, Bishop Marengo, Fr. Mlekus, Fr. Maschio, Fr. Farina, Fr. Ravalico, Brother Cid, Brother Ferraris, Brother Frasson,[13] Brother Mantarro, and others who will follow these pioneers.

2. A quick look at the main events affecting the Province in the last six years

The last six years (1997-2002) witness a great variety of activities and signs of growth both at the Provincial and at the local level.

2.1 Two new Presences

2.1.1 Don Bosco Katmandu (Nepal)

Don Bosco Katmandu is the Salesian Society's millennium gift to Nepal. The vision of the Society is to offer to the youth of Nepal, particularly those of Katmandu, an opportunity to empower themselves with technical skills and produce the much needed skilled manpower. To attain this the Society is in the process of setting up two Institutes in the Valley, at Luhbu and Techo:

- **Don Bosco High and Technical School Luhbu**
  A centre for vocational training and a high school is under construction. The aim of the Institute is to cater for the poor

[12] Ibid. 412–413; Cfr. Ch. VI, 172.

[13] Brother Armando Frasson: born on 14.10.1901 in Cully (Switzerland), makes his first profession on 14.10.1924, comes to India after his novitiate, is appointed to Don Bosco Shillong, which is the venue of his missionary career, except for two short spells at Tanjore and COP. Bro. Frasson may deservedly be called the founder of the 'Don Bosco Press'. What characterizes him in his unrelenting work are his amazing regularity, orderliness, and punctuality. His simplicity, humility, obedience, and goodness of heart are equally admirable. What makes him a true son of Don Bosco is his genuine love for the boys. His skills as a comedian can keep a crowd of boys amused the whole day. He dies on 26.04.1978, aged 77.

youth of the area, particularly the school dropouts and the under-privileged. A computer centre is already functioning. A Nepali medium high school starts in May 2002.

- **Don Bosco Institute Techo:**
  In the millennium year a 33 *ropanis*[14] property is acquired by the Society with a view to setting up a credible and quality oriented Technical and Vocational Training Institute. It starts in January 2002 with a computer-training programme, evening coaching classes and language classes. Msgr. Antony Sharma S.J., the Prefect Apostolic of Nepal, blesses the Institute and Fr. Francis Alencherry SDB, the Provincial, inaugurates the Vocational Training Centre on 27th January 2002.

2.1.2 Kalimpong

Property is purchased during the last year of Fr. Thomas Polackal's term of office. Work starts with Fr. Francis Alencherry. Shri K.C. Mandal, W.B.C.S. (Exe) S.D.O., Kalimpong, inaugurates **Don Bosco Joti Kalimpong** on 19th July 2003. Msgr. Stephen Lepcha, Bishop of Darjeeling, had blessed it on 14th July 2002.

2.2 Developments in some other local communities

- In the place of the old Augustinian Hall at **Bandel** a new three-storied wing is built as residence of the community and to serve as a Retreat House in addition to the old Retreat House. It is blessed on 10th November 2001.
- A third floor is added to the main building of St. John's school for classrooms for Classes XI and XII, and for the computer lab. To the old school office a new floor is added and made into a boarding for Santal boys from Classes I – V.
- In **Joypur** a new church is built and the hostel for boys is blessed on 8th May 2003.
- In 2001 a hostel for boys is blessed in the **Kalyani** parish.
- In **Don Bosco Krishnagar** a spacious three-storied hostel is blessed on 15th August 1997. A new wing for the Technical school is started in 2001 and completed in 2003.

[14] Land measuring unit used in Nepal.

- In **Don Bosco Liluah** the new residence for the confreres and the hostel for the boys is completed in 1998. The technical school is rebuilt. The Auditorium, demolished by order of the Corporation that declares it unsafe, is rebuilt bigger and better equipped and is blessed and inaugurated by Fr. Francis Alencherry on 14th May 2002.

- **Don Bosco Malbasey** also witnesses great improvements with the extension of the school and the building of a new hostel for the boys, and a school hall.

- **Palsonda More** witnesses practically the rebuilding of all its various structures, such as the repairs of the hostel, the school, and especially the reconstruction of the church. The demolition of the beautiful church erected by Fr. Jim Gimenez is due to the bad condition of the soil. The new church is blessed on 5th May 2002.

- On 11th August 1998 **Purnea** becomes a diocese. The new bishop, Msgr. Vincent Barwa is consecrated first bishop of the new diocese on 8th October 1998. On 15th February 1999, the Salesian parish of Purnea is given back to the diocese.

- **Salesian College, Sonada, opens to the public**. More than once in the past years a problem is mooted regarding Salesian College: should Salesian College be shifted to the plains? "No!" is the answer given in the year 1977, and the main reason for not shifting it is the need to keep it private.[15] In the late 1990s discernment is made at Salesian College on the same problem. This time the suggestion to shift SCS is prompted by the need of opening it to the public in order to increase the ever-decreasing number of students, as this may lead to disaffiliation. The result of this second discernment is again a "No!", but the College has to be opened to non-Salesians: to other Religious, and to seminarians. In July 1999 three sisters (2 FMA Sisters and 1 Holy Cross Sister) are registered as regular students. In July

[15] Cfr. Minutes of Provincial Council meeting held on 9.7.1977 and 6.10.1977, *Provincial Archives* B.8.2.2

2001 a limited number of local students, both boys and girls, are also registered as day scholars. In 2002 a computer centre is blessed for the benefit of the students and of the local people.

- **Don Bosco Siliguri** has now a beautiful functional and multipurpose Auditorium, which is blessed by Fr. Francis Alencherry on 21st March 1998.

2.3 Important Events

The years 1999, 2000 and 2001 are marked by important events, all having a powerful impact on the life of the whole Province of Kolkata, of local communities and of individual Salesians:

1999: Fourth Centenary of the Bandel Shrine[16]

A diocesan Committee, presided over by Archbishop Henry D'Souza, prepares a comprehensive plan for the worthy celebration of the historical event, and a local organizing Committee, presided over by the Prior of Bandel, Fr. Bertie Fernandes, plans out the details of the various events. A novena of pilgrimages precedes the conclusion of the celebration of the 4th centenary. Each day of the novena is reserved for a particular group: Salesians, Salesian Family, priests, Religious, Youth group language-wise, Laity, etc. The concluding celebrations on 14th November 1999 are particularly solemn.

2000: Jubilee Year 2000

This is an extraordinary church event that is celebrated at the same time in Rome and in the dioceses all over the world. The Salesian superiors invite all the Salesians to take active part in the Jubilee as it is celebrated in the local churches, but at the same time they give directives for the celebration of a Salesian Jubilee with events both at the Centre, for which they invite the Provinces to send representatives, and also events organized in the Provinces.

In the month of June 2000, the Jubilee of the Eucharist is observed. From 18th to 26th June an International Eucharistic Congresses is held in Rome. In August 2000, there is the Jubilee for Youth, with a World Youth

[16] On the occasion of the Centenary, a beautiful Brochure in published: *400 Glorious Years – Bandel Basilica 1599–1999.*

Meet on 15th August in Rome. In October 2000 there is the Jubilee of the Salesians at the Bandel Basilica. The Salesian Mission Jubilee is on 11th November in Turin (Italy). On this occasion a particularly numerous missionary expedition takes place. The Province of Kolkata sends two confreres, Bro. Robin Rai and Bro. Xalxo Eugene, to be members of the expedition. The conclusion of the Salesian Jubilee is on 8th December 2000, the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception.

2001: Platinum Jubilee of the Kolkata Province

A number of events are planned by a planning Committee presided over by Fr. Francis Alencherry, the Provincial. Already in the first meeting of the Committee the emphasis is not on big external celebrations, but on the spiritual renewal of the confreres. To this purpose all the Retreats are planned and entrusted to a team of three animators: the Provincial, the Vice-Provincial and Fr. Thomas Ellicherail. Each Renewal Retreat consists of two parts: the first 3 days are in the form of a Seminar where the basic themes of our religious and Salesian life are presented by the animators and discussed by the whole assembly of confreres leading to the formulation of a meaningful 'Vision Statement'; the last 3 days are the Retreat proper where each of the participants is encouraged to prepare his own plan of action for personal renewal to be placed on the Altar on the closing Eucharistic Celebration, together with the other gifts offered at the offertory procession.

The Jubilee celebrations take place on 10th, 11th, and 12th November 2001:

On the first day we have the Platinum Jubilee Celebrations at Bandel in which all the groups of the Salesian Family take part: in the morning, a solemn Eucharistic Celebration in the Shrine; in the afternoon, the blessing and inauguration of the new residence for the Bandel community and Retreat House; in the evening, a special programme is held with items from the various groups of the Salesian Family.

On the second day, the celebrations are held at Kolkata: in the morning, there is a Solemn Eucharist presided over by the representative of the Rector Major, Fr. Joachim D'Souza, at Auxilium parish, followed by the sharing of questions and answers with Fr. Joachim on various Salesian topics. The whole celebration of the morning is meant only for

Salesians. In the afternoon, there is the opening of an Exhibition presenting the various activities of each centre at Don Bosco Park Circus, and in the evening a programme in the DBPC Auditorium with items from various houses of the Province.

The last day is taken over by the Past Pupils: in the morning they organize a very successful panel discussion on the *Empowerment of Women*. The panellists are all distinguished personalities from West Bengal and even from outside West Bengal. In the evening, the Past Pupils organize an open-air cultural programme that closes the celebrations.

3. A Look at the Future

The growth and expansion of the big tree is a process that has to continue. But again we may ask: what will account for a vigorous and healthy growth? What will its source be? What will be the way to it?

The **source** cannot be but the same that has made possible the phenomenal growth that we have witnessed in the past 80 years: from the original small seed to the mighty tree of the Salesian Presence in India today, as the Map on the last page of this epilogue shows.

The source again is the ***Grace of God*** first and foremost, the *spreading of devotion to Mary Help of Christians,* and *dynamic fidelity to Don Bosco's spirit*, as it is beautifully enshrined in the renewed Constitutions (C. II), approved by the Church in 1984. The General Chapters that follow are only an explication and a practical application of the Constitutions to the ever-changing social situation.

His Holiness John Paul II in his apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, in a strong message to the whole Church, gives us a pressing invitation to forge ahead in our journey with enthusiasm and trust in the Lord: "*Duc in altum* – draw out in the deep for a catch." (Lk. 5:4) Peter and his first companions trusted Christ's words, and cast the nets: "When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish." (Lk. 5:6) *Duc in altum!* These words ring out for us today, and invite us to remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm and to look forward to the future with confidence: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever." (Heb. 13:8)[17]

[17] *Novo Millennio Ineunte,* 1

The Pope and the new Rector Major, very authoritatively and clearly indicate also the **way** along which we have to proceed, if we want to be faithful to Don Bosco's desire: **the Way to Holiness**.

John Paul II does it in his message to the General Chapter 25: "Don Bosco continues to be present among you. He lives on through your fidelity to the spiritual heritage that he left you. He gave to his works a special style of holiness...It is a matter not so much of taking up new activities and initiatives as of living and bearing witness to the Gospel without any compromise...*Salesians of the third millennium! May you be enthusiastic teachers and guides, saints and formers of saints as Don Bosco was.... Yours is a history filled with saints, many of them young people*...To this by no means small band of Saints and Blessed you too are called to unite yourselves, committed to following in the footsteps of Christ, source of holiness for every believer. Do so in such a way that your whole Congregation may shine out for holiness and brotherly communion."[18]

GC25 has reflected deeply on the message of the Holy Father and has given us very wise guidelines. The new Rector Major has given us a well thought-out synthesis of these guidelines in his closing message at the end of the Chapter.[19]

Again in his address to the capitulars on 12th April 2002, the Holy father calls the Salesians to the basics of their vocation when he says: "Dear Salesians, if you are constant in fidelity to your commitment, if you make every effort to impress on your work the mark of evangelical love, you will be able to fulfil your whole mission with joy and effectiveness. Be saints! As you well know, holiness is your principal task, as indeed it is for all Christians."[20]

Our new Rector Major, Fr. Pascual Chávez Villanueva, makes this message his own in his first letter of 14th December 2002, to the Congregation, titled: **"My Dear Salesians, Be Saints."**[21]

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[18] Cfr. Acts of GC 25, nos. 143–144, 118–119.
[19] Ibid. Nos. 182–198, 147–165.
[20] Ibid. Nos. 170, 140–141.
[21] Cfr. Acts of the General Council, No. 379, Oct.–Dec. 2002, 3–37.

We like to conclude this third part of the epilogue by quoting from the appeal of the Rector Major to the Salesians, in which he indicates **the way** for a bright future for the confreres of Kolkata Province and for all the Salesians in India:

"Dear Salesians, be holy!"..."Be enthusiastic teachers and guides, saints and formers of saints, as was St. John Bosco." Let us accept the Pope's summons, entrusting to these prophets of the future – who are the Saints – the period following the Chapter through which we are now living, and from which we hope to derive **a powerful thrust for a better future**, where **the primacy of God**[22] will shine in us with greater clarity and we may share with him his great concern for the world. When we consider the many great things the Lord has already done, the wonders worked in the Salesian Family, we can easily imagine what he will still do in the future, if he finds us well disposed and with an open heart."[23]

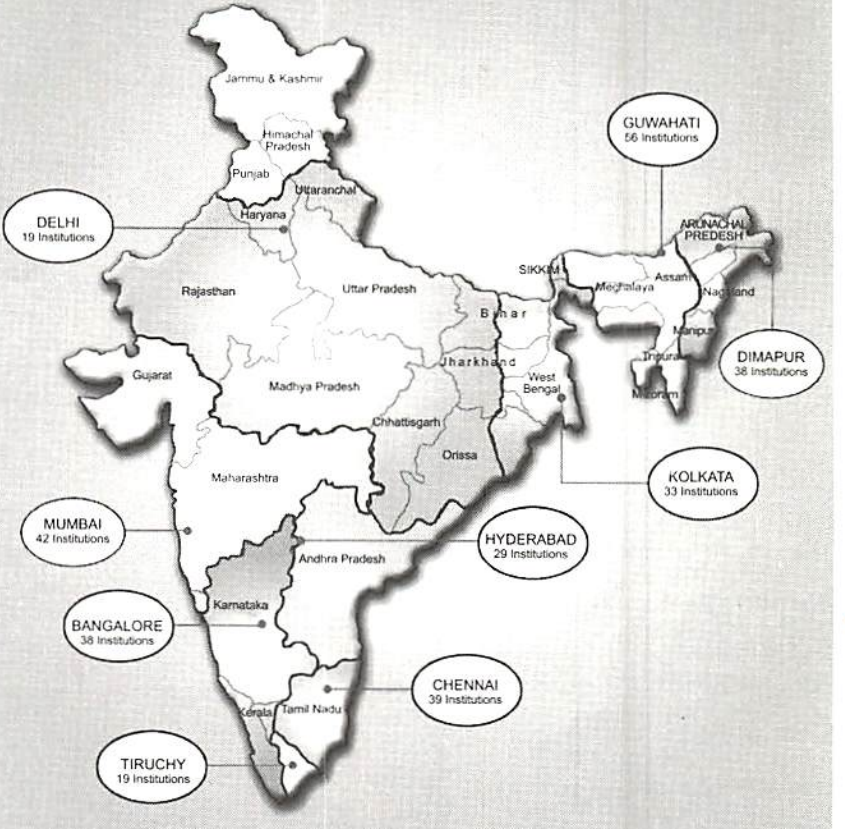


V. Rev. Fr. PASCUAL CHÁVEZ VILLANUEVA, SDB
Rector Major (2002–)

Fr. Chávez is born at Real Catorce, Northern Mexico, on 19th December 1947. He enters the Salesian Society in 1964 and is ordained a priest on 8th December 1973. An intelligent and mentally organized person, with a heart for the poor and the abandoned, he holds many responsible posts in Mexico and in the Americas. He is the ninth successor of Don Bosco. His last assignment in the Congregation is that of Regional Councillor for the Inter-American region. He has a doctorate in Biblical Theology and has been involved in the work of formation. As a superior of the Mexico-Guadalajara Province he consolidates and re-launches the Oratories on the border of his nation. He speaks Italian, English, French, German and Hebrew, and understands Greek and Latin.

[22] Our emphasis
[23] Cfr Acts of the General Council, no. 379, Oct.-Dec. 2002, 34-35.

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n *following a number indicates a note on that page number:*
*e.g.*208n *refers to a note on p.208 .*
f *and* **ff** *following a number indicate the page or pages following that number.*

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About the Book

"...Describing this book as a history with a soul does not in any way detract from its true characteristic as history. More than an evaluative or critical account of events and persons. it is a chronicler's history, which is authentic because the narrative is based on the documents available in the archives of the Province and in the different Salesian institutions. At the same time it is a dynamic history because the events that characterised the growth and expansion of the Province from its inception up to the present day and the persons responsible for them come alive in these pages and invite the reader to relive the heroic days of the past, while critically evaluating the present in which he is immersed."

– Fr. Francis Alencherry
from The Forward

About the Author:



Fr. Nicholas Lo Groi was born on 18th February 1922 at Cammarata (Agrigento, Italy). He became a Salesian of Don Bosco (S.D.B.) at San Gregorio (Catania - Italy) on 2nd September 1938. In December 1939 he came to India as a seminarian. He was ordained a priest on 3rd October 1948 at Shillong. He holds a Ph.D. in Philosophy from the Salesian Pontifical Atheneum (Turin).

As a priest Fr. Lo Groi has held very important posts in the Province of Kolkata: Rector and Principal of Salesian College, Sonada (1959-1966). Rector and Principal of Don Bosco School Park Circus, Kolkata (1967-'68). Vice Provincial (1967-'70) and then Provincial of the Kolkata Province (1973-'78). From 1970 to 1973 he was the Director of Novices at the Salesian Novitiate in Shillong. After his term as Provincial Superior he was In-charge of On-going Formation of the Salesians in India in Bangalore (1978-'81), and then once again Rector of Salesian College, Sonada, (1982-'88). Thereafter he excercised priestly ministry as Confessor at Bishop's House, Krishnagar (1989-'94) and at Sonada (1994-'99). From September 1999 he was at the Salesian Provincial House of Kolkata engaged in writing this History.