

DIMAPUR PROVINCE IN PERSPECTIVE

Papers and Documents from the Research Seminar 2004



Edited by

Jose Kuruvachira SDB

Francis Thottathimyalil SDB

R.K. Guangdiat Nicholas SDB

THE PROVINCE OF DIMAPUR: AN OVERVIEW

The Salesian province of Dimapur was created out of the erstwhile Guwahati province and canonically erected on 8 December 1981, with the then Rector Major Fr. Egidio Vigano's decree of canonical erection. The inauguration of the province, dedicated to St. Francis de Sales, was held on 18 June (Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus) 1982 with Fr. Mathew Pulingathil as the first Provincial.

Considering the views expressed by confreres, the houses and presences of Arunachal Pradesh, Upper Assam, Manipur and Nagaland were carved out of the province of Guwahati to form the new Province of Dimapur. The confreres were incardinated into the province in whose territory their house was situated. The student-confreres were invited to express a preference for either of the provinces. This was done keeping in mind the needs and requirements of each province. In 1982 the Province of Dimapur comprised of 23 houses and presences looked after by 155 confreres. It had grown to 45 houses and presences with 216 confreres in July 2005.

The province of Dimapur today covers the archdiocese of Imphal and the dioceses of Dibrugarh, Kohima, Itanagar, Miao and Tezpur.

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About the editors:

Jose Kuruvachira SDB has a doctorate in Philosophy from the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome. Currently he teaches Philosophy of religion and Indian culture at the Salesian College of Higher Education, Dimapur, Nagaland. His area of special interest is religious fundamentalism in contemporary India. He was the convenor of the research seminar 2004.

Francis Thottathimyalil SDB is a frontline missionary who has worked several years in Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur. He has Masters degrees in Theology and English Literature. He is credited with the monumental work of translating and editing many books of the Bible into Rongmei and Nyeseng (Nyishi) languages of Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh, respectively.

R.K.Guangdiat Nicholas SDB has a Masters degree in English literature and is the Principal of the Salesian College of Higher Education, Dimapur, Nagaland, affiliated to the Nagaland Central University. He is also a visiting lecturer at the Salesian College of Teacher Education, Dimapur, Nagaland.

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INTRODUCTION

From 29 June to 1 July 2004, a group of confreres of the Salesian Province of Dimapur came together for a province level research seminar at Don Bosco Provincial house, Dimapur, Nagaland. The seminar was organised as a requirement for the South Asia level research seminar to be held in 2005 in preparation for the centenary celebrations of the arrival of the first Salesians in India (1906-2006). The aim of the seminar was to reflect as a province on the mission of the Salesians of Don Bosco in South Asia in the Third Millennium.

The seminar saw the presentation of fifteen papers on different aspects of Salesian Charism, namely, evangelisation, catechesis, youth ministry, education, culture, formation, social communication, work for the marginalised youth and human development. The papers contained a mine of information about the life and activities of the confreres of the province. Hence it was keenly felt that the papers should be compiled, edited and preserved for the future as a point of reference.

A word of about the methodology that we have followed in compiling and editing the papers may be in place. As far as possible, we have tried to keep to the original language, style, content, structure and methodology of presentation followed by the authors of the various papers. This is because we wanted each author to speak to us in his own style and idiom.

After the seminar, in the light of the observations made during the discussions and by individual confreres, certain minor additions have been made to some of the papers. This was done either for providing a more comprehensive and accurate view of the topics dealt with or for rectifying certain factual errors. We are aware that there could still be errors in the material presented in this volume. Hence if the readers

are kind enough to notify them to the editors in writing, they could be rectified in the future.

Readers will notice, in some papers at least, certain 'incompleteness' in the information furnished by the authors in the notes and bibliography. Due to practical reasons it was not possible for the editors to verify each of the notes or to ask the authors to re-write the papers with correct/complete notes. Hence we have left them as we have found them in the original.

However, we have deliberately edited some papers because they, according to our judgement, contained materials that were not very relevant or 'controversial' or can hurt the feelings of some people. But those who are interested in reading the various papers of the seminar in the original can get them from the Salesian provincial archives at Dimapur. In the edited version of the papers some titles have been either changed partially or abbreviated.

The final statement had two working drafts. They are reproduced as appendices to this book. They are included as a help to trace the stages that the final statement passed through before it assumed the present form. The drafts contain several valuable insights and suggestions, some of which unfortunately, do not figure in the approved final statement.

The papers are compiled for private circulation among the various institutions and individual confreres of the province of Dimapur. Hence references to certain places, proper names and technical terms have not been given explanation as they are familiar to the confreres who live and work in the province.

Finally, we are grateful to Rev.Fr. Thomas Mulayinkal, the Provincial and his council members for their encouragement and support for the seminar, to Fr. Joseph Pampackal, the provincial economist, for meeting the expenses of both the seminar as well as the printing of this book, to Fr. Sony Pottenplackal, Fr. Mathai Kottarathil and Fr. Joseph Thuruthel for carefully going through the entire manuscript and making suggestions for improvement in language and style, and to DBYES, Dimapur, for assuming the responsibility of getting this book printed.

Jose Kuruvachira SDB
Francis Thottathimyalil SDB
R.K. Guangdiat Nicholas SDB
31 October 2004.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

Rev.Fr. Thomas Mulayinkal SDB

My dear Confreres,

It is with great joy that I welcome you to this research seminar organised by our Province in preparation for the centenary celebrations of the arrival of the Salesians in India (1906-2006). I wish all the participants a time of serious study and reflection in the coming three days.

1. Salesian missions in India as a decision of Don Bosco

The beginnings of Salesian history in India are to be traced back to the intention of Don Bosco himself. He always cherished the desire of sending his sons to India¹. Between 1870 and 1874 he received several requests for missionaries from Asia, Africa and America, and among them was also India. After the successful missionary expedition of 1875 to South America, which attracted the attention of the media, the Salesian Congregation was known far and wide, and requests for missionaries were multiplied². Towards the end of Don Bosco's life the desire to send missionaries to India grew all the more intense. Fr.E.Ceria, his biographer, writes: "For quite some time Don Bosco had cherished the thought of establishing missions in *India* and *Australia*"³. In 1876 Don Bosco wrote to Fr. Michael Rua: "missionaries are also urgently needed in *Australia*, *India* and *China*, where many mission stations are about to close for lack of personnel"⁴.

In 1876 Pope Pius IX offered to Don Bosco twelve vicariates in India, which were in urgent need of personnel. On the insistence of the Pope, Don Bosco agreed to take one of them and requested twenty months to prepare his Salesians⁵. On 31 October 1876 Don Bosco wrote to Fr. Cagliero informing him that he was thinking of sending him to India as the head of the missionary expedition⁶. On 14 January 1877 he wrote again to Fr. Cagliero: "We shall accept the vicariate apostolic of Mengador [Mangalore] in *India*, and Father Cagliero will be the vicar apostolic"⁷. On 13 February 1877 he conveyed to Fr. Cagliero the communication from the Holy See that it is offering to the Salesians the apostolic vicariate in *India* and another in Australia⁸. He then informed his Salesians to get ready to go to India.

2. Arrival of the Salesians at Tanjore (1906)

A tiny band of five Salesians and an aspirant headed by Fr. George Tomatis⁹ set sail for India from Genoa, Italy, on 17 December 1905. It was a daring venture on the part of those Salesians for they had set out for an unknown and distant land, uncertain of the outcome of their mission. The sons Don Bosco set foot in India on the shores of Bombay for the first time on 5 January 1906¹⁰. Then they travelled by train and reached Mylapore on 8 January, and Tanjore, Tamil Nadu, on 14 January¹¹.

The Salesians began their work in the orphanage of St. Francis Xavier at Tanjore with six inmates. Soon the number rose steadily till it reached 800 in 1928. The pioneers also had to take care of a parish middle school which was upgraded to a high school in 1921¹². They started a festive oratory, two 'industrial schools', one for shoe making and smithy which were later substituted by carpentry and weaving¹³. In 1909 they took up a new Orphanage (the San Thome Orphanage) at Mylapore¹⁴. The year 1910 saw the beginning of a Don Bosco Night School¹⁵. In 1915 the bishop entrusted to the Salesians the pastoral care of the parish of the Sacred Heart¹⁶. In 1924 a Don Bosco Press was set up at Tanjore¹⁷. In addition to these they conducted several village schools.

The Salesians assiduously applied themselves to the learning of the local language and fostering of local vocations¹⁸. Within a month of their arrival at Tanjore there was a local unit of the Salesian Co-operators consisting of 40 members¹⁹. They administered the first baptism on 5 June 1906²⁰. However, in 1928, both Tanjore and Mylapore missions were handed back to the diocese²¹.

Today we remember with gratitude the pioneers who laboured in India for their unparalleled missionary enthusiasm and apostolic zeal and undaunted courage. The valiant first Salesians brought Don Bosco to India and made him alive in our midst. Because of them we have become heirs of Don Bosco's charism, his missionary enthusiasm, his pedagogy, his zeal for souls and his love for the young.

The memory of the momentous event of 5 January 1906 moves us with deep sense of gratitude to God, to the Salesian Congregation and to the pioneers themselves. Therefore, it is truly commendable that Salesians of South Asia have chosen to celebrate the centenary of the historic event not only in song and dance and similar external events with fanfare and publicity, but also with a national level research seminar involving all the provinces and delegations of South Asia. Its aim is to engage in a serious self-introspection and critical reflection on the hundred years of Salesian presence and work in India and South Asia.

3. The miracle of Salesian expansion in India

In 1988, on the occasion of the first centenary of the death of Don Bosco, Fr. Egidio Vigano, the then Rector Major, described the phenomenal success of the Salesian missions in India as a miracle. He observed: "The congregation [in India] has grown so rapidly that the growth is miraculous. It is especially in India that, among all the nations of Asia, the Salesian Mission has had the greatest result"²². Today the Salesian Congregation is firmly rooted in South Asia with nine SDB provinces and three Vice-provinces, six FMA provinces, the Co-operators, Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (MSMHC), Sisters of Mary Immaculate (SMI), Visitation Sisters of Don Bosco (VSDB), the Past Pupils, and several others who constitute the Salesian Family. The phenomenal growth of the Salesian Family in South Asia still continues.

The year 2006 will be etched in our memory and in the annals of history as a time of thanksgiving for the wonders the Lord has worked in India in the past one hundred years. We witness today the rich manifestation of the Salesian charism and the abundant fruits it has borne through the tireless work of the members of the Salesian Family all over this vast sub-continent.

4. Salesian presence in the province of Dimapur

The first Salesians reached Northeast India in January 1922. Today the growth and spread of the Salesian work in Northeast has been described as a 'miracle of Mary Help of Christians' and we as a province are also beneficiaries of this 'miracle'.

The province of Dimapur came into existence on 18 June 1982 by the division of the province of Guwahati²³ exactly 60 years after the arrival of the Salesians in Northeast India, with 154 confreres in all²⁴.

Probably the earliest Salesian presence in our province is traceable to the Dibrugarh mission started by Fr. Leo Piasecki in the 1920s²⁵. In 1948 Fr. Orestes Marengo and Fr. Attilio Colussi entered Manipur, followed by Fr. Aloysius Ravalico in 1952 and Fr. Peter Bianchi in 1955²⁶. On 31 December 1948 Mgr. Emmanuel Bars arrived at Kohima, as chaplain to the Medical sisters (Sisters of the Society of Christ Jesus) but he was forbidden from exercising any pastoral ministry. In 1951 Mgr. Bars was replaced by Fr. Umberto Marocchino²⁷. Fr. John Larrea began working with the Lothas of Nagaland in 1954²⁸. The first Salesian to contact the people of Arunachal Pradesh was Fr. Aloysius Cerato while he was working in North Lakhimpur in the early 1940s²⁹. In 1974 Fr. Thomas Menampampil as Rector of Don Bosco, Shillong, was greatly responsible for the beginning of the Catholic Church in Arunachal Pradesh. However, the appointment in 1979 of Fr. Job Kallarackal to look after the Church in Arunachal Pradesh is to be considered as a landmark in the history of the Catholic Church in that State³⁰. There are also many other outstanding Salesian missionaries who have worked in our province.

From this humble beginning the name of Don Bosco has reached practically every town and village in the province. The seed of the Salesian work has germinated and flourished all over the region notwithstanding the fact that some of our confreres had to lay down their lives in the process³¹. Today we have 39 presences spread over the four States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur and Nagaland, with 221 confreres.

However, comparing with the hundred years of Salesian presence in India our province is young just 22 years old. And yet much has been accomplished during the short span of 22 years. I would even add that our growth has been phenomenal from several points of view, especially if we consider the problems and uncertainties we encounter each day, due to the peculiar political situation prevailing

in the region. But we have not been wanting in courage to experiment with novel ideas and undertake new ventures. In this we follow Don Bosco who said "In those things which are for the benefit of young people in danger or which serve to win souls for God, I push ahead even to the extent of recklessness"³². The result of our apostolic endeavours has been overwhelming, impressive and immensely beneficial to the people of our region, and we turn to God and to Mary Help of Christians in thanksgiving.

5. The seminar as an initiative for evaluation, discernment and renewal

The centennial celebrations of the arrival of the Salesians in India is a golden opportunity for us to look back at our successes and failures and to plan for the future, because every act of critical reflection is a catalyst for change. Unfortunately, some of us are not quite fond of the discipline involved in serious reflection and critical evaluation because we are too busy with our works, often to the extent of being hyperactive. Some others resist it as a useless exercise oblivious of its supreme value and importance for renewal. However, the maturity of a province and of individuals is measured, among other things, also by their ability to engage in serious and scientific reflection. The exercise will improve the qualitative strength of the province as well as that of individual confreres.

An assessment of our life and works with a degree of professional competence is part of an open and discerning mentality. Periodic exercises of this sort is a duty demanded of us by the Congregation. We are told in the *Ratio* that the society in which we live is in a continual flux. Hence we need persons with an open and critical mind, an attitude of enquiry, a willingness to learn and to face new challenges, an ability to distinguish between what is permanent and what is changeable, a penchant for dialogue and a capacity for discernment³³. Hence we would like to engage in this seminar with seriousness, objectivity and humility so that we may truly appreciate the good that has been accomplished by the province, learn from the past mistakes, and make plans for the future, and thus, as the Gospel urges us, prepare ourselves to 'let down the net for another catch'. (cfr. Jn 21,6.)

The society in Northeast India is changing rapidly and we need to be relevant to the times and be aware of the transformations in the social, cultural, economic and political milieu. In the *Constitutions*

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we read: "Sensitive to the signs of the times and with initiative and continual flexibility we evaluate these activities, renew them and create new ones"³⁴. Hence the research seminar, which we commence today is essentially an initiative for an exercise in serious self-introspection and critical analysis of our apostolate and way of life and the impact they have on the peoples and cultures of the region.

I have noted that the organisers of the seminar have made sure that the exercise we do in these days touches all the important aspects of our Salesian life and activity, such as, evangelisation, catechesis, youth ministry, education, culture, formation, social communication, work for the marginalized youth, works for human development, policies of expansion of the Salesian works and so on. This seminar can therefore, serve as an occasion for the province to evaluate and redefine its life and mission. It can be, as the *Ratio* reminds us, a moment of discernment, renewal of methodology, a guide for animators and an impetus to foster commitment in order to improve the quality of our work³⁵.

Conclusion

I thank all of you in anticipation for your valuable service to the province through your study and reflection. I am grateful to the Provincial Council members for their participation in the seminar. I thank the convenor of the seminar Fr. Jose Kuruvachira, the co-ordinating committee and all those who have worked hard to prepare the various papers on the different topics. I understand that preparing for this seminar meant for you a lot of additional work. I gratefully acknowledge and place on record your hard work and interest in studying matters that contribute to the good of the province and its mission.

I am sure, this seminar will make some concrete suggestions for the better animation of the province and improvement in the quality of Salesian life and works. The Provincial with his Council will carefully study the recommendations which will emerge in the course of this seminar and try to implement, within our possibilities, whatever can be of help for the benefit of the province and of the individual confreres.

I implore the assistance of the Holy Spirit, of Mary Help of Christians and of St. John Bosco upon each one of us, and I place this seminar under their guidance.

With these words, I am happy to inaugurate this research Seminar of the Salesian Province of St. Francis de Sales, Dimapur, 2004.

Fr. Thomas Mulayinkal SDB
(Salesian Provincial)

NOTES

1. Don Bosco used to say: "what a wonderful day that will be when our missionaries will go to evangelise the various regions of America, Australia, *India*, Egypt and many other lands!". *The Biographical Memoirs*, XI, New Rochelle, 1964, 384 (Emphasis added).
2. Don Bosco wrote to Fr. Rua in 1876: "As for the opening of new houses, we have many requests from Argentina, Australia, Uruguay, Paraguay, China, *India*, the South Sea Islands and very many other places" *The Biographical Memoirs*, XII 58. (Emphasis added).
3. *The Biographical Memoirs*, XII, New Rochelle, 1980, 4. (Emphasis added).
4. *The Biographical Memoirs*, XII, 137. (Emphasis added).
5. Cfr., *The Biographical Memoirs*, XII, 161.
6. Don Bosco wrote to Fr. Cagliero: "I really feel you must return to Europe in 1877 and then take a trip to Ceylon in *India* to open another very important mission. That place needs a Castelnuovo boy". *Biographical Memoirs*, XII, 223. (Emphasis added).
7. *The Biographical Memoirs*, XIII, 19. (Emphasis added).
8. Cfr. *The Biographical Memoirs*, XIII, New Rochelle, 1983, 123. (Emphasis added).
9. The others were: Fr. Ernest Vigneron, Fr. Richard Biebuyck, Cl. Maria Belestria, Coad. John Rostagno and Adrian Rovetto (aspirant). Cfr. M. Kapplikunnel, *Their Life for Youth*, Bangalore, 1989, 16.
10. The coming of the Salesians to India was the result of a long correspondence between the diocese of Mylapore and Don Michael Rua, the then Rector Major of the Salesians. The contract was signed by Don Bosco who used to say: "what a wonderful day that will be when our missionaries will go to evangelise the various regions of America, Australia, *India*, Egypt and many other lands!". *The Biographical Memoirs*, XI, New Rochelle, 1964, 384

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- (Emphasis added). The contract was signed by Rt.Rev.Teotonio Ribeiro Vieira de Castro and Don Rua on 19 December 1904 at Trurin during the *Ad Limina* visit of the bishop. Cfr. M.Kaplikunnel, *Their Life for Youth*, 12-15.
11. Cfr. M.Kaplikunnel, *Their Life for Youth*, 16.
 12. Cfr. M.Kaplikunnel, *Their Life for Youth*, 17, 25.
 13. Cfr. M.Kaplikunnel, *Their Life for Youth*, 17, 26.
 14. Cfr. M.Kaplikunnel, *Their Life for Youth*, 34-35.
 15. Cfr. M.Kaplikunnel, *Their Life for Youth*, 41. It was started by Fr. Eugene Mederlet who substituted. Fr. Ernest Vigneron who died in 1907. Cfr. *Ibid.*, 19-20.
 16. Cfr. M.Kaplikunnel, *Their Life for Youth*, 44.
 17. Cfr. M.Kaplikunnel, *Their Life for Youth*, 34.
 18. The first Indian boy to be selected by the Salesians was Karunai. He was sent to Italy in 1907 as an aspirant. Later he went to Portugal for his novitiate. Unfortunately he fell ill and died in 1909. In 1908 Ignatius Muthu and Arulsamy were sent to Italy. They made their profession in 1911. Cfr. "Don Bosco in India", in *Don Bosco Centenary Souvenir 1888-1988*, Madras, 1989, 25.
 19. In February 1906 Fr.Tomatis sent to Don Rua a first list of 40 Salesian Co-operators. Cfr. M.Kaplikunnel, *Their Life for Youth*, 17.
 20. The candidate was one of the inmates of the orphanage, a boy of about 12 years. Cfr. M.Kaplikunnel, *Their Life for Youth*, 17.
 21. From 1906-1912 the Salesians in India were part of the Province of Portugal. From 1912-1922 they were under the care of the Roman Province of St. Peter. In 1923 they were formed into a *Visitatoria* with Mgr. Louis Mathias as superior. Cfr. "Don Bosco in India", in *Don Bosco Centenary Souvenir 1888-1988*, 25.
 22. Message of the Rector Major Egidio Vigano dated 30 November 1987 in *Don Bosco Centenary Souvenir 1888-1988*, 8.
 23. The decree of the erection of the province is dated 8 December 1981. The province was consecrated and dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus on 18 June 1982. Cfr. DMP/CIR/1/82.
 24. Cfr. T.Vattoth, "Brief History of Dimapur Province", in *Don Bosco Centenary Souvenir 1888-1988*, 110.
 25. Cfr. "In Tribute to their Sacrifice", in *Don Bosco Centenary Souvenir 1888-1988*, 108.
 26. Cfr. *A Chronicled History of the Houses of the Province of St. Francis de Sales*, Dimapur, J.Mattappally (compiler and editor), Dimapur, 2000, 178-180 (Henceforth *A Chronicled*

- History*). However the first Salesian missionary to set foot in Manipur was Fr. Leo Piasecki who used to visit an Irish family in Imphal. Records tell us that in February 1952 Fr. Umberto Marocchino from the Kohima mission made a visit to Hundung, Manipur. Cfr. *Ibid.*, 177, 179.
27. Cfr. *A Chronicled History*, 114-115.
 28. Cfr. *A Chronicled History*, 165.
 29. Cfr. *A Chronicled History*, 262. Being an Italian Fr. Cerato could not enter Arunachal Pradesh. However, on 1 June 1963 he baptised the first three Arunachalis in the parish Church at Lakhimpur. All the three belonged to the Apathani tribe and hailed from the same village of Mudang Tage. Their names are: William Tatum Tage, Joseph Muda Tage and Athanasius Taju Tage. Cfr. *Ibid.*
 30. Cfr. *A Chronicled History*, 265, 267. In a letter dated 1 August 1979 Fr. Job Kallarackal was officially appointed as the first parish priest of East Arunachal Pradesh which comes under the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Dibrugarh. Cfr. *Ibid.*, 268.
 31. We recall here Fr. Jose Nedumattathil (35 years), Fr. Raphael Paliakara (46 years), Fr. Andreas Kindo (32 years) and Bro. Shinu Joseph Valliparambil (23 years), all of whom were shot dead by some evil elements of society. But we consider them as our 'martyrs' who have given their lives for the Church in Northeast India.
 32. Quoted in the *Constitutions and Regulations*, Rome 1984, 19 (Henceforth *Constitutions*).
 33. Cfr. *Formation of Salesians of Don Bosco: Principles and Norms*, Rome 200, 3.3.1, p.100. (Henceforth *FSDB*)
 34. *Constitutions*, 41.
 35. Cfr. *FSDB*, 546, p.321.

Chapter 1

SALESIAN PROVINCE OF DIMAPUR: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE (With an overview of the socio-politico- economic scenario)

Sebastian Jose Aerimattathil, SDB

Introduction

In this paper I would like to present a brief historical resume of the Salesian Province of Dimapur with an overview of some aspects of the socio-politico-economic scenario of our province, comprising the States of Arunachal Pradesh, (Upper) Assam, Manipur and Nagaland. For the resource material I have relied mainly on the following: provincial archives, extraordinary visitation reports, province strategic plan 2001 and the Provincial Chapter documents. I am aware that my research is not exhaustive, and there could be inaccuracies and omissions. Hence I am subject to correction.

1. Physiognomy of Northeast India

Northeast India, comprising seven states of the Republic of India, has an area of 2,55,168 sq.kms accounts for 7.76% of the total area of the country. The region has a population of 38.4 million (2001) and claims 3.74% of the Indian subcontinent. The region is located between 22 N. Lat. and 29.5 N. Lat. and 89.7 E. Long. and 97.3 E. Long. It is surrounded by four countries, viz. Bhutan, Bangladesh, China and Myanmar. The strategic importance of the region can be

seen from the fact that the region has about 5,000 kms of international boundary. With Bangladesh, it has a common boundary of about 1,160 kms, with Bhutan about 600 kms, with China about 1,200 kms and with Myanmar about 2,000 kms. The Northeast may be called a miniature India as it encases many groups of peoples having different racial, social and cultural backgrounds that immigrated from different directions and finally settled down here¹.

1. 2 The State of Nagaland

Nagaland lies approximately between 25.6 N and 27.4 N Latitude and between 93.20 E and 95.15 E Longitudes situated in the extreme Northeast of the country. Nagaland is bounded by Arunachal Pradesh in the North, Assam in the west, Manipur in the South and Myanmar in the East. Kohima is the capital of Nagaland. There are 16 principal tribes and many sub-tribes. They are collectively known as 'Nagas'. They have numerous linguistic and dialectic variations that are different from one another. The state has a picturesque landscape, with crimson sunrise and sunsets, lush and verdant flora and fauna. Nagaland is a strip of hilly terrain with kaleidoscope landscape of green hills, meandering streams and rivers that skirt the mountains and cascading gorges. Many people from other states of India have also come and settled down here over the years.

1. 3 Location of the provincial headquarters: Dimapur

Dimapur is a big town and the commercial hub of the state of Nagaland. It is situated at the boarder of Nagaland and Assam. Golaghat town in Assam and Kohima, the Capital town are equidistant from Dimapur. This town is easily accessible by road, rail and air from Guwahati, the gateway to the Northeast. The Salesian provincial house is situated barely one km out of town².

2. Creation of Dimapur Province

Expansion comes with division. 8th August 1981 is a date to remember, as it was on this day that Fr. Thomas Panakezham, the then Regional Counsellor for Asia announced the division of the province of Guwahati. The province of Dimapur was bifurcated from the erstwhile Guwahati Province and canonically erected on 8th

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December 1981 with the Rector Major Fr. Egidio Vigano's decree of canonical erection³. The inauguration of the Province dedicated to St. Francis de Sales, was held on 18th June (Feast of the Sacred Heart) 1982 with Fr. Pulingathil Mathew as the first provincial. Bishop. Alangimattathil Abraham of Kohima diocese presided over the inaugural ceremony. This gave a fillip to Salesian activity in this Northeastern part of our vast country. Considering the views expressed by confreres, the houses of Upper Assam (in the districts of Dibrugarh, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sibsagar, Tinsukia, Jorhat and Golaghat), Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh were carved out from the Province of Guwahati to form the new province of Dimapur. The confreres were incardinated into the province in whose territory the house was situated. The student-confreres were invited to express a preference for either of the Province. This was done keeping in mind the needs and requirements of each province. It was decided that the formation houses of the Salesians in Shillong, though belonging to the province of Guwahati, would continue serving both the provinces. On 15 February 1982 Fr. Nedumala Scaria was nominated vice-provincial and Fr. Vadakethannikal Sebastian as the economer. The provincial counsellors were Fr. Kerketta Stanilaus and Bro. Brhamakulam Anthony. The province of Dimapur had 23 houses (centres) and 155 confreres in 1982. The province has grown to 39 houses with 221 confreres as on March 2004.

The province of Dimapur covers the dioceses of Dibrugarh and Tezpur in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, Kohima in Nagaland and the Archdiocese of Imphal in Manipur.

3. Formation houses

The province has the basic infrastructure for initial formation of its personnel, namely, apostolic schools, pre-novitiate, novitiate and post-novitiate.

3.1 The inter-provincial studentate of philosophy

The inter-provincial studentate of Philosophy was opened on 25th May 1982⁴ in Good Shepherd Seminary for a period of two years. Bishop Alangimattathil Abraham presided over the inaugural ceremony in the presence of Fr. Kochuparambil Mathai provincial of Guwahati, and Fr. Pulingathil Mathew provincial of Dimapur. Fr. Mulayinkal Thomas was appointed the first Rector with Fr.

Aclevanthara Sebastian as the Dean of Studies, Fr. Kaduthodil Abraham as the administrator, Bro. Kallikaden Cyprien and Bro. Kottarathil Mathai as assistants. The Salesian Community shifted from Good Shepherd Seminary to the present site on 24th March 1984.

3.2 The novitiate

The Salesian novitiate at Ngarian in Imphal was opened on 31st March 1988⁵ with Fr. Palathingal Varghese as the novice master, Fr. Thekeparambil Sebastian as the administrator and Fr. Kerketta Jonas as the socius. Since May 2003 the novitiate house is at Zubza (Sechü), Nagaland⁶.

3.3 The pre-novitiate house

The pre-novitiate House at Baghchung in Jorhat was opened on 10th May 1986⁷ with Fr. Chittissery Joseph as Rector and Fr. Paliakara Raphael as counsellor cum administrator. It was christened 'Rua Home' in 1985 when the pre-novices from Salesian College came to stay at Don Bosco, Golaghat.

3.4 Apostolic schools

The province has 2 apostolic schools: one at Dibrugarh, mainly for the boys of the plains (Adivasis) and the other at Zubza⁸, for the boys of the hills (Nagas, Manipuris, etc.). The community at Dibrugarh comprises of 7 confreres (5 priests and 2 practical trainees), and 72 apostolic school students from Cl. V to Cl. X. Savio Home, the apostolic school at Zubza, has 45 apostolic boys from cl. VIII to X.

In both the apostolic schools the number of boys who opt for the Salesian life is good but the rate of perseverance is rather low.

4. Organs of animation

The provincial and his council is assisted by several commissions and delegates in governing the province. Given below are the organs of animation.

4.1 Youth pastoral

The youth pastoral commission is made up of a delegate and 4 co-ordinators, each in charge of one of the 4 dimensions of education and

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culture, evangelisation and catechesis, groups and movements and vocational guidance, with a sub-commission for indigenous cultures and another for youth at risk. In most houses the EPP has been drawn up, thanks to the hard work of the vice-provincial assisted by the youth pastoral delegate.

4.2 Education and culture

The sub-commission of education and culture, comprising the co-ordinator and representatives of the headmasters and principals of high schools and colleges as well as of non-formal technical centres, visualises its scope as: "to make a difference in the fields of education and culture, helping the young towards integral human, social and spiritual maturity in the building up of a more just and humane society". It is primarily concerned with schools and colleges, for which it convokes an annual meeting of headmasters and principals, sees to the selection of text books for our schools, and the setting up of common question papers. It proposes the fee and salary structure for the teaching and non-teaching staff and the modifications to the service rules (once in 6 years). It helps the schools to keep proper records, to introduce a policy of financial assistance and coaching facilities for poor students and dropouts, and to organise Teacher Orientation programmes.

4.3 Evangelisation and catechesis

The sub-commission for evangelisation and catechesis aims at awakening, nourishing and deepening the faith of the people and of the young through the publication of booklets, leaflets and charts for catechetical use in English and the vernacular languages. It also produces some audio and videocassettes and CDs on religious themes for distribution among the people. It engages in various training programmes, mainly for catechists and young people.

4.4 Groups and movements

The Director of DBYES together with his staff handles the Dimension of Groups and Movements. The Don Bosco Youth and Educational Services (DBYES) conducts programmes for students, scouts and guides, youth leaders and youth in general, teachers and Salesians in formation. They have chalked out an ambitious Action Plan 2002-2004 which consists of the following: to be creative and

daring in reaching out to young people, especially those at risk; to offer to young people skills, opportunities and choices to improve the quality of their lives and to minister to their peers; to inspire and enthuse young people to be persons of integrity and vision, competent and committed to building up a more just and humane society; to play a networking and leadership role in the region, in providing resources and expertise in the field of youth and youth ministry.

4.5 Vocation orientation

The sub-commission of vocation orientation comprises the vocation promoters, the rectors of the apostolic schools of Dibrugarh and Zubza and of the aspirantate of Jorhat, and a few selected parish priests and a Salesian brother. It has 2 full-time vocation promoters, one for the hills and the other for the plains. They conduct vocation camps twice a year in October and January for candidates in various classes, sent by the rectors and parish priests. In addition, they visit the families of the boys, keep correspondence with them, meet the parish priests or headmasters of schools and give talks in their parishes or schools.

4.6 Commission for the promotion of indigenous cultures

This sub-commission is of recent origin. It aims at the promotion of the many indigenous cultures in the 4 States within the territory of the province, and helps the province to integrate itself into the cultures of the local people. It has the following goals: to grow in empathetic awareness of the culture of the people among whom we work, being sensitive to their feelings, to integrate ourselves into the cultures of the local people; to build up a 'local' Salesian province, which identifies itself with the people, to help the growth of various cultures, and to preserve anything that is good and noble in them; to promote ethnic harmony; to help tribes move towards a healthy balance between self-affirmation and openness to other cultures through the assimilation of values.

The commission intends to pursue the above goals through publications of research, studies in culture, audio and video productions of dances, songs and cultural programmes, celebrations of a cultural and para-liturgical nature for various festivals integrating elements from that culture, meetings and seminars,

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training programmes and study sessions for groups from different tribes, preserving folk tales and traditional music, and gradually developing a cultural encyclopaedia of the Northeast, beginning with 'thumb-nail' sketches of each tribe.

4.7 Agency for Integral Development Action (AIDA)

ANMA Integrated Development Association (AIDA) is the human and social development department of the Salesians of Don Bosco, Dimapur Province. AIDA was established in 1985 through the enthusiasm and social concern of three young Salesians with postgraduate training in social work (MSW) Bimal Lakra, Mathew Thypodoth and George Palamattam, under the guidance of Fr. V. J. Sebastian who was the then provincial economist. The erstwhile ANMA Integrated Development Association is now called Agency for Integral Development Action (AIDA)

AIDA is committed to the integral development of the weaker and marginalized sections of society, especially the tribal peoples and among them youth, women and children in the Northeastern states of Upper Assam, Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh through formal and non-formal education, capacity building, linkages and socio-economic empowerment of communities.

5. The Salesian family

The Salesian family has a council made up of delegates from each group, with the SDB delegate as the head. It organises the Salesian family day.

Name	Houses/ Units	Members	Working jointly	No. of persons
SDB	39	216		
FMA	11	53	8	25
MSMHC	28	150	6	39
SMI	2	9	1	4
Cooperators	6	50 + 20 (aspirants)	6	70
Past-pupils	4+8	Not available		N. A.

The following constituents of the Salesian family are present in the territory of the province of Dimapur: SDB, FMA, MSMHC, SMI, Disciples of Don Bosco⁹, the Salesian Co-operators and the Past-pupils.

Of the 39 Salesian presences in the province¹⁰, SDB and FMA work together on the same missionary project in 10 centres; SDB and MSMHC in 9 centres; and SDB and SMI in 1 centre. There are Co-operators in 6 centres.

At the provincial level the Salesian family day is celebrated on the last Sunday of May. It is a full day programme, well attended and participated in. It has proved to be very useful in building up the Salesian family. At the local level the Salesian family day is usually celebrated on the feast of Don Bosco or on any another appropriate day.

5.1 Salesian co-operators

In the province we have six centres where co-operators' units are operating. They are the following:

Centre	Members with Promise	Aspirants	Total
Imphal	10	-	10
Dimapur	10	02	12
Mao	13	05	18
Tamenglong	06	03	09
Kohima	11	-	11
Borduria	-	10	10
Total: 6 Centres	50	20	70

The first centre of the Salesian Co-operators was started in the Province at Imphal in 1988, in connection with the DB88 celebrations. At present there are 5 established centres, One centre is being set up at Borduria. Wokha and Tinsukia are exploring the possibility of starting units. All the centres are attached to the Salesian community.

The Salesian Co-operators are active in a number of fields such as youth apostolate, education, pastoral works, catechetical and family apostolate and evangelisation.

5.2 Don Bosco past-pupils

The Province has a provincial federation of past pupils. There are 12 units of the Don Bosco past pupils, of which 8 have not yet been formally set up with the election of the office bearers. The first meeting of the past-pupils of Arunachal Pradesh was held in Itanagar in May 2001. Some schools have started maintaining past-pupils' registers and holding meetings. Efforts are on to enroll the outgoing students in the past-pupils' federation with proper registration. All schools have been asked to start or to maintain the register of past-pupils with effect from 2003.

6. Social communication

The commission for social communication, made up of the delegate, 4 Salesians and 1 lay person, aims to help Salesians and lay people through media-related programmes to cultivate the right attitude to, and the wise use of the media, and thus to gradually evangelise the media culture. Its activities consist of formation / training in Media Awareness Programmes (MAP) and other media-related training sessions, publishes and diffuses the province Newsletter, *Dimapur Links*. It also takes care of the publication and marketing of audio-cassettes, home video films, telefilms and books, either alone or in collaboration with other agencies.

7. Missionary animation

As a province that is missionary by nature, missionary animation assumes a significant role to enkindle and keep alive in the confreres, especially in the younger ones, the desire to spread the Gospel in areas not yet touched by the Good News of Jesus Christ. On the one hand, the people are most eager and receptive to the Catholic faith, on the other hand, the isolation of the people, the remoteness and inaccessibility of their habitat, the multiplicity of dialects, the difficulty of communication and travel and the political insurgency make the missionary enterprise rather difficult.

8. An overview of the Northeastern socio-political scenario¹¹

Being sensitive to the realities of one's surrounding is a precondition for the relevance and effectiveness of any organisation. Involved as we are in the shaping and moulding of lives, we cannot ignore or be blind to what happens in the larger society of which we are part. If we ignore them, our own very existence is at risk. The following factors may be said to characterize the Northeastern region today.

8.1 Society/societies in transition

The global changes that are at an accelerated pace today have rudely shaken the communities in the region from their slumber. We may not be competent to assess the nature and process of change within communities that were so far more or less insular. But as may be expected the impact has been tremendous.

8.2 Breakdown in social/community systems, values and attitudes

"Old value systems are crumbling. Alienation is in this era of rapid social change," says Dr. Md. Muslih-ud-Din, an educationist, while speaking of Northeast India. When systems in place crumble all too quickly and are perceived as obsolete, the elders withdraw not knowing their role and the young grow up without direction and anchor. The result is, as some psychiatrists in the region say, the emergence of "my world is me" syndrome, to the extent of "doing what you want", without actually thinking about it. There are no role models and nothing is sacred - not even parents.

8.3 Perception of affluence and glamour as key indicators of development

With little or no thought given to values and change in mindsets many perceive of affluence and glamour as key indicators of development. The opportunity available for corruption in the system, the administration of development process by the rigid and "statistics oriented" government, and the lack of awareness and consequential exploitation of the masses have contributed to this.

8.4 Identity crisis

The identity crisis experienced by every community and especially by the young people in the wake of all the changes that are taking place in every field and amidst the confusion of nationalistic movements mushrooming in the region is quite perceptible.

8.5 Cultural uprootedness

It accentuates the problem of identity crisis. It must be said that the changes in the ways of living and thinking brought about by Christianity, modern education, the economic and political systems have added to the cultural upheavals in the region.

8.6 Rapid urbanisation

Towns and cities hold the promises and dreams (and thrills) placed before the young by the media, by education, and by the adults.

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Nothing happens in the rural area; it is boring humdrum life out there. With little or no guidance the rural young pushed into the cities fall prey to influences and unscrupulous elements; the dreams of many crash

8. 7 Communities in conflict

The Northeast has had more than its share of conflicts and consequent violence. We have seen it, we have suffered it. The conflicts that we are all familiar with are:

- a. Insurgency¹², militancy, secessionism
- b. Clannism, tribalism, factionalism
- c. Denominational rivalry - discrimination

Entire generation has been brought up in this poisoned air of conflict and violence. The emotional and psychological trauma they undergo is seldom taken note of. The social, economic and political complexities of the problem make good-willed people feel helpless or cynical. The distortion of values in society is very evident.

8. 8 A young generation that is deeply frustrated

The social transitions and the conflicting situations together have produced a generation that is deeply frustrated. A sample study of 600 young people (15-25 years) was done by the National Institute of Advanced Studies and its findings are startling. In depth interviews with these members of the 'generation next' "found them entangled in a web of frustration, anger, withdrawal and escapism. Half of them felt that people were justified in resorting to violence when there were no other way to make the government listen. One third were willing to take to the gun to be heard and a fourth felt bloodshed was inevitable if the miserable conditions of the have-nots were not to change for the better." Often the anger gets channelised into crime. Police officials say that there is sharp rise in thefts and burglary committed by middle class and lower middle class youth today.

There are two main groups that are most susceptible to frustration:

8.8.1 Educated, but not skilled, not guided, and not employed group

There are many educated, but not skilled, not guided and not employed persons who do not know what to do. They are often wooed

by the many militant groups. Often they are a burden to their families and let down by a system that fanned their ambition and a shame to themselves.

8.8.2 Dropouts

There are many skill-less, jobless, misfits. They are ashamed to work on the land, and are despised by many. They form good material for anti-social elements and militant groups.

Dropout rates in class 1 to class 8 for the year 1999-2000 (Min. of HRD Annual Report 2000-2001)

Assam:	69.81%
Arunachal Pradesh:	64.92%
Manipur:	43.08%
Nagaland:	40.27%

8.9 High incidence of unemployment fuels this frustration

It is estimated that educated unemployment is 40% in Nagaland.

In Assam there are 1.5 million registered unemployed; unregistered ones may be many more. We are sitting on an angry volcano.

8.10 Breakdown of social and personal discipline

Instruments of social control have become more or less defunct. Parents have not stepped in where the village/community was once effective. Schools/churches have not filled in for the training of the young as powerfully and significantly as the institutions that have disappeared. There is a continuum of over indulgence of the child and unbridled freedom thereafter. Discipline disappears from personal and social life.

8.11 All pervading insecurity

The people of the region, at least majority of them, look confident and secure. But scratch the surface and one is confronted by fear and insecurity. These are camouflaged with an apparent air of aggressive self-confidence. There is economic insecurity, very few opportunities, little infrastructural development, consumer

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mentality. Cultural insecurity: identity crisis, fear of being over run by 'outsiders', influx from across the border, changing demographic maps, loss of cultural roots, not being able to appreciate differences and dissent. Social insecurity: communities not trusting each other, all-pervading sense of directionlessness. Political insecurity: Frequent change in governments and alliances, fight for sovereignty, insurgent and counter insurgent operations. All these affect the individual and the community, gnawing away at their creative and constructive energies.

8. 12 Emergence of a class system

The society is getting more and more polarized, a fact that is seldom openly admitted. Distinctions between the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated, the influential and those without influence, the powerful and the powerless are becoming more and more glaring. The rich become richer. The educated place themselves in positions of power to exploit the ignorance of the uneducated and loot them mercilessly and shamelessly. The powerful and the elite gang up against those who are powerless.

8. 13 Breakdown of governance

Opportunism, corruption and partisan policies have become the rule of the day. There is no government in the region, with the exception of perhaps Mizoram that can boast of some governance. Ordinary person can expect nothing from the government. Accountability, transparency and responsibility, which are the watchwords of democracy, have become exceptions today. There is a total breakdown of governance in the region. Indifference and cynicism rules. Militancy thrives in such atmosphere.

Conclusion

Today the province of Dimapur is 22 years old. In this short span of time it has rendered yeoman service to the Church in Northeast India, especially in the field of evangelisation, education and catechesis. In spite of the fact of this province being probably one of the most difficult mission areas in the Salesian world, it has courageously pioneered many novel projects like higher education,

human development, care of marginalised youth, etc. We acknowledge with humble gratitude, the dedicated work and many sacrifices of our pioneers in circumstances extremely difficult and challenging. We remember with love all those responsible for the animation and governance of the province from its very inception. Above all we thank God Almighty and Mary Help of Christians together with Don Bosco for their constant benevolent intercession. We have reason to be happy today because there are promising youngsters joining us to carry on what our predecessors have so marvellously initiated. May God continue to bless our Province.

Appendix 1. Canonically erected Houses in the Province

1. Don Bosco Imphal: Patron St. Dominic Savio
Canonical erection: Prot. N. 101/60 on 3 May 1960.
2. Don Bosco Kohima: Patron St. John Bosco
Canonical erection: Prot. N. 158/73 on 14 April 1973.
3. Don Bosco Provincial House Dimapur: Patron St. John Bosco
Canonical erection: Prot. N. 204/82 on 2 July 1982.
4. Salesian College Dimapur: Patron Sacred Heart of Jesus
Canonical erection: Prot. N. 205/82 on 2 July 1982.
5. Don Bosco Doom Dooma: Patron St. Joseph
Canonical erection: Prot. N. 206/82 on 2 July 1982.
6. Don Bosco Tamenglong: Patron Bl. Michael Rua
Canonical erection: Prot. N. 207/82 on 2 July 1982.
7. Don Bosco Wokha: Patron St. Paul
Canonical erection: Prot. N. 208/82 on 2 July 1982.
8. Rua Home Jorhat: Patron Bl. Michael Rua
Canonical erection: Prot. N. 145/86 on 5 June 1986.
9. Don Bosco Dibrugarh: Patroness Mary Help of Christians
Canonical erection: Prot. N. 863/1960 in April 1960.

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10. Don Bosco School Maram: Patron St. John Bosco
Canonical erection: Prot N. 307/88 on 14 December 1988.
11. Bosco Bible School Tinsukia: Patron St. John Bosco
Canonical erection: Prot. N. 308/88 on 14 December 1988.
12. Don Bosco School Dimapur: Patron St. John Bosco
Canonical erection: Prot. N. 296/91 on 15 November 1991.
13. Don Bosco Khoupum Valley: Patron St. John Bosco
Canonical erection: Prot. N. 186/97 on 23 July 1997.
14. Savio Home Zubza: Patron St. Dominic Savio
Canonical erection: Prot. N. 187/97 on 23 July 1997.
15. St. Xavier's Harmutty: Patron St. Francis Xavier
Canonical erection: Prot. N. 193/97 on 25 July 1997.
16. Don Bosco Borduria: Patroness Mary Help of Christians
Canonical erection: Prot. N. 015/2001.
17. Don Bosco Hanguathong, Arunachal: Patron St. John Bosco
Canonical erection: Prot. N. 016/2001.
18. Don Bosco Palin: Patroness Our Lady of the Rosary
Canonical erection: Prot. N. 017/2001 on 17 January 2001.
19. Emmaus Novitiate Zubza: Patron Sacred Heart of Jesus
Canonical erection: Prot. N. 0435/03 on 21 April 2003.
20. Don Bosco Golaghat: Patroness St. Theresa of the Child
Jesus: Canonical erection: 1954?
21. Don Bosco Punanamai (Mao): Patroness Mary Help of
Christians: Canonical erection: 1979?
22. Don Bosco College, Maram: Patron St. John Bosco
Canonical erection: Prot. N. 100/2004 on 5 April 2004.
23. Catholic Church, Tinsukia: Patron St. John Bosco
Canonical erection: Prot. N. 084/2004 on 19 June 2004

Other Centres/presences

24. Don Bosco School, Dergaon, Assam
25. Don Bosco School, Langjing, Manipur
26. Don Bosco Itanagar
27. St. Vincent's School, Jagun, Assam
28. Christ King School, Kohima, Nagaland
29. Don Bosco Hostel, Science College, Kohima
30. Don Bosco Centre, Mintong, Arunachal Pradesh
31. Don Bosco School, Mon, Nagaland
32. St. Joseph's School, Rajanagar, Arunachal Pradesh
33. St. Thomas' School, Sadiya, Assam
34. St. Joseph's School, Shajouba, Manipur
35. Catholic Church, Tongna, Assam
36. Don Bosco School, Tuli, Nagaland
37. Catholic Church, Yachuli, Arunachal Pradesh
38. Bishop's house, Dibrugarh, Assam.
39. Ravalico Hostel, Imphal, Manipur.

Appendix 2. Houses closed/returned to the Dioceses

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Awangkhum, Manipur | - Returned to the diocese |
| 2. Senapati, Manipur | - Returned to the diocese on 31 December 1999. |
| 3. Ngarian Novitiate, Manipur | - Closed in May 2001 |
| 4. C.P.C, Kohima | - Returned to the diocese |
| 5. St. Mary's, Margherita | - Returned to the diocese in March 2004 |
| 6. Akhuluto/Atoise/Sataka | - Closed |
| 7. St. Joseph's Seminary, Dibrugarh- | Returned to the diocese |

Appendix 3. Our Numerical Strength as on March 2004

PRIESTS	BROTHERS		CLERICS				NOVICES	Total Confreres
	Perp.	Temp.	Phil.	P.T.	Std.	Theo.		
142	6	3	23	25	11	11	08	
142	09		70				08	221

221 + 3 in special situation - Grand Total = 224

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Appendix 4. Salesian Province of Dimapur General Statistics

Sl. No	Category	Assam	E. Arun	W. Arun	Nagaland	Manipur	Total	%
1	Houses/presences	11	05	05	10	07	38	
2	Parish/M.Centres	08	03	04	04	05	24	
3	No. of Catholics	38,230	31,470	45,000	7956	16913	139,569	
4	Schools	10	09	04	07	07	37	
5	Primary	01	04	03	00	00	07	
6	High School	09	01	02	07	07	26	
7	Hr. Sec. School	---	---	---	03	02	05	
8	Total Students	8458	1429	2909	9124	8529	30449	
9	Catholic Students	855	972	1107	1584	2967	7485	24.58
10	Colleges	---	---	01	02	01	04	
11	Total Students	---	---	33	219	503	755	
12	Catholic Students	---	---	02	180	205	387	51.25
13	Youth Centres	00	01	00	02	00	03	
14	Apostolic Schools	01	00	00	01	00	02	
15	Non-formal	01	00	00	00	01	02	
16	Hostel/Boarding	10	03	04	06	08	31	
17	Aspirantate	01	---	---	---	---	01	
18	Animation Centre	---	---	---	01	---	01	
19	Cano. Erected Hs	06	02	01	07	05	21	
20	Novitiate				01		01	
21	Junior College	01	---	---	---	---	01	

Appendix 5. Distribution of Salesian Personnel (as in March 2004)

Area	Priests	Brothers	Practical T.		Students			Total
			Cl.	Br.	MA+B.Ed	PH	TH	
ASSAM	46	03	09					58
NAGALAND	45		07		08	18		78
MANIPUR	22	01	07					30
ARUNACHAL	21	02	02					25
OUT-PROV	05	03			03	05	11	27
OUT-INDIA	03							03
TOTAL	142	09	25		11	23	11	221

Appendix 6. New Presences/Ventures

- 2001: New Animation Centre (AIDA & DBYES) at Dimapur
Higher Secondary School at DBS Dimapur.
- 2002: New Don Bosco Centre at Doimukh
New Don Bosco College at Itanagar.
- 2003: New B.Ed College at Salesian College campus
New Novitiate at Zubza.
Non-formal Vocational Training Centre at 3rd Mile, Dimapur.
- 2004: New Don Bosco Centre at Longding.

Appendix. 7. Provincials and their Councils

1982- 1988

Provincial:	Fr. Pulingathil Mathew
Vice-Provincial:	Fr. Nedumala Scaria
Economer:	Fr. Vadakethannical Sebastian
Councillors:	Br. Brahmakulam Anthony Fr. Kerketta Satnislaus
Secretary:	Fr. Nedumala Scaria

1988 - 1992

Provincial:	Fr. Nedumala Scaria
Vice-Provincial:	Fr. Mulayinkal Thomas
Economer:	Fr. Mundathanathu Michael
Councillors:	Fr. Thazhekadan Sebastian Fr. Palathingal Varghese Fr. Parakkat Joseph (P.C)
Secretary:	Fr. Mulayinkal Thomas

1992 - 1994

Provincial:	Fr. Nedumala Scaria
Vice-Provincial:	Fr. Mulayinkal Thomas
Economer:	Fr. Vattoth Thomas
Councillors:	Fr. Toppo Benjamin Fr. Palathingal Varghese Fr. Variathukalayil Joseph
Secretary:	Fr. Mulayinkal Thomas

1994 - 1997

Provincial:	Fr. Palathingal Varghese
Vice-Provincial:	Fr. Pulimoottil Alex
Economer:	Fr. Variathukalayil Joseph
Councillors:	Fr. Charuvila Andrew Fr. Karthikapallil Thomas Fr. Toppo Benjamin
Secretary:	Fr. Pulimoottil Alex

1998- 2000

Provincial:	Fr. Palathingal Varghese
Vice-Provincial:	Fr. Pulimoottil Alex
Economer:	Fr. Variathukalayil Joseph

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Councillors:	Fr. Karthikapallil Thomas Fr. Kerketta Jonas Fr. Poonthuruthil James
Secretary:	Fr. Pulimoottil Alex

2000 - 2002

Provincial:	Fr. Mulayinkal Thomas
Vice-Provincial:	Fr. Kerketta Jonas
Economer:	Fr. Pampackal Joseph
Councillors:	Fr. Kalapurackal Thomas Fr. Poonthuruthil James Fr. Tharakan Mathew
Secretary:	Fr. Kerketta Jonas

2002 - 2006

Provincial:	Fr. Mulayinkal Thomas
Vice-Provincial:	Fr. Kerketta Jonas
Economer:	Fr. Pampackal Joseph
Councillors:	Fr. Kalapurackal Thomas Fr. Perianayagam John Bosco Fr. Tharakan Mathew
Secretary:	Fr. Aerimattathil Sebastian Jose

Appendix 8. Extraordinary Visitations

The first Extraordinary Visitation was carried out by Rev. Fr. Thomas Panakezham, in the name of the Rector Major Rev. Fr. Egidio Vigano (Prot.No.92/2263). The duration of the Visitation was from 10 February to 24 April 1992.

The Second Extraordinary Visitation was carried out by Rev. Fr. Joaquim D'Souza, in the name of the Rector Major Rev. Fr. Juan E. Vecchi (Prot.No.98/1046). The duration of the Visitation was from 02 September to 18 November 1998.

The Third Extraordinary Visitation was carried out by Rev. Fr. Joaquim D'Souza, in the name of the Rector Major Rev. Fr. Pascual Chavez (Prot.No.02/0969). The duration of the Visitation was from 01 February to 20 May 2003.

NOTES

1. The Northeast region's complexities should be viewed in a holistic manner. Comprising diverse ethnic groups and cultural streams like Aryan, Dravidian, Indo-Burmese, Indo-Tibetan and other

racess, the Northeast is a distinct geographical unit connected to the rest of the country through a narrow corridor known as the 'Chicken's Neck'. Ranging from the plains of Brahmaputra in Assam to the highly dissected mountains of the eastern Himalayas in Arunachal Pradesh, the region has wide physical variations.

2. Canonical erection of the provincial house Prot. N. 204/82 on 2 July 1982.
3. Prot. N 158/82 on 2 January 1982.
4. Prot. N. 205/82 on 2 July 1982.
5. Prot. N. 014 b/88 on 11 June 1988.
6. Prot. N. 0435/03 on 21 April 2003.
7. Prot. N. 145/86 on 5 June 1986.
8. Prot. N. 187/97 on 23 July 1997.
9. It is a Secular Institute founded by Fr. Joe D'Souza SDB, which is not yet officially accepted into the Salesian family.
10. Cfr. appendix I.
11. Source Province Plan 2001- Fr. Tony Pellissery SDB.
12. **Arunachal:** Some of the prominent organisations are United Liberation Volunteers of Arunachal Pradesh (ULVA), United People's Volunteers of Arunachal Pradesh (UPVA), United Liberation Movement of Arunachal Pradesh (ULMA), National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM), National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-K). **Assam:** United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), Bodo Security Force (BSF), and recently a proliferation of others. **Manipur:** National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM), United National People's Liberation Front (UNLF), Peoples Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK), Peoples Liberation Army (PLA). **Nagaland:** National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM), National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-K), Naga National Council (NNC-C), Naga Federal Govt. (NFG), Naga National Council (NNC-K).

Chapter 2

POLICIES OF EXPANSION OF THE SALESIAN CONGREGATION IN NORTHEAST INDIA

With Special Reference to the Province of Dimapur

Joseph Edakkukan SDB

Introduction

The topic of my paper is vast and multifaceted, comprising the history, methods and means of expansion of the Salesian Congregation in Northeast India. I do not claim this paper to be exhaustive or without inaccuracies. Hence I am subject to correction¹.

It is to be stated at the outset that, I could hardly find any well-defined policies of expansion of the Salesian Congregation in Northeast India in the materials I consulted for writing this paper². In the meantime I realised that I had not consulted a very important source that would be more authentic and original than all the material I had gone through, i.e. Don Bosco himself. I was curious to find out if Don Bosco had given any policies or guidelines for the expansion of the Congregation to his first batch of missionaries to South America. Consequently, I found in the Salesian Constitutions a goldmine of policies in the recommendations given by Don Bosco to the first group of his missionaries to Argentina³.

In this paper I make an attempt to show that the guidelines and the policies given by Don Bosco to the first batch of Salesian

missionaries were the same ones, very successfully and most effectively followed by the first generation Salesian missionaries of Northeast India, which is today considered as 'the miracle of Mary Help of Christians'. The paper will also examine some of the policies followed by the province of Dimapur in its last 22 years of history. The final section will take a critical look at these policies⁴.

1. Philosophy of expansion

A casual look at the universe will make us realise that the greatest preoccupation of its creator is to ensure the continuity or expansion of the various components of his creation. A close examination of plants, trees and other living beings for example, would reveal that they are structured in such a way that the propagation of their species is more than assured⁵. What is true of the physical bodies is also true of moral bodies like clubs, associations, religious Congregations, etc, which yearn for continuity and expansion. In the physical or natural order, expansion occurs automatically. With the moral bodies, however, progress or expansion does not occur automatically. Conscious efforts are needed for their propagation and multiplication. Therefore, it is very pertinent to make an in-depth critical study of policies, plans, methods and means used for growth or expansion of such bodies, in seminars, symposiums, chapters, etc. from time to time, so that continuous and effective efforts can be made to ensure progressive development or expansion of moral bodies like the Salesian Congregation.

2. Theology of expansion

There is absolutely no doubt that Jesus wanted the kingdom of God to expand in all directions, even to the ends of the earth through the work of the missionaries. In his missionary mandate to his disciples Jesus laid emphasis on three aspects of evangelisation: first, going out to preach the Good News. He says: "Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teach them to observe all the commandments I gave you. And look, I am with you always; yes to the end of time" (Mt.28:19-20). Second, being witnesses to the gospel values of repentance and forgiveness which brings about radical changes in people. We read in the Gospel: "Repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all nations, beginning

from Jerusalem. You are my witnesses to this”(Lk.24: 47). In the *Acts* we are told: “But you will receive the power of the Holy Spirit which will come upon you and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but through out Judea and Samaria, and indeed to earth's remotest end”(Acts 1:8). Third, giving example of communion and unity among the evangelisers, Jesus says: “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world, May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me”(Jn. 17:18-21).

Pope John Paul II, writing in his encyclical letter, *Redemptoris Missio* on the great value of witnessing in the task of evangelising the world, says: “The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission. Christ, whose mission we continue, is the witness par excellence, and the model of all Christian witnesses. The first form of witness is the very life of the missionary, of the family, of the parish community, which, reveal a new way of living. Everyone in the Church can and must bear this kind of witness. In many cases it is the only possible way of being a missionary”⁶.

After the discovery of America by Columbus in 1462, whose daring expedition was sponsored by the king of Portugal, the kings and principalities of the fragmented Europe wanted to have a 'place under the Sun'. It was a matter of national pride for all the European nations to set out for conquest of the unknown world, which would enhance their economic and political powers. Loyal subjects, kings and queens, who were daring and adventurous, ventured out to cross the seas and the oceans in conquest of new lands. The same spirit captured the imagination of missionary-minded priests and religious, and they, backed up by the laity who were equally fired with the same spirit and enthusiasm for conquest, set out to conquer souls for the King of kings.

Concerning the role of the Salesian Congregation in an evangelising Church, Our Constitutions state: “The Salesian vocation places us at the heart of the Church and puts us entirely at the service of her mission. In this way we continue to build up the Church as the body of Christ, so that through us she may appear to the world as the universal sacrament of salvation”⁷. We read again: “Through our missionary activity we carry out a patient work of evangelisation by founding the Church within a group of people. This work mobilises all the educational and pastoral means proper to our charism. Following the example of the son of God, who made

himself in all things like his fellow men, the Salesian missionary makes his own the values of these people and shares their hopes and anxieties"⁸.

In my opinion, the strict theological interpretation of the doctrine *extra ecclesiam non est salus* ('outside the Church there is no salvation') which was prevalent at the time, gave great impetus to the missionaries to launch out into the unknown world in search of souls to be saved. No matter from where or from whom the call came to the missionaries expressing the desire to hear the Word of God, they immediately heeded to the call, without considering the distance, lack of food and accommodation and opposition from the enemies of the Word. Even if there wasn't any call from anywhere, and none showed any interest in knowing about Christ, the missionaries took initiatives to spread the word of God. But with the post-Vatican clergy this attitude was considerably changed. For the so-called 'pre-Vatican clergy', it was deemed worth undergoing any sacrifice to save just one soul, as that would ensure one's own salvation.

3. Policies of expansion in Northeast India

For the Salesians in Northeast India, the expansion of the Church, which is the visible Kingdom of God on earth, was the first and the foremost priority. Consequently, the expansion of the Salesian Congregation was not an issue that bothered them.

From 1922-1990 or so, the Salesians hardly ever thought of the expansion of their Congregation as such in the Northeast. The mandate given to them by the Holy See to take charge of the development of the Church in the area was accepted very seriously. They made *no distinction between Church and the Congregation*. For them what mattered was the expansion of the Church. Old land documents bear witness to this fact. For example, hardly any sale deed was done with the representatives of the Salesian Congregation as vendee. Land was bought in the name of the Church, by the Church and for the Church, which was represented by the bishop or the parish priest. This is, by and large, what has happened in the whole of Northeast⁹.

Hence, basically, the story of the expansion of the Salesian Congregation in the Northeast is the story of the growth of the Catholic Church in the area. The Don Bosco schools established by the Salesians in all the centres they worked contributed much towards

Salesians attaining a great measure of name, fame and influence for their Congregation. So much so, the name of Don Bosco today is a 'household word' which is generally recognised as a symbol of quality education and hope for the marginalised.

However, it must be stated that, although the theory that the Salesians cared little for their Congregation due to their great concern for building up the local Church seems to be very plausible, there could be some critics who may not subscribe to it. According to them, it was neither excessive love for the Church nor dislike for the Congregation that prompted some Salesians to show no great interest in the expansion of the Congregation, but their individual self-interests. Some of them acquired land in the name of the Church without any thought for the future of the Congregation. They could not visualise or rather they probably didn't want to visualise. I believe a time will come when Salesians wouldn't be in charge of those centres anymore. This was tantamount to neglecting the expansion of the Congregation¹⁰.

4. Don Bosco's guidelines to the first missionaries (1875)

In 1875, Don Bosco in his souvenir to his first missionaries to Argentina, gave 20 recommendations, which can be considered as the guidelines or policies he recommended for the expansion of the Congregation. Their perennial value make them the golden rule for all the Salesians to follow in all policies of expansion of the Congregation. In the following pages we shall consider some of the most important ones.

4.1 Seek souls and not money, honours or dignities¹

The advice 'to seek souls' was wholeheartedly and faithfully carried out by the Salesian missionaries not only during the lifetime of Don Bosco but also even up to the present time, although the eagerness to seek souls may not be as intense nowadays as it used to be in the past. Whenever an opportunity for spreading the Word of God to new areas and new peoples presented itself, no difficulties however insurmountable they might have appeared, would deter the Salesians from venturing into the task.

Fr. Ravalico, the great missionary of Manipur, is a typical example of a Salesian who followed Don Bosco's advice to 'seek souls'. On 4 November 1956 he wrote in the chronicles:

The bishop and I [Ravalico] left Imphal by jeep and spent the night at Chote on the way to Sugnu. The catechumens came to wish us. The following day we reached Churachandpur and stayed there for three days. For eight days we travelled on foot through the chains of mountains to reach the Paithe, Hmar and the Lushai tribes. We visited the villages of Thuila, Taipen, Phanyar, Thanlan, Pherzol etc., walking about eight to nine miles a day. In every village we were welcomed cordially. We showed them filmine, played music on the gramophone and distributed medicines.

On 15 November we reached the summit of the Lushai hills where we found about 40 families of catechumens. We stayed for two days in order to recoup our energy. On 17 November we began our journey and reached Rokot where we found about three dozen families of catechumens. On 19 we went to the village of Monyhukai and on the following day we came down to the Barak river valley which presented a panoramic vision.

At Tipaimuk we took a boat on our way back. It took us 24 hours. We sat relaxing as the boat moved slowly along the serene river. At one moment we were suddenly shaken violently. The current was so strong that the boat hit some rocks. But the boatmen were quick in manoeuvring the boat to safety. On 21 November we arrived at Lakhimpur and took a bus and in the evening we were able to reach Silchar. The following day Mgr. Marengo left for Halflong and I flew back to my beloved Manipur¹².

The government of Bhutan entrusted the Salesians with the task of managing a government technical school. They brought up the school excellently well. They were not, however, satisfied with only imparting technical knowledge to the students. To seek souls was such a compelling force within them that some of them clandestinely started imparting the message of salvation to the youth. A good number of students freely received baptism and they regularly attended Holy Mass and prayer meetings privately till the intelligence officers caught up with them. Ultimately the Salesians were asked to leave Bhutan, as making converts was illegal there. Although the Salesians had to leave the kingdom of Bhutan, as the first converts grew to maturity, the influence of the Church and the Congregation spread slowly but steadily. Eventhough they had to leave the place, the Salesians experienced great satisfaction for having followed the advice of Don Bosco to seek souls, even in such trying conditions.

Dimapur Province in Prespective

Again, as soon as the Salesians came to know of far away villages of Ukhrul, Hungdung, Awangkhul and Singngat in Manipur and Lakhuti in Nagaland were eager to listen to the Word of God, they rushed to these spots, seeking souls and not money or honours or dignities. Frs. O. Marengo and Athilio Colussi visited Manipur as early as 1948 when they visited Hungdung. And Fr. Joseph Felix sdb visited Manipur in 1957, when he visited Awangkhul. Singnagat was visited by Fr. Ravalico in 1956 or so. Fr. Emmanuel Bars came to Kohima on 31st December 1948. Fr. Bollini visited Lakhuti, a Lotha village in Nagaland, on 16 March 1953 and stayed on there up to 19 March. Even as late as 1964 Salesians from Imphal went about looking for souls, reaching Silchar by plane, crossing the Barak river by boats, and further walking for long distances, reaching out to the farthest areas under the jurisdiction of the Imphal mission centre.

Whenever the Polish Salesian Fr. Leo Piasecki, known as the 'Lion of Brahmaputra Valley' came to know of new communities of Adivasi tea-garden workers in the whole length and breadth of Assam, he reached out to them immediately, extending his spiritual and often, material help to Christians and non-Christians alike¹⁴.

Today Fr. Constantine Vendrame is revered and venerated as the 'Apostle of Khasi hills'. He could walk long distances without food to reach his destination to spread the Word of God among the Khasis. While on missionary tours, he was so busy with 'his Father's work' that he forgot about his meals¹⁵. Time didn't bother him either. In fact, punctuality was not his forte when he was engaged in his missionary apostolate. When necessary he even defended the Church and her activities when the local government authorities wanted to put restrictions on them¹⁶.

Although the work of the missionaries in Assam plains was really admirable considering the paucity of personnel and the vastness of the area they had to cover, some are rather critical of the Salesians who didn't pay much attention to the apostolate for the main ethnic group of Assam, the Assamese. Although there were in Assam Adivasi non-Catholic Christian labourers, like the Lutherans for example, to be cared for, the Protestants simultaneously established mission centres for the Assamese. Today we are told that at present in Assam there are a good number of Assamese Protestants, whereas the Assamese Catholics can be counted on one's fingertips. Some feel that we Salesians too could have easily spared some personnel for the Assamese apostolate, instead of concentrating all our energy in the

Khasi hills where climate was pleasant and the work was much easier and satisfying. The same criticism is levelled against the Salesians who did not have any specific policy for the expansion of the Church among the Meitheis or Nepalis, unlike the Protestants.

At the same time we cannot say that there was absolutely no attempt made by the Catholic missionaries to spread the message of salvation to the Assamese¹⁷ or other communities of Assam. A catholic prayer book and a small catechism in Assamese were printed in those days. All these must have been small attempts of some individual Salesians without any central strategic planning.

The pioneer Salesian missionaries of Manipur, especially Fr. Ravalico and Fr. Bianchi, went to different ethnic groups including the Meitheis. Mr. Biren Singh and his family who embraced Christianity can bear witness to this. This is an example to show that the missionaries didn't purposely neglect any tribe or community. In the 1970s, by the efforts of the Salesians in Imphal, a community of 22 Meithei families of Phayeng village in Imphal valley became Catholics. We cannot, however, exonerate ourselves completely from the blame of not having a more comprehensive plan to 'seek for souls' of major groups like the Assamese, Manipuris, Nepalis and others. Therefore, we have to admit that it was definitely a historical blunder for which, I believe, we have no valid excuses.

However, it would be a great mistake if we take this as criticism directed solely to the first generation Salesian missionaries. In this regard *all of us, including the diocesan clergy*, who have been working in the Northeast are equally guilty, if not more, of not having any set policy for the evangelisation of the ethnic groups mentioned above. We had all these years to correct the mistakes of the past. But, unfortunately, no one thought of it. So all of us need to say: *mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa!*

As soon as the Salesians came to know of the possibility of spreading the Word of God in Arunachal Pradesh, which was a forbidden territory to the missionaries¹⁸, they adopted the policy of giving the young Arunachalis opportunities to study in our schools in Assam, often free or with heavily subsidised fees. Bosco Bible school of Tinsukia was established precisely for the purpose of imparting secular and religious instruction to the Arunachal youth. All those youngsters became apostles of the Word of God in their own villages. Archbishop Thomas Menampampil, as a priest and as a bishop, took keen interest in this project to which can be attributed the rapid

expansion of the Church in Arunachal. Many Salesians ventured into the forbidden territory. Some of them like Fr. Job Kallarakal who had to take on the guise of a daily labourer to reach out to people willing to listen to the Word of God. Fr. Jose Chemparathy is credited to have travelled far and wide into the very interior villages, criss-crossing steep valleys and mountains of West Arunachal, all on foot. Fr. George Palliparambil is said to have done the same in East Arunachal. The work done by Fr. Mathai Kottrathil in Tirap district area is also very commendable.

One of the factors that helped the rapid expansion of the Catholic Church in many parts of the Northeast was due to her teaching regarding the use of wine¹⁹. Although the Bible condemns drunkenness, according to the Catholic Church, it does not forbid drinking of alcoholic beverages. The Baptists, however, forbade drinking of wine, which according to them was against the teaching of the Bible. To stop drinking, which was part and parcel of their very culture, was a great challenge to the pagans. Grace of God, however, touched some of the good and well-intentioned people among them, who courageously accepted Christ as their saviour and scrupulously avoided taking alcoholic beverages. They were chased out of the villages by the pagan civil authorities for becoming Christians and they had to build up their own Christian colonies. Soon the 'pagans' began to admire the affluent, peaceful, happy life style of the Christians, for example, their steady economic progress, their being educated in schools, the change of their dressing pattern, putting on pants and shirts, wearing neck ties instead of putting on the traditional loin clothes, etc. Because of all these spectacular changes they noticed in the Christians, many of them were attracted towards Christianity. But they could not embrace Christian religion as the doors of the Baptist Church were closed against them because of their addiction to drinking. In the mean time, some of the Baptists could not resist the temptation of drinking wine, and for this the Baptist Church excommunicated them. This is exactly what happened at Awangkhu village of Tamenglong district in February 1957 when 25 Baptist families were excommunicated for drinking wine. As their pride was hurt they were unwilling to repent and go back to the fold. At the same time they were not happy to return to the 'pagan' way of life as they had savoured the sweetness of Christian life. While they were looking for a way out, someone told them that there was another Christian Church at Imphal, which allowed drinking. Therefore, a certain K.S. Poujeipou was deputed to verify

the truth of the matter from the Catholic Fathers who were overjoyed at the prospects of new conversions and assured him that Bible didn't forbid drinking wine. When he went back to the village the 25 families together with some of their pagan friends celebrated this 'great message of liberation and salvation' that one could be Christian and yet drink wine. Their joy knew no bounds and they drank and sang and danced, to their hearts' content, celebrating 'the good news of salvation'.²⁰

In seeking souls, the missionaries took the fullest advantage of this situation that brought about, according to some, many 'questionable' conversions! Many of the so-called converts felt that they could happily continue to live as pagans, enjoying at the same time the privileges of being Christian. This affected the quality of their Christian life adversely. Although the Catholic missionaries were perfectly correct theologically, many Catholics at present believe that in practical terms, the Baptist teaching was much more beneficial to the people than the Catholic ones. A comparative study made recently, on the economic and social status of the Baptists and the Catholics of Manipur by this author attributes the affluence and high social status of the Baptists to their theology that forbids alcoholic drinks. It is striking to note that in spite of the fact that members of the same family or clan of the Miam Naga tribe on whom the study was made became Catholic and Baptist, comparatively, the Baptists are seen to be on the top of the social ladder, although the Catholics have received much more Church help than the Baptists. We have to acknowledge that the Baptist teaching of sinfulness of drinking alcoholic beverages, is now being taught by the pragmatic Catholic Charismatics at the famous charismatic retreat centres at Potta in Kerala and also elsewhere. This is a deviation from the Catholic theology, which seems to have the approval of the Church!

However, the veteran Catholic missionaries feel that in the given circumstances of the time, what they did was the best that could have happened. If they too had forbidden alcoholic drinks altogether, like the Baptists, the pagans, most probably, would have continued to live their pagan way of life for many more years, thereby arresting the progress of evangelisation works considerably. Although there may be an element of truth in it, we cannot, however, deny the fact that we didn't do anything much to discourage the habit of drinking. Because of their generous and compassionate disposition, the missionaries were always willing to help the poor without realising that their

poverty was due to heavy drinking and the help given to them did not really help them as in most cases the people made use of the help to drink more. *In this aspect of evangelisation too, we cannot point our accusing finger only to the pioneers. All of us are equally responsible for this miscalculation.*

Even if some of the means used by the missionaries in seeking souls might be termed 'questionable' from what is said above, we can conclude with a considerable degree of certainty that the policy of seeking souls in season and out of season, anywhere and everywhere possible, using all available means, brought about rapid expansion of the Church and the Salesian Congregation in the area.

4.2 Take special care of the sick, of the old, of the young²¹

Whenever the missionaries went about visiting villages they always carried with them medicine-kits for treating the sick. The medicines of the missionaries proved to be very effective. Very often medicines given were not appropriate for certain sicknesses, as they didn't have much to pick and choose from their medicine-kits. But due to the prayers and the deep faith of both the missionaries and their patients, many cures took place as if by miracle²². The Salesian missionaries, following the advice of Don Bosco, took very extraordinary care of the sick, often taking them to dispensaries at the mission centres or even to faraway hospitals for treatment²³. The Salesian superiors often exhorted the confreres to take great care of the sick members of their houses, be they Salesians or laypersons because they believed in the words of Don Bosco: "take special care of the sick and you will win the blessing of God and the good will of men". This type of charitable and sacrificing acts of the missionaries made great impact on the mind of the people, making them ready to accept the good news of salvation. The policy of taking special care of the sick and the old definitely was one of the important causes for the expansion of the Church and the Congregation.

4.3 Take special care of the young²⁴

The Salesian Congregation was founded mainly for the purpose of taking care of the young, especially the poor and the marginalised. Therefore, it was very natural for Don Bosco to have included this most essential aspect of Salesian life in his souvenir to his missionaries. The pioneer Salesians of the Northeast considered caring for the young as the greatest instrument of evangelisation. For

them, the slogan *ad familiam per juventum* ('to the family through youth') was as important for evangelisation as *ad Jesum per Mariam*. The life of the Salesians, dedicated for the welfare of the youth, therefore, proved to be their greatest and most effective means of evangelisation. So much so, in most part of the Northeast, children and the youth who were specially cared for by the missionaries received baptism first. The elders followed suit. The author can vouch for the fact that 'to the family through the youth' policy was in vogue in Manipur even as late as 1970s²⁵.

As we have seen above, main preoccupation of the Salesian missionaries was removal of ignorance from the people. For this purpose they started residential and non-residential schools even in interior villages. Typical example of Salesian interest in removing ignorance by establishing schools far and wide is the attempt of Fr. Joseph Felix sdb in Nagaland. Soon after his arrival at Kohima in 1963 he made extensive tours to different parts of Nagaland and established English medium schools in many places²⁶.

Everyone knows the important role of the Salesians in the overall progress made in the field of education in the whole of Northeast India. The success of the evangelisation work of the Salesians in the Northeast can verily be attributed mainly to their network of educational institutions established all over for the purpose of evangelising the youth who have become well placed leaders in all walks of life in the whole area. It is very evident from all what we have seen that the Salesian policy of taking special care of the young has contributed much towards the expansion of the Church and the Congregation.

4.4 Show respect to all persons in authority, both civil and ecclesiastical²⁷

The Salesians were a folk of humble disposition especially at the beginning of their Congregation. They were very poor and had to depend on the generosity of men of power and pelf to sustain the poor boys they were looking after. So, they could not afford to be arrogant or haughty, as now many of them seem to be. That sort of behaviour would not have created any sympathy for them or brought any help for their work. The advice of Don Bosco to show great respect and reverence to all in authority, therefore, was a very practical one which helped Don Bosco himself and his Salesians to accomplish effectively their apostolic works for the poor and abandoned boys

whom they were looking after. A proud and haughty behaviour pattern of life would not have brought about the great success they achieved in their various undertakings. For the Salesians of bygone days, respect for authority came most naturally without making any extraordinary efforts for it²⁸.

Monsignor Perier, the archbishop of Calcutta was a great friend of the Salesians who always sought his advice and humbly followed his wise counsels and directives. He could rely on them for any work he wanted them to accomplish, no matter how difficult it was²⁹. The archbishop highly appreciated the family spirit of the Salesians and did not miss any opportunity to be with them and enjoy their happy company³⁰. Precisely because of all these, the archbishop entrusted the care of his cathedral and the Catholic Orphan Press (COPO) to the Salesians, which was a great boon and timely help for the expansion of the Salesian Congregation in India.

The advice of Don Bosco to show due respect and honour towards ecclesiastics and persons belonging to religious institutes has always stood us in good stead. When the magnificent cathedral of Shillong and all other possessions of the Salesians were destroyed in a devastating fire, the Jesuits came forward and generously offered their holiday resort Woodcot at Kurseong, to be used as the Salesian formation house, accommodating the students of theology and philosophy as long as was required. This was definitely due to the good will created between the two religious families, following the advice of Don Bosco: "Love, reverence and respect other religious orders, and always speak well of them. In this way you will be esteemed by all, and will promote the good of our Congregation."³¹ While being in Kurseong, the Salesians came in contact with the owners of a brewery at Sonada, near Darjeeling, and eventually they bought the brewery from them and converted it into a 'hatchery' of Salesian formation, (studentate of Philosophy) which is now a centre of learning not only for the Salesians but also for the general public. As anyone can see, it is a proven historical fact that the Salesian policy of showing respect towards all persons in authority, both civil and ecclesiastical, did help bring about rapid expansion of the Salesian Congregation in the Northeast.

4.5. Let the world know that you are poor in clothing, food and abode and you will be rich in the sight of God, and will win the hearts of men³²

The willy-nilly Salesian missionaries had to follow this advice of Don Bosco because they were really very poor as their sources of

income was very limited³³. Don Bosco's policy of making the world know that the Salesians are poor by their life of genuine poverty did produce the expected result of being 'rich in the sight of God and winning the hearts of men. God's blessings came down upon the Salesians abundantly in the form of great increase of vocations and generous benefactors who offered unstinting help to the them, which helped them immensely in the expansion of their works³⁴.

4.6 The policy of vigorously cultivating ecclesiastical and religious vocations helped expansion of Church and the Congregation.

Right from the beginning of their work in the Northeast, the Salesians took keen interest in cultivating priestly and religious vocations. As a matter of fact the first Khasi priest Fr. Francis SDB was ordained in the year 1947 or so. The catholic communities being very young, the religious faith of the people was very shallow and consequently, in spite of the number of candidates joining the Salesian Congregation being considerably big, few persevered. Although the Salesians in the Northeast were not over worried about it, as many young Europeans, especially Italians were opting to come to India. The example of Fr. Carregno of Madras province who pioneered in recruiting vocations from South India spurred the Salesian superiors from the North to imitate the good example of the South³⁵.

The quality education imparted by the Salesians to their candidates, many of whom discontinued their studies for priesthood or religious life, was much appreciated by all. Unlike the ex-seminarians from the diocesan seminaries, who were often a liability and a headache to the families and the Church, the ex-aspirants from the Salesian formation houses were, by and large, an asset to the society as they went ahead with their studies successfully and eventually were well placed in the society and the Church. Many of them became very active collaborators in parishes and dioceses. Both the persevered ones and those who left the Salesian society brought name and fame to the Salesian Congregation. Ex-aspirants and ex-Salesians in the Northeast have played a big role in the expansion of the Church in the area. The excellent education they received in the formation houses made them leaders on their own right. In a number of cases our ex-aspirants and ex-Salesians are credited to have an inspirational role in starting mission centres in new areas³⁶.

Many bishops and parish priests were quite impressed by the all-comprehensive and holistic formation given by the Salesians to their candidates, which helped them to be leaders in the Church. According to some, this might have influenced some of them to invite the Salesians to their dioceses, though not in the Northeast. Therefore, it is right to say that the Salesian policy of cultivating ecclesiastical vocations did help bring about expansion of the Salesian Congregation.

5 Love one another, advise one another, correct one another, and do not be carried away by either envy or rancour. Let the good of one become the good of all, and let the troubles and sufferings of one be regarded as troubles and sufferings of all, and let each one strive to banish or at least to mitigate the sorrows of others³⁷

This is the longest and probably the most important of all the recommendations given by Don Bosco in his souvenir to the first missionaries. In their enthusiasm to persevere in the sacrificing but spiritually enriching life in the missions, the missionaries were prepared to encounter any difficulties to be able to lead a life of brotherly love and charity. It was not always easy to put up with certain difficult characters. But that compulsive missionary objective in them helped to put up with any difficult character by being faithful in practising the above advice of Don Bosco. Even when there were strong differences of opinion among themselves outsiders would never come to know of it. As a matter of fact, we could never imagine that the missionaries in general and our superiors in particular could have any quarrels among themselves. They seemed to be very eager to help each other by happily sharing the burdens of life. Everyone was concerned about everyone else. No one ever thought of repeating Cain's question 'Am I my brother's keeper?'

The late Fr. Mora of Barpeta-fame, confided to me the reason for his resignation from the provincial council. He was fed up, he said, of hearing so many stupid things spoken in the council against so many confreres and was not happy to be a party to it. Free and frank discussion was not only allowed, but also encouraged in the council meetings. Although there was no reason to be scandalised, yet due to his delicate dispositions, I believe, Fr. Mora could not tolerate speaking ill of others as it was against the Salesian mores of the time. I did admire the missionaries from whom we could hardly hear

anything spoken against each other. This type of brotherly and happy community life must have been an attraction to the youth who were inspired to join the Congregation. It was most natural that many generous benefactors came forward to help such a happy band of Salesians whose only preoccupation seemed to be sharing their own happiness and blessings with everyone else.

Fr. Buccieri who was the prefect of Sacred Heart College, Mawlai in 1950s once met with a motor accident due to his own defective driving, although he thought it was the fault of the other party. The other driver who was a high-ranking officer followed Fr. Buccieri's car determined to get justice done. But when he reached the college he experienced so much of cordiality and kindness especially from Fr. Comba who offered him some wine and entertained the visitor in his own inimitable way. He also noticed how the inmates of the college felt for one another, all sympathising with the prefect and offering him whatever help he would have liked to get. He was much impressed with all what he saw, especially the unity, understanding and fraternal love of the Salesian community, which consisted of multiple nationality. This experience of his made him an ardent and generous benefactor of the college. A well-knit, happy and loving Salesian community has always attracted the attention of generous people who were spurred on to contribute as much as they possibly could, towards the expansion of the Salesian Congregation.

The advice of Don Bosco to love one another, advise one another, correct one another etc., is very well echoed in the treatise 'think well of all, speak well of all and do good to all' by Don Ricaldone, the third successor of Don Bosco. It is considered as one of the Salesian classics on the family spirit of Don Bosco and his system of education. At the time of its publication there was some signs of backsliding on the part of the Salesians in respect of cordial and happy Salesian community life and so it was much appreciated as a timely help rendered by the Rector Major. Many Salesians used it as their precious 'vade-mecum'.

6. Don Bosco's policy of seeking lay collaboration helped expansion of Salesian congregation in the Northeast.

Don Bosco considered lay collaboration so essential for the expansion of his work that in the very first Constitution he drafted for the Salesian society, he included lay people also as its members, besides the clerical and religious lay members. At that time, to include

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lay people as members of a religious Congregation was something unheard of. In Rome he was told, therefore, to exclude membership of laity in his Congregation if he wanted its Constitution to be approved. So, he had to be satisfied with forming a separate group in the Salesian family, which he named as the Association of Salesian Co-operators.

Regarding the lay collaboration our present Rector Major, Fr. Pascual Chavez says: "The practical requirements of our works have prompted our communities towards an ever greater collaboration with lay people who have found a place in some extent at all levels and share more and more consciously in the Salesian mission and spirituality"³⁸. This is nothing but following the directives of the G.C.24, which was all about communion and sharing in the spirit and mission of Don Bosco by Salesians and lay people together.

Isn't it somewhat surprising to hear the Rector Major saying that practical requirements of our works have NOW prodded us on to seek for lay collaboration, when Don Bosco, right from the very beginning of our society considered lay collaboration a very essential characteristic of our Congregation?

This only shows that sometime in the history of our Congregation we deviated from the original plan of Don Bosco who considered lay collaborators as part and parcel of our Congregation. This must have happened at a time when we had such an abundance of vocations that we could afford to keep out the lay people from our work except allowing them "to pray, pay and obey" for our own advantage. 'The practical requirements' which the Rector Major is speaking about, is therefore, nothing but the dwindling of vocations and consequent reduction in the number of members in the Salesian Congregation!

However, the Salesians in the Northeast, right from the beginning up to now could not but depend on the collaboration of the laity as they were not only very few but also incompetent to do many things in the missions without the help of the lay people. They could not have accomplished even one hundredth of what they have achieved without lay collaboration. Therefore, there is absolutely no doubt that assiduously following the policy of Don Bosco of enlisting active collaboration of the laity brought about rapid expansion of the Church and the Congregation in the Northeast. The collaboration Don Bosco sought from the laity in his time, the help our pioneers wanted from them and the collaboration we seek now, are all totally different from what G.C.24 has inculcated. It insists on collaboration between

Salesians and the laity at the decision making level, at the level of execution and at the verification level. For Don Bosco, for our pioneers and for us the collaboration has been one sided, except in some rare cases. We want collaboration only in execution level. We decide and tell them what is to be done and the lay people are expected to execute. The laity's participation in the Salesian apostolate, as envisaged in G.C.24, is something much more profound and comprehensive. It is important, therefore, that we hold some detailed and serious discussions on the topic and come to some practical conclusions on so vital a subject as this.

7. Policy of decentralisation in the Northeast

Although Mgr. Louis Mathias, the leader of the first group of Salesians who came to the Northeast, was a strict disciplinarian who brooked no opposition, encouraged personal initiatives. Under his leadership no talent went wasted. As long as his authority was recognised and his directives were humbly accepted, he had absolutely no difficulty in anyone being innovative and taking initiatives. He encouraged and supported such confreres to the hilt provided they didn't bother him much for finance. All those who had some inclination to make propaganda and get funds, and was confident in being successful to get through the planned projects, took up the initiatives and went ahead with the expansion works. Just as Paul and Barnabas, confreres who had strong differences of opinion separated themselves and went in different directions, often with the tacit permission of the superiors, and were successful in establishing new mission centres. There is no doubt that the policy of decentralisation did help in the expansion of the Church and the Congregation in the Northeast.

Here it may be remembered that much of the expansion works were centred around strong individuals. It is interesting to note that there were several of such personalities in different areas, having their own independent views on policies of expansion. For example, Mgr Louis Mathias was a very intelligent and dynamic leader. At the same time he was influenced by the equally intelligent and far-sighted Fr. Caregno. Fr. Piasecki the lion of the Brahmaputra had his counterpart in Fr. Alessi in Tezpur area and Fr. Bollini in Golaghat area. The inimitable Fr. Ravelico in Manipur was counterbalanced by the equally strong Fr. Peter Bianchi. Unfortunately, this was not the case in Arunachal Pradesh. It is a matter for debate and study whether lack

of several strong leaders had any adverse effect in the expansion of the Church and the Congregation in the area³⁹

Although the policy of decentralisation, by and large, did help in the expansion of the Salesian works, in the wake of it, certain disorders crept into the planning of the expansion works. Those who could gather funds were not always good planners and most of them were not willing to let others have any part in planning and execution of the projects. So the superiors, often had to close an eye, choosing the lesser evil and letting them take up less important works, neglecting other more urgent ones, which would have brought about better results in the overall expansion of the Church or the Congregation.

8. A paradigm shift since the 1970s

Although the policies given by Don Bosco to his first missionaries continued to guide the Salesians in their work of expansion even after the 1970s one has to be blind not to notice a general decline and lack of enthusiasm in practising the advice given by Don Bosco. There was a paradigm shift in the faithful following of Don Bosco's guidelines, which were found most effective for the expansion works of Salesians in the Northeast during the first fifty years of their existence in the area.

8.1 Dampening of the missionary spirit

The intention of Pope John XXIII in invoking the Second Vatican Council was to open the Church windows a little 'in order to let in a little bit of fresh air'. The Council, instead, caused a virtual hurricane that shook the entire edifice of the Church. Old values gave way to new ones. Eating meat on Fridays would not send anyone to hell any more. Since Holy Sacrifice of Mass was for the benefit of the community, daily Mass was not considered compulsory for priests without community participation. To recite breviary daily was no more under pain of mortal sin. At the second Vatican Council the Church accepted for the first time the civil freedom of people to follow any religion according to their conscience. As a matter of fact, God does not need any religion to reach out to people. When Jesus evoked the scene of the last judgement he indicated that the people encountered him not in religious rituals but in the poor and the needy⁴⁰. To seek souls, therefore, was no more a priority, as salvation was made available also through other religions. In spite of the efforts

of *Evangelii nuntiandi* the old enthusiastic spirit for evangelisation could not be restored. Change in the Church policy for her own expansion had an adverse effect on the Salesian policy for expansion of the Church and the Congregation as it dampened the pioneering missionary enthusiasm. The younger generations of Salesians especially, are much influenced by the new ideas on evangelisation they have picked up during the years of their formation. As a matter of fact a tendency seems to be cropping up among many Salesians to leave the evangelisation works proper, which according to them are not so important, to the old, the infirm and the penniless, and the works that really matter, in their opinion, like schools, colleges, youth centres, non-formal training schools, etc. to be assigned to the young and the strong. It is indeed very unfortunate.

8.2 Tendency towards affluence and consumerism

With regard to practice of poverty we Salesians have to admit that we are suffering from a backslide of immense proportion. We are not making an effort to let the world know that we are poor in clothing, food and abode. On the contrary, we project ourselves as belonging to the category of the most affluent 10% of Indians. The cheap goods available in the market don't seem to be for the Salesians, most of whom come from poor or lower middle class families who cannot afford at home to enjoy the life of comfort they are having in the Congregation. And yet, it has been noticed that poorer the family background of confreres greater the demands they make for a higher degree of affluent life, bordering on consumerism! This state of affairs definitely has not helped to bring about any expansion of the Congregation. No wonder why in some parts of the world the Salesian Congregation is shrinking steadily causing reduction of provinces while Congregations like Mother Teresa's, which practise abject poverty, thrive on! What is happening elsewhere in the Salesian world may not be too far away from India if we go on as we do. We pride ourselves to be most hospitable people and often go out of our way to entertain guests in a way not expected from people who have taken the vow of poverty. Several of those who enjoy our hospitality speak deridingly at our back! I shall not go on giving further examples of breach of the virtue of poverty whereby we not only don't 'win the hearts of men' but we alienate them. 'When the desire for ease and comfort grows amongs, us our pious society will have run its course'. Is this prediction of Don Bosco coming true?

8.3 Arrogance, pride, individualism and uncharitable talk and action

If we honestly look into ourselves we will realise that we have been guilty on every count of the advice given to us by Don Bosco to love one another, advise one another, correct one another, and do not be carried away by either envy or rancour, etc. Gone are the days when no one ever heard a Salesian speak against another disparagingly or deridingly, especially in public. We, instead, have no hesitation to tear each other with our cutting remarks and tarnish each other's face in public even in front of outsiders, when we are asked to brighten everyone's face! One of the remarks we often hear about the Salesians nowadays is that they are very proud and arrogant and individualistic. Can we expect the youngsters for whom we work to join a group like ours and those in formation, to continue in their Salesian vocation? One of the reasons for the rapid expansion of the Congregation in the beginning was due to the abundance of vocations that flocked to the Congregation because of the exemplary life of the Salesians. If the speed of expansion of the Congregation is steadily declining, the main reason for it, I feel, is our negligence in the practice of charity, which is one of the most important recommendations given by Don Bosco to his first missionaries. It is high time that we started a campaign 'to think well of all, to speak well of all and to do good to all'!

We have briefly examined the great changes that have come about in the practice of the three recommendations given to the first Salesian missionaries by Don Bosco. It is very unfortunate that the same negative and retrogressive changes have taken place in respect of the rest of the policies of expansion contained in the same document. In such a situation is it possible for us to bring about any sustainable expansion of the Congregation in the future, in spite of all our wise strategic planning, unless the planning contained strong remedial measures that would take us back to our roots?

9. Policies of expansion specific to Dimapur province

Dimapur province came into existence in the year 1982, exactly 60 years after the arrival of the first batch of Salesians. Whatever has been said about the policies of expansion of the Salesian Congregation in the Northeast can be applied to Dimapur province for the first few years of its existence. The paradigm shift for the worse that have taken place in the Northeast in respect of the practice

of policies for expansion given by Don Bosco himself and the need for going back to our roots, which we have dealt with above, can verily be applied also to Dimapur province. As we have seen, the expansion of the Salesian Congregation in the past 50 to 60 years has been synonymous with the expansion of the Church and her humanitarian activities, which were somewhat stereotype in character. Everywhere we had the usual parish/ mission centre with a convent, a school and boarding for boys and girls. Some centres had also a dispensary and/ or a 'grihini' school.

A few years since the existence of the province, however, there have been a lot of changes in the Province's vision and outlook towards expansion. The General Chapters, especially G.C. 23 and 24, Provincial Chapters, extraordinary visitations by major superiors, meetings of rectors and parish priests, regional meetings, and meetings of different commissions had much to do in bringing about this change. Attempts in recent years of making the Educative Pastoral Plan (EPP), the Educative Pastoral Community (EPC) involving a wider spectrum of collaborators, and the much spoken about Organic Provincial Plan (OPP), the most laboriously and scientifically prepared Strategic Planning for the province, and so on, have helped the province to have a new vision for the expansion of the province and its apostolic activities. One of the factors that has helped us in taking up new types of activities, is the arrival of new groups of religious to share in the works of evangelisation. Multiplication of dioceses and the diocesan parishes also was of great help for the Salesians to diversify their apostolic activities. Somewhat easy availability of funds through aiding agencies and NGOs too helped the expansion works immensely.

In this respect, mention may be made of Agency for Integral Development Action (AIDA), an NGO functioning under the aegis of the province of Dimapur. Various developmental works for the benefit of the people have been taken up with the help of AIDA. Its programme for empowering women through self-help groups is really commendable.

Our traditional youth activities in schools and boarding houses have found new refreshing avenues with the help of Don Bosco Youth and Educational Services (DBYES).

The change in the policy of expansion in the province of Dimapur is tangibly visible in the establishment of non-formal educational

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institutions at Golaghat, Dimapur and Maram. Another institution of the kind is being contemplated at Tinsukia. Conversion of our High schools at Doom Dooma, Dimapur, Kohima, Mao and Maram into Higher Secondary Schools in a short period of time shows a significant shift in our policy. The establishment of four colleges (Doom Dooma, Dimapur, Itanagar, Maram) and a B.Ed College (Dimapur), all in a short span of time indicates a paradigm shift from our former apostolate in favour of kids to that of real youth who are supposed to be our target group. It is to be remembered, however, that the students in our schools during the first fifty years of our work in the Northeast were young people most of whom were out of their teens. Some of our students in Don Bosco, Imphal, in the sixties, were married men, tall, stout and ferocious looking, without moustache though, as they started schooling very late in life.

Here it should be emphasised that while appreciating the new trend in the province regarding our works of expansion consisting of diversification of our activities, which according to some Salesians are 'stereotyped works' of mission centres, parishes, schools, boardings, convents, dispensaries, etc., should still be the hallmark of Salesian apostolate in Arunachal Pradesh as the situation there seems to be the same as the one existed elsewhere in the province some 50 years ago when such activities were found very fruitful.

A new trend in enlisting lay collaborators in a big way in our apostolate, which was the very theme and substance of G.C.24 has been successfully tried out in Imphal. The day-to-day management of our two premier schools in Imphal is in the hands of lay people under the animating presence of the Salesians. Although it was due to some circumstantial compulsion that we have been prodded into following the directives of G.C. 24 in this manner, the idea is catching up and many of us feel that we should try out the same in other areas where we are prevented from taking up more works for the youth due to lack of Salesian personnel.

It is heartening to see a new thinking in the province to take up more works for the marginalized. Fr. George Menampampil has started more than thirty 'Leikai schools' (rural schools) in the outskirts of Imphal, Manipur, for the poorest of the poor, which are conducted by lay people who are animated by the Salesians. The same type of work is being done in Dimapur by Fr. T.O. Sebastian, and perhaps also elsewhere in the province. Both these undertakings are very much appreciated by everybody. The strong trend towards

taking up works beneficial to the young at risk in Dimapur province, is clearly visible in the lines of action taken by the recently concluded Provincial Chapter 2004. The line of action approved by the Provincial Chapter after a thorough discussion states: "The Provincial with the help of the commission for the young at risk shall initiate work for the young affected by HIV/AIDS, alcoholics and substance abusers". While discussing the topic it was very convincingly explained that the Salesian in charge of this centre need not be a well-qualified expert. What is needed is that he should be a compassionate person, having some general knowledge of the subject. Technical aspect of the work could be taken care of with the collaboration of lay experts.

Another mandate of the Provincial Chapter was to study the possibility of a Don Bosco shelter for the street children in our province. During the discussions on this topic Dimapur was suggested to be a suitable location for this project.

Another suggestion that came up for the expansion of the Congregation was to extend the policy of 'seek souls' of Don Bosco to the families of the youth who are under our care.

10. A critical look at the policies of expansion of the province of Dimapur

10.1 The very first principle that we followed was that the Church is first and the Church is last in all we do. We could say that almost the one and the only consideration we had was the preaching of the Word and the building of the Church. We gave absolute priority to this in everything.

10.1.1 The positive consequence of this was that the 'miracle of Mary help of Christians' was made possible through this policy. The Church did grow and get established. There was no diversion of our efforts through narrow parochial thinking to building up the Congregation with some loss to the Church. The Church entrusted the Northeast to the Congregation and we have proved ourselves worthy of the trust she placed in us. We accomplished the task entrusted to us.

10.1.2 The negative consequence was for the Congregation. We find ourselves today structurally weak, and with a presence that is unbalanced geographically and among ethnic groups. There are areas and communities where we were the first evangelisers where we no

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longer have any sort of Salesian presence. There are other areas and communities where our presence could almost be considered 'excessive'. Whereas this last statement may be disputed, no one can question the fact that our presence is not spread in a perfectly balanced manner over all our territory and all the ethnic groups of our province.

10.1.3 The consequence on the people is also mixed bag. There are communities and areas where our positive impact has been immense whereas there are communities that even wonder whether we have intentionally neglected them since we are no longer working among them.

10. 2 The second principle we have followed in practice was a natural consequence of the first. We went whenever the Spirit called us. We went where the people responded positively to the Gospel. We established ourselves even if in some cases only for a time in areas where the community was open to the Good News.

10. 2.1 The positive consequence of this was that the Church grew and developed fast. We invested our personnel and material resources wherever people embraced the faith. The work bore fruit, we invested even more work, and reaped an ever greater harvest. This strategy would have given us better results than we could have expected had we tried to make a mechanically equal division of our resources among all the geographical regions and ethnic communities with no reference to the response of our labour. There seems to be a time of grace for each people. If this is taken at the tide the results are great. If this time of grace passes while we are preoccupied with being 'just' and 'equal', we might gather a smaller harvest in the fertile areas while wasting our efforts in places that are not yet ready for the Gospel message.

10. 2.2 The negative consequence of this policy was that certain communities have apparently even come to the conclusion that Christianity and Salesian presence are not for them, but only for some other communities. A certain sense of grievance and of neglect by us has developed in their attitude to us.

10.2.3 The consequence for the people is that certain communities and areas have lost out in the process of development. There is no doubt that in keeping with our ecclesial and Salesian principles, people have benefited from our presence not only for their faith and morals, but also for their all-around development. We brought them

education, health care and economic growth. The communities that were not responsive to the faith missed out also on these side benefits of Salesian missionary work.

10.3 There is one element in our policies for expansion that is quite evident. When we had to go into a new area, we located our centre strategically in State capitals and district headquarters, which were often not the largest Catholic communities within the area.

10.3.1 This has been a strategy of the Church since the times of the first Christians. It was a wise decision. These administrative headquarters are served by roads; there is possibility of having a supply of electricity and of telephone service; we have quick access to all offices we require in the course of our work. This sort of a central location helped us to get things done. We also had influence and prestige.

10.3.2 This policy in the locating of our institutions made it possible for us to network among ourselves more easily, avoiding at least partly the danger of isolated institutions.

10.3.3 A negative consequence of such location was that the most numerous beneficiaries of our educational services were often people of other faiths, not Catholics. Catholics in the immediate neighbourhood were few. Having children in boardings is expensive. Besides, boarding children are made to grow up away from the loving presence of their parents and family.

10.3.4 A second negative consequence was that our central location created an additional reason to arouse tensions with the diocesan clergy. When they arrived on the scene they had to open centres in less glamorous places.

10.4 It seems quite apparent that a lot of development in the form of new presences, and the growth of existing presences, was the fruit of individual charism and individual initiatives. Individual capacities for finding resources whether locally or from funding organisations determined the rate of growth of new centres. All this was not so much the result of a centralised, provincial-level planning, strategy and policy.

10.4.1 The positive element in this principle is that our expansion came from the grassroots rather than through a top to down imposition. Development was a response to the felt needs of the people or, at least, of the Salesians who were in direct contact with the people. It was not the result of armchair planners or boardroom decisions. This is highly praiseworthy.

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10.4.2 The negative consequence of this policy was the imbalance we referred to earlier from another angle. The individual Salesians at the grassroots knew best the people they were already dealing with. They grew in their emotional attachment for them. Hence they tended to concentrate more and more on their own small target group rather than glance over the horizon to take a more global view of the needs of the entire populace and region.

10.4.3 A second negative consequence was that individuals who had the capacity to raise resources developed and built up high quality infrastructure whereas those with lesser capabilities in this line were unable to offer their people even the minimal facilities that they deserved.

10.4.4 It is worth mentioning here yet another consequence for the province deriving from the fact that a lot of expansion of the province came about as a result of the initiatives of individual Salesians. It was only natural that the new 'centre' started by a Salesian was within the area of his old parish. This slowed our entry into new areas far away from existing centres. This system created more possibilities for us to be transferred within areas where we feel comfortable, we know the language, the culture, etc. This has contributed at least in part to our reality today, that we function in many respects like four 'sub-provinces' within one Dimapur province. We have tended to 'specialise' in one region of our province and resist transfers to other areas of the province.

10.5 A parish in the old days covered a whole district. Some parishes still do. When we had personnel enough for a new parish, rather than move to a new district, as we saw above, we established it within the same district, all of them manned by Salesians. A consequence of this was that there were no diocesan centres or other Congregations in an entire district. Hence we provided the bishop with an additional argument for taking away from us a centre or two from this district, which may not have happened if the same number of centres had been scattered in various districts of his diocese.

10.6 The next element I mention may appear contrary to what I have been saying in the last two points. But perhaps it is not. Up to twenty or thirty years ago, we still felt responsible for the entire region. So when decisions for expansion were taken not by individuals centres but by the provincial council, they tried to balance our presence within the region, placing the new parish as far away as

possible from the existing ones. Hence our efforts were spread thin over a wide area. Congregations that came in at later stages did not have the numbers that we had. They did not carry the old baggage of the whole region being a missionary territory entrusted to them. They came to care for a single parish to start with. Hence they concentrated their efforts only on this one area, developing it thoroughly, looking at all aspects of development, establishing institutions of differing nature in almost every single village. We spread out over wide areas, concentrated on evangelisation and did just a little of everything else. They remained limited to a small area, and offered widely varied services of a more professional quality.

10.7 Though the area ceased being a mission territory entrusted to us a long ago, the province did not make a corresponding change in its mentality. We like to have everything in a particular area looked after by us alone. To do this we need parishes. Hence most of the new centres we started were parishes first and foremost, though having institutions at the centre. It is not easy for bishops to allow us to hold onto parishes indefinitely and, as the number of local clergy grew, they asked us to move on. This would not have happened if more of our new parishes had been Salesian institutions rather than parishes.

10.8 The tasks entrusted to us by the Church to build up a mission territory were indeed a great and noble one. We did it with enthusiasm. But it necessarily diluted to a certain extent our Salesian identity as evangelisers of the young. Perhaps it even affected seriously the entire concept of Salesianness in all of us who were born and brought up in the Northeast. Here I am referring to *all* of us Salesians of the Northeast who did our novitiate here and who have had their experience of Salesian life almost exclusively in the Northeast. It became almost impossible for us to conceive of Salesian work without parishes. Hence our resources in personnel and finances go invested in more and more parishes, with institutions forming just an adjunct to them. Every further step in expansion of the province further diluted our specificity as a Congregation for the young.

10.9 Our unstated, but apparent, overstress on parishes in our policy of expansion partly affected the vision and mission of our Congregation and our target group as per charism. Our focus shifted substantially from the youth to children. The public we serve today fall more in the below 18- year age group than in the 15 to 35 years age group.

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10.10 The same stress on expansion in the direction of parishes affected also the nature of our institutions. We are into mass education rather than offering educational opportunities to focussed target groups according to our charism, like the more disadvantaged or potential leaders.

10.11 Our policy of expansion into more and more parishes affected the Congregation in yet another way - we lost, to a certain extent, our creativity, flexibility and capacity to adapt. We became traditional, not innovative. Each new centre was a carbon copy of the previous one. While concentrating strongly on evangelisation, we set up a church, a school, a boarding for boys, a boarding for girls, quarters for sisters, quarters for Salesians, and at times a dispensary. We did not change and grow with the needs of the times. I am not denying that parishes can also be innovative. But it is far more difficult to carry an entire parish with you on the path of change than to carry the youth along.

10.12 We also had the highly commendable policy of sticking only to 'the politics of Our Father'. We have stuck to our traditional activities and avoided sensitive areas. This helped us to tread more or less unscathed amid the problems of insurgency and inter-ethnic conflicts. On the negative side it prevented us from employing our wealth of talents and resources to provide answers to the actual problems of the youth and the society around us intolerance, violence, unemployment, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, etc. The deficiency in our involvement in these issues has made us miss great opportunities in favour of the young.

10.13 One characteristics of our policy of expansion has been to keep expanding almost continuously. It would be difficult to pick out a year in the history of our province when we did not open at least one new centre. Comparing the number of institutions now and at the start of our province does not give us the right picture since in this interval we have also handed over several centres to the diocese. Besides the new presences, we have to remember also the development of existing ones, starting up new projects and activities without officially starting new, independent or autonomous institutions or houses.

10.13.1 A positive element of this policy is that we get a sense of satisfaction as we see our work grow and develop. We feel we are dynamic and active.

10.13.2 The negative side is that there has been no consolidation. There is little reflection on the ultimate aim of our presence in a place

and an evaluation of whether we are doing the right thing in the right way to achieve those goals. The Salesian communities are small, badly organised, unbalanced in the sharing of work among the members, lost in activities rather than in *being*, ignoring processes in favour of products, lacking in community life.

10.14 The policy of constant and non-stop expansion has resulted in numerous communities of two or three members.

10.14.1 On the positive side, the understaffing of our centres has given us the result that each one of us holds multiple portfolios. We are challenging each individual to his maximum and really achieving all we can. Everyone has opportunities to use as many of his talents as possible and to shine out at least in one area.

10.14.2 The negative side is that we are, indeed, understaffed. Everyone is overworked. All are exhausted by the end of the day.

10.14.3 Our 'busyness' has resulted in giving the impression that we are proud and haughty because we have no time to spend with our people. We cannot be at their pace, taking decisions before they have had their say.

10.14.4 We have no time to read, to meditate, to reflect. It is difficult to free someone to attend a refresher course or an updating programme. Hence we continue to do the same old things in the same old way and preach the same old sermons, but unfortunately, do not get the same old results!

10.15 The policy of continuous growth and expansion has had some more consequences.

10.15.1 We are so busy with the actual work of running our schools and parishes, that we give insufficient importance to an indispensable corollary to all expansion of our work, an expansion of our membership. The work of looking for, following up vocations has been sorely neglected. This is a tragedy that most of us have not yet realised. We may wake up when it will be too late.

10.15.2 The second negative consequence of this continuous growth has been that we have not been able to qualify the existing personnel to enable them to be effective through these institutions. We are only able to own and 'manage' these institutions. We are not qualified to actually carry out the activities themselves.

10.15.3 Thirdly, we do not have time any more to mingle with the youth or children or people in our centres and institutions. We have

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thereby gone against one of the most fundamental principles of Don Bosco's system.

10.16 In the process of our expansion we have also opened houses of formation for almost all stages except that of theology for clerics and post-noviciate formation of Salesian brothers. We see a lot of flip-flop in our policy as regards the first, preparatory stage that of the apostolic school or aspirantate. In the short history of our province we have experimented with a wide variety of locations and systems. While the efforts to discover the ideal are praiseworthy, the trial and error method have not yet given us the desired fruits.

10.17 We see a lack of policy in yet another aspect of our expansion our collaboration with Congregations of women religious. We have had a blow-hot, blow-cold policy in different parts of the province, and sometimes in the same centre at different moments in its history. A more consistent and mature policy on the terms of collaboration would have helped us in the process of opening new centres or starting new activities in existing centres.

10.18 One last point: local ecclesiastical authorities have certainly influenced our process of expansion. Where we received support and encouragement from the local ordinary for our efforts and initiatives, we have grown faster than in dioceses where we had to 'calculate' and manipulate every step of the way

Conclusion

We have examined some aspects of the policies of expansion of the Salesian Congregation in Northeast India with particular reference to the province of Dimapur. There does not seem to exist any clear-cut policy or guideline for the expansion of the Congregation, except the 20 recommendations which were given by Don Bosco to the first group of his missionaries to South America. For us Salesians they are still the golden rule to be followed in all our policies of expansion. Our first generation of Salesians in the Northeast have tried their best to follow them as meticulously as possible, and the result was the expansion of the Church and the Congregation in the region. However, since the 1970 we notice a trend among us which does not always respect the directions given by Don Bosco. The eagerness to seek souls has dampened and our missionary enthusiasm has dwindled. In many cases our life style has become quite affluent, at times bordering on consumerism. Some of us have a tendency to be arrogant, proud and individualistic. Often

we are uncharitable in our words and deeds to the extent of tearing people apart and destroying their good name. These tendencies will help neither the expansion of the Church nor of the Congregation. Since the inception of the province we have initiated many new works and bold ventures. They have both positive and negative aspects. But if we carefully study them and remedy whatever is negative, we can truly make the Congregation expand and flourish and make it a true sign and instrument of God's salvation for the people of the region.

As a final concluding point of the above given conclusion, I would stress the need for us Salesians to go back to our roots, resolving to follow scrupulously the policies of expansion given by our father and founder to the first group of Salesian missionaries on 11 November 1875 in the Church of Mary Help of Christians at Turin. They are as relevant today as they were ever before. We shall be faithful to that precious patrimony of ours in imitation of the pioneer missionaries of Northeast. We have seen that there was a paradigm shift, for the worst, in the faithful following of Don Bosco's guidelines to the Salesian missionaries. Its is high time that we made a U turn and start a movement of radical reform in our Salesian religious life. No amount of our wise, strategic planning will have any tangible effect unless it is based on the advice of Don Bosco and unless we have the good will and determination to follow that advice.

NOTES

1. In preparing this paper I interviewed some of our veteran missionaries like Fr. John Med and Fr. Peter Bianchi, the former provincials of the province of Dimapur, namely, Fr. Mathew Pulingathil, Fr. Scaria Nedumala and Fr. Varghese Palathingal, and some other confreres.
2. I went through some of the documents available in the provincial archives at Dimapur. There I came across various Provincial Chapter documents, minutes of the meetings of the rectors and parish priests, vision statements of some provinces of India and that of the erstwhile Salesian Provincial Conference of India (SPCI, now SPCSA). I also went through some papers, which were presented in a seminar held at Sacred Heart College, Shillong, in October 1982 and the materials available at the Salesian College library, Dimapur.
3. "Souvenir of St. John Bosco to the First Missionaries" in *Constitutions of the Society of St Francis de Sales*, Rome 1984, 265-266. (Henceforth referred to as "Souvenir"). The souvenir

consists of 20 recommendations given by Don Bosco to the first group of Salesian religious who were leaving for Argentina from the Church of Mary Help of Christians, Turin, on 11 November 1875.

4. I acknowledge the help given by Fr. George Menampampil in preparing this section.
5. Look at a guava fruit. It's packed with seeds cushioned in a thick coating of flesh ensuring safe propagation or expansion. The same can be said of most varieties of fish that conceive lakhs of eggs, and the human semen consisting of millions of potential human beings.
6. *RM*, 42.
7. Cons. art. 6.
8. Cons. art. 30.
9. For example, when the Salesian bishop, late Mgr. Orestes Marengo left the diocese of Tezpur and Fr. Joseph Mittathanny, a diocesan priest was appointed bishop, we are told that there was not even one Salesian house in the whole diocese of Tezpur. His Grace Dominic Jala, the Archbishop of Shillong, told the author that even today most of the centres built up, developed and manned by the Salesians in his archdiocese are officially and legally Archdiocesan centres.
10. For instance, when a particular Salesian parish in Manipur was about to be bifurcated in the 1970s, the Salesians to whom the land was being offered by the people for starting a Don Bosco School, were requested by some other confreres to get it registered or documented in the name of the Salesian Congregation and use it for the development of both the Church and the Congregation. But they refused to comply with the suggestion. After some years the Salesians were very sad when they were asked to hand over the centre to the diocese after having established and developed it. Today it is a flourishing diocesan centre having a parish with a big school, hostels, etc. In the same period of time and in the same State, a Salesian is said to have refused to ask the bishop to make that centre into a Salesian one on a permanent basis, although it was pretty certain that the bishop was well disposed to do it. This was a centre, which was started, built up and nurtured by the Salesians, on the land given by the people who wanted the Salesians to start a Don Bosco School. This too is a strategically placed diocesan centre today. The same self-interest of the past, I am told, has motivated some Salesians to act in a similar way in Arunachal Pradesh even in these days. (These facts about the expansion of the Salesian Congregation being part of the contemporary history, for reasons that are obvious, I have avoided mentioning names).

11. "Souvenir", 1, p.265.
12. A.J. Sebastian (ed.), *In His Name*, Dimapur: Don Bosco Publications, 1999, 59-60.
13. These details are from the interview I had with Fr. Peter Bianchi SDB. In 1967 a confrere came to Don Bosco Imphal to help me. While visiting classrooms he came across a very big boy in Class II, who could have easily been in the football team of the school. He was highly surprised to see a boy of such size among the small kids, which provoked him to give me a lecture on Salesian pedagogy. He told me that, such big boys among the small ones could turn out to be bullies and would impede proper education. Since he was my classmate, I took the liberty to tell him that he was talking through his hat! That boy was a king's son of a particular tribe. One or two years he would stay in the school and the boarding and learn some religion and would go back home. He would be an opening for the Church to his village and the tribe. In those days, schools were considered great means of evangelisation. Admissions to our schools and boardings were assured, if the candidates were recommended for pastoral reasons, in spite of their size or lack of standard. Very few students from the tribal areas were unaffected by the message of salvation imparted to them during their school days. In fact, nearly all of them received Baptism.
14. There is a humorous story of his eagerness to visit the Christian and non-Christian Adivasis in the tea gardens of Assam. Once he wrote to the manager of a tea garden informing him of his programme to visit his garden on a particular day. The manager wrote back saying that, although he would be out of station on that day, Father Piasecki could go all the same as his wife would take care of him. When Fr. Piasecki met the manager again, he thanked him profusely for making all the arrangements for him 'to sleep with his wife'. The manager retorted, 'That was too much of a hospitality. I didn't intend that much!'.
15. Once when Fr. Vendrame was parish priest of Mawkhar, Shillong, two clerics from Sacred Heart theological college went to help him on a Sunday. After the Mass the clerics went to the dining room for breakfast. Fr. Vendrame told them to eat plenty as they were young and there is need of good nourishing food for their growth. So saying he left without taking breakfast as the Christians were waiting to talk to him. The clerics found just one fried egg and a few slices of bread for nourishing their growing selves. Fr. Vendrame was so busy with his work that he had forgotten all about getting the needed provisions.
16. Fr. Henry Fantin during the seminar on the Salesian missionary methods held in October 1982 states that Fr. Vendrame is credited

to have opposed the then governor (an Englishman) who had asked him to remove the illegal construction of a school on a plot of government land. The governor's letter said. "His Excellency, the governor of Assam is pleased to inform Rev. Vendrame sdb to remove forthwith his illegal construction on the government land". etc. Fr. Vendrame is said to have answered in his own inimitable way. "I, Rev. Vendrame sdb is pleased to inform His Excellency, the governor of Assam that the building in question is a primary school for the poor children of the locality and the government, instead of ordering to remove the school building, should give some grant-in-aid for the school". We are told that, the governor being an understanding and compassionate person not only didn't insist on the removal of the construction but also gave some financial help to the school! For Fr.Vendrame that school was very important for his work of seeking souls.

17. We are told of a feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus celebrated at Don Bosco, Guwahati, by Fr.Vincent Scuderi, to which many Assamese people were invited. A good number of them attended the function, which was to be concluded with a common meal. Just before starting the meal someone accidentally shoved the statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which fell into the *dhal* curry! This caused a great commotion among the Assamese who considered it a bad omen and all of them ran away. Fr. Peter Bianchi testifies to the veracity of this event.
18. In Arunachal Pradesh the so-called "Freedom of Religion Bill" (Anti-Conversion Bill) was passed in 1978.
19. The word 'wine' is a common term for all locally made alcoholic beverages.
20. Cfr. *In His Name* Fr.P.Bianchi's Memoirs, 74.
21. Cfr. "Souvenir", 5, p. 265.
22. Was it a repetition of Don Bosco's 'bread- tablets', which cured his boys instantaneously because of their intense faith in him?
23. Fr. Pianazzi of revered memory is credited to have given enema to a patient by using his cycle pump, without which the sick person would have died. In 1981 or so there was an emergency sick call made from Tadubi to Punanamai Catholic mission centre. A woman could not deliver her baby as the hand of the baby emerged first, instead of the head. As there was no driver available at the time, the missionary took the woman all the way to Kohima civil hospital where the baby was safely delivered by surgical-operation. The doctor told the missionary: " you have saved both the mother and the child".
24. Cfr. "Souvenir", 5, p. 265.
25. When Lamdang village in Manipur was converted, youth and children received baptism first. I remember this very vividly because the youngsters over there, were a very happy and well-knit

- lot. A few years after their baptism they thought of protecting themselves, especially the girls, from being allured away by the Baptists when they would reach the marriageable age. For this they paired themselves into couples of future brides and bridegrooms. As could be expected, this plan, which was thought to be foolproof, was not 'waterproof' enough to protect itself from being drowned in the pool of time. At the time of their marriage there were only two original couples. All others got re-coupled among themselves.
26. The paper on the Salesian missions in Nagaland presented in the seminar held at Sacred Heart College Mawlai in October 1982, mentions the following schools: St. Joseph's Cambridge school at Purba (no more in the hands of the Catholics); St. Paul's Cambridge school at Zunheboto (no more functioning as a Catholic school); St. John's Cambridge School at Tuensang (run by the diocese); All Saints home English School at Peren which has been developed into a mission centre (now manned by MSFS Fathers and C.M.C. sisters); Don Bosco School, Khonoma (this is now a mission centre manned by the Pilar Fathers); and the Holy Cross School, Dimapur, which has become now a prestigious school of the area. After Fr. Felix's transfer from Kohima, by the end of 1965, the Anglo Indian families who were looking after the schools left for one reason or other and there were no immediate substitutes for them and so all the schools could not be developed as they could have been.
27. Cfr. "Souvenir", 6, 7, 8, p. 265.
28. For example, whenever Fr. Provincial arrived in a Salesian house with or without prior information, the whole community would stop whatever work they had been engaged in and would dash ahead to welcome him, shaking his hand and kissing it with great reverence. The same was done whenever a bishop visited a Salesian house. Fr. Gutierrez of happy memory, as rector of Sacred Heart Theological College insisted that all the brothers promptly come out and wish bishop Stephen Fernando whenever he visited the college, often without prior information. He appreciated and relished every bit of the respect and honour shown to him. Every time the theology students sang '*Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat*' he eagerly waited to hear the prayer for the local ordinary, "*Stephano reverentissimo episcopo nostro pax vita et salus perpetua*". As late as 1979, when bishop Mittathanny visited the Salesian international centre at Pisana, Rome, the then Rector Major Fr. Egidio Vigano, a man of strict punctuality, in deference for the ecclesiastical authority, wouldn't start prayer before the meal at lunch time without him. We, the confreres from the Northeast were commissioned to go round and search for him. The

- author is not so sure if the respect and honour given to bishop Mittathanny has brought about much benefit to the Salesians, though.
29. In my view he probably could not get the same response from his Jesuit confreres who were proud of being the greatest and the most powerful religious order and considered to be the staunchest defender of the Church.
30. I have a vivid memory of one of his visits to the Salesian College, Sonada. During lunch-time Fr. Rector was pouring some whisky into his glass and Fr. Prefect in the mean time offered to add some water to it. But he told the prefect that the Church did not advocate mixed marriages. All had a good laugh.
31. "Souvenir", 10, p. 266.
32. "Souvenir", 12 p. 266.
33. In the year 1953, I was a student of Philosophy at Salesian College, Sonada. During winter the inmates of the college, including the aspirants, were clad in warm clothes of all shapes and shades and sizes. Some had oversized Italian mantles; others had ladies' overcoats, which could accommodate two or three at a time. Those of American soldiers were worse still. We looked like refugees fleeing from some war-ravaged zone. After rising from sleep at 4.30 am it was compulsory for everyone to have a thorough wash of face, head and especially the neck with icy-cold water (hot water was too much of a luxury) under the scrutinising eyes of the assistants Bro. Panakezham and Bro. Robert Kerketa. In the study hall there was a home-made stove fed with firewood from which emanated more smoke than fire. A tin pipe, six inches in diameter, placed diagonally across the hall to supply heat to all parts of the hall, cleared part of the smoke out of the hall. Smoke or no smoke, it served the purpose of keeping us warm! To reduce expenses for heating water, I believe, it was forbidden to take bath except on Saturdays when each one received a bucket of smoke scented water from a big cauldron. Fr. Prefect was ever vigilant to find ways and means to reduce expenses. Visitors appreciated poverty practised inside the house in spite of its grandiose external appearance.
34. A generous gift of about 200 acres of land at Umran, Meghalaya, made to late Fr. Joseph Arokiyasamy by a British friend of his, I believe, is an example of the efficacy of being faithful to the policy of living a rigorous life of poverty.
35. The first batch of under-matriculate aspirants from Kerala was brought to Bandal in the year 1948 or so. The first batch of post matriculate aspirants was brought to Mawlai, Shillong in the year 1950 by Fr. Pianazzi.
36. For example, Mr. Gregory from Tengnoupal district of Manipur and his companions who came back from the Salesian aspirantate,

have helped much towards expansion of the Church and the Congregation.

37. "Souvenir", 13, p. 266.

38. Acts of the General Council, April-June 2004.

39. Here I argue, for example, that if Fr. Thomas Vattoth had come to East Arunachal in the early stages of our work over there, the positive results that accrued due to the presence of such intelligent and dynamic confreres elsewhere in our province, would probably have come about also in Arunachal Pradesh.

40. Cfr. M. Amaladoss, *New Leader*, March 1-15 2004.

Chapter 3

THE YOUTH OF DIMAPUR PROVINCE

George Menampampil SDB

Introduction

It is not easy to speak about the youth within the area of Dimapur province for the simple reason that our area is so vast, and the nature, situation, problems and needs of the youth vary so much from State to State and from tribe to tribe. Nevertheless, a Salesian seminar of this sort would be quite incomplete without a look, however inadequate it be, at this *raison d'être* of our congregation the youth.

1. The context and characteristics of our youth

It has rightly been said that a nation or a country gets the government or leaders it deserves. This statement is even more correct when modified to “A society gets the youth it deserves.” A quick glance at our society is essential if we are to understand our youth. Our youngsters live in this society. They are the products of this society. So, what does our society look like?

1.1 Positive elements

One of the most beautiful elements of our society is precisely what I mentioned above as an obstacle to writing a paper on the youth of our province the vast variety of ethnic groups, languages, cultures, religions, etc. We live in a truly multicultural society. We do have one of the more beautiful corners in God's garden, considering the plurality and wealth of culture of our people.

Another aspect of this positive element is the fact that our people are proud of their ethnic identity and culture. Most of the people we are dealing with were never in their history really oppressed, suppressed and exploited. The people of most of our ethnic groups do not suffer from the inferiority complex of the low castes or untouchables and tribals of other parts of India.

Yet another progressive step in this direction is the fact right now there is a resurgence in ethnic awareness and cultural pride. I will admit that this resurgence has resulted also in violence of various sorts, but in itself it is a very positive development.

Our society can be proud of the fact that it is community-centred. Co-operation and collaboration are more appreciated among our people than competition.

Yet another positive trait of our society is that it is democratic and casteless. There is great equality among the people.

As regards the relationship between Salesians and the people there are three aspects of our society that we could keep in mind: a) the people have largely retained their simplicity, friendliness and openness; b) there is a Christian atmosphere in the major part of the area where we work. Even people who are not yet baptised into the church remain open to Christianity; c) there is great appreciation for the contribution our Congregation has made to the people of this area. They have high regard and respect for us.

1.2 Negative elements

1.2.1 Traumatic rate of transition

The pace of evolution that modern society has set itself is so high that communities all over the world are in a state of 'future shock'. In a place like Northeast India where we have crammed centuries of normal change into a period of about two generations, and where even today people of different centuries seem to be living side by side, the contrasts among various sections of people are straining the fabric of society to the limits.

Towns and cities hold out promises and the young rush there in search of education, jobs and a future, never to return to their village. The gulf between our villages and towns is widening day by day even as more and more people get educated and find gainful employment, but almost only in towns.

The young are caught up in the trauma of this unprecedented turmoil in every aspect of our life. The result is confusion, a tendency to withdraw inward, a nostalgia for the past that is more mythical than real since they have only heard or read about it, impatience with our society's inability to keep pace with the rest of the world, and uncertainty in the choice they have to make between the thrills and risks presented by the frenetic pace of ultramodern western culture and the secure but placid tempo of our rich, ancient civilization.

1.2.2 A breakdown of social/community systems, values and attitudes.

We have been unable to imitate the example of Japan or Korea, where the people have modernised their economies without throwing out their culture, principles and traditions. In those countries they have absorbed good western values such as time-consciousness, work culture and the dignity of labour, combining them with their good traditional values such as respect for elders and for the law, self-control, community spirit, etc. We seem to have embraced the worst of both worlds. Once upon a time religion or social control was the moderating force. Today this is no longer the case. Our English education and boarding life have contributed to the cultural uprootedness of our young people by moving them away from their families and villages.

Following on the lead given by the Greek philosophers, Plato, Aristotle and Socrates, the West decided long ago on the primacy of the individual over the group. The East, instead, has for millennia given precedence to the society over the individual. The young person growing up in an Eastern culture but coming under the unrelenting pressure from Western values is torn between the two. At home and in the community he prefers to play, mingle, socialise, merge with the average, be like everyone else. At school he is urged to compete, win, excel, distinguish himself, stand out.

The young student or worker in Mumbai or Delhi will burn the midnight oil before his examinations, do a job on the side, or earn an additional diploma or certificate in his spare time. The young person in Northeast India would spend the entire night with his peers completing an urgent work for the community. But it would be difficult to motivate him to work extra in order to excel in his studies or his personal work.

The society looks on aghast at those individuals holding power whether the 'legitimate' political power or the 'illegitimate' gun-power who mouths the Eastern values of serving the people while actually acting according to the Western values of individual profit. We are confused; we do not know what to make of it.

These tensions are felt by the young more than by the old and they also are the ones most affected by them. The tug-of-war between the society and the individual, between competition and collaboration, between benevolent despotism and anarchical democracy is yet to be decided in favour of one or the other.

1.2.3 Emergence of classes within our society

A disturbing element of our society in transition is the emergence of a class system within communities that used to be very democratic and egalitarian. The newly rich, powerful, educated class is as ruthlessly exploitative of their lowly compatriots as the traditional higher castes are elsewhere in our country.

1.2.4 No governance

A lot of the problems faced by all sections of our society can be attributed to the lack of a legitimate authority to take decisions and enforce them. Militant groups have taken the law into their own hands with impunity and they enforce their dictates at will. Today even students unions, clubs and associations are filling the vacuum left by a non-governing government. Duly elected governments seem unable to govern take decisions, maintain law and order, provide justice, and accomplish developmental work that benefit the general public.

1.2.5 Xenophobia

Almost every language in our area has a special word for people who do not belong to our ethnic or language group, and it is used derogatively. Outsiders are viewed with fear or suspicion. They frequently become the first targets in any moment of tension. Tribal loyalty is such that we lay ourselves open to questioning whether we believe in objective truth, justice, right and wrong.

1.2.6 Corruption

Perhaps the greatest reason for the sense of frustration among the young is corruption, which, like an octopus, has spread its tentacles

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into every sector of human activity in the region. There is a lack of transparency in the functioning of the government and of the private sector. The conviction is widespread that everything is up for sale, and available only at a price. People feel that merit has no value and is not rewarded. It is alleged that, whether it be opportunities for employment, studies, representation of the State in sports and games or anything else, the beneficiaries seem to be those with money, family connections and political power.

The results of more than one 'admission test' or 'selection process' have been held up by court cases instituted by rejected parties. Even official statistics show that people have been shot dead by militant groups for indulging in corruption. Several others have been shot in the leg and others forced to resign their jobs for the same crime. There are accusations of corruption even for recruitment into the armed forces.

The feeling that there is inequality in opportunities among various communities, ethnic groups, districts, and within the same community itself is spreading. There is a sense of frustration, and total hopelessness and helplessness in getting one's rights; and this is leading to violence.

What makes the situation more tragic is the fact that children are helped by their own parents to use unfair means in examinations and to 'buy' lucrative government jobs, thus washing out all the values and principles of honesty they were taught in their childhood at home and at school.

1.2.7 Climate of violence

Violence is all pervading, and the young are seen as perpetrators of violence more than as its victims. Our young people are growing up in an environment of violence.

A) Secessionist violence

The violence in our region has many root causes.

Armed insurgency contributes the greater part of the violence around. A lot of murders in Northeast India are committed by 'unidentified assailants'. A lot of kidnappings are not reported to the police, but are negotiated by private individuals and organisations. Most extortion goes by the name of 'tax collection' or 'donations'. On numerous occasions when people have been killed by the security

forces, the local people complain that they were not encounter deaths but murders after the militants had been arrested or surrendered, but no official complaints are filed, and hence they do not enter the records as accusations of 'faked encounters'.

There is a section of the population who feel that soon after the country attained her independence, she used the might of a powerful nation and the lack of awareness of the general public at the time to force the people of the region to surrender their separate identity more than ought to have been done. They find justification for this position in the history, race, culture, language and geography of the region. However small or large this group might be, not enough has been done to address their grievances.

There are numerous instances of young people becoming agents of violence because they were first victims of violence. The problem of insurgency has been met by strengthening the security forces in numbers, the quality of their arms and the exceptional powers given to them. Every insurgent killed or forced to disappear has given birth to half-a-dozen others. So has each young person who has been humiliated, beaten up, tortured or otherwise harassed.

Numerous young people of the region have had the embarrassing and painful experience of being treated as foreigners in their own land. Travelling, studying or working even a short distance out of Northeast India they come across people who do not recognize them as Indians and treat them with disdain or contempt, stereotyping them and using racist language. This has created a strong sense of alienation.

There is a feeling of neglect and indifference from the rest of the country. Money has been poured in, perhaps, but even this is seen as the result of a patronising attitude, a refusal to address the real grievances of the people and an attempt to buy or bribe them into submission.

Once a person has joined an armed group it is extremely difficult to come out again when they get disillusioned with it because they would be putting their very life at risk from their former comrades in arms, and because those who have already surrendered are left to languish in pitiable conditions.

Frustration. corruption, nepotism, favouritism, ethnic loyalties, inequality of opportunities, lack of value for hard work and merit,

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diversion of funds meant for development to the benefit of powerful individuals and groups, etc., have made young people lose their trust in all existing structures of the government. They feel that these institutions have failed to provide even the bare minimum of the services they ought to. The situation of government schools, hospitals, infrastructure, etc., is well known. Two more examples, rather less known, will suffice.

While the number of employment exchanges has grown the number of candidates placed in appointment has fallen. In Manipur only 2 people found employment through the employment exchanges in 2000-01 and nil in 2001-2002.

The inspector general of prisons reports in Manipur that the judicial system handed out 420 convictions in 1970-71, there were only 29 in 1995-96, 5 in 2000-01 and 7 in 2001-2002. It is self-evident why people see violence as the only way to get justice. We have reached the stage where a militant group formed in Manipur in 2002 does not intend demanding independence or secession, but instead wants to wage an armed conflict to win respect for human rights!

B) Violence between ethnic groups

A lot of the violence in the region in the last two decades has been between various ethnic groups. This is a break from the traditions of this area. There once reigned great harmony among our numerous communities. We had institutions of an emotional nature, through which people, though having no ties of blood, were bound together through bonds of undying friendship and brotherhood.

There was also an economic interdependence. Good quality cotton was grown in the hills. It was brought down to the plains to be spun into thread and then distributed all over the entire region to be made into cloth. All the trade among the various communities took place in the plains, even of cows and buffaloes.

In those days the relationship was also feudal in nature and involved attitudes of superior-inferior and advanced-backward. Education and democracy demand a change in these attitudes, and that has been slower in coming. Hence a sense of resentment has developed.

Positive discrimination is good and useful, but it has not yet solved the problem because it can deal only with the economic situation and not the emotional attitudes.

The feelings of distrust have only widened in the recent past. Tribals complain of step motherly treatment and diversion of funds. Non-tribals complain of reservations and quotas for tribals that enable them to get into positions closed even to those better qualified among them. This sense of alienation and feelings of rivalry are perhaps the biggest immediate challenges facing the region today.

Besides the exceptional violence born of insurgency and inter-ethnic conflicts, the society has the other types of violence that is considered 'normal' in all human communities, perhaps at a little higher rate than elsewhere, but a much deeper comparative analysis of data from the whole country would be needed to be certain of this.

Elders in society admit today with great regret that at the time of tension in the recent past they encouraged the youth towards ethnic exclusiveness and urged them to take up arms to defend the village. They recognize that this resulted in the lowering of the educational environment of the juniors, created in the youth a false sense of power that flows from the barrel of a gun and developed a taste for the thrills of risk taking.

They have also seen kidnapping and extortion as an easy source of income with very little danger involved, and no work at all. They also see themselves as modern day Robin Hoods, feeling that they are only seeking justice, creating a more egalitarian society, punishing the class of exploiters, etc. Once violence becomes remunerative, and a habit for it is developed, it is as difficult to give it up as any other addiction. Members of militant groups have also the disincentive of the fear of retribution from former colleagues. They see that companions of theirs who gave up violence have not been able to live a normal life, let alone improve their economic situation. They are indeed caught between the proverbial devil and the deep sea.

1.2.8 Economic backwardness

In spite of decades of 'special' treatment given to the Northeast, the region remains economically backward. There are no industries worth the name. We do not have raw materials in quantities that are large enough to make large-scale industries viable. Insufficient electricity and other sources of power is another reason for low

industrialisation. Geographical isolation and the poor transport facilities makes investment unattractive. The law and order situation makes it impossible.

Agriculture is primitive and in the hills it can only be labelled subsistence agriculture particularly in the case of jhum cultivation. Lack of roads to large markets within and without the region is a block to the mechanised, large-scale production of any agricultural goods.

1.2.9 Poor facilities for education

In comparison to the other States of the country educational standards have been falling. There are no top-rated educational institutions in the area. All those who need 'quality education' need to go elsewhere. Enormous financial resources are flowing out of the region to pay for the education of children and young people in other States of India.

1.2.10 Easy money NGO/projects-culture

Everyone in our society seems to be on the lookout for easy money. Even farmers and villagers have learned that it is more rewarding to go from office to office looking for 'projects' and 'schemes' from the government than to sweat it out in productive work in one's fields or elsewhere. Our welfare State has helped destroy our traditional work culture. Our region has a very high density of NGOs, most of which consist of members of the same family, and carry out various 'projects', mostly on paper.

1.3 Other characteristics of our youth

Besides all the positive characteristics of this period in the life of all human beings everywhere their dynamism, optimism, energy, vitality, idealism, etc. the youth of Northeast India today have other particularly notable qualities: resilience, readiness for sacrifice, spirit of collaboration, courage, self-confidence, pride and an ambitious nature. They are highly talented in sports and games, culture and the arts.

On the negative side we find them easy-going, lacking in self-discipline and a work-ethic, emotional, insecure outside of their own 'territory', easily influenced, quickly frustrated, fatalistic, on the look-out for easy money, quick-fix solutions and instant satisfaction, confused as to their identity and having impossible expectations from everyone else.

Political parties, ethnic leaders and people with vested interests have exploited and manipulated young people for their own ends. They have been used as cannon fodder in all our movements and campaigns. They are easily worked up by adults with vested interests in favour of one or another emotional issue and the young become martyrs for other people's struggles.

They now claim for themselves the leadership role in all areas, including some that are beyond their competence. They wish to decide what is good for themselves and everyone in the State. When the legitimately established authority does not carry out their decisions they take it upon themselves to do that, too, including through the use of muscle power. The rest of society frowns on this, but apparently has not been able to do anything about it so far.

2. Contribution of the youth to society

Traditionally our society was controlled by a system that was labelled 'Asiatic despotism'. The elders took decisions and the youth had to accept their final word. But there was provision of adequate space for the youth. Youngsters had freedom to organize themselves. There existed a good reciprocity in the relationship between society and the youth. They contributed to society especially through sports, culture and work. The society gave them recognition by showing them respect, and acknowledging them as 'good', 'respectful of elders', 'doing good work', 'modest', etc.

Young people had their 'morungs' in the hills and equivalent institutions in some of the communities of the plains through which they received their formation as well as found their space to contribute to society. This initiation into society instilled a fine combination of competition and co-operation into the youth. They organised social dancing where young men and women met and interacted, and held competitions in games and sports. There was the informal social institution where boys came together in the evenings in the local ground. Some played games, others gossiped and discussed various topics including politics. They organised volunteers who did social work and provided material help and support in each other's work. Young women organised co-operative work like spinning thread.

The youth are still responsible for the construction of the community hall pandal for any religious, social or cultural function in the village or any family. They see to the organization of all such occasions.

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With this cultural background the youth of today take to clubs, unions and associations as ducks to the water. They organize themselves and lead all cultural, religious and social functions with ease. They have become agents of awareness building and social change. They are in the forefront of all movements and campaigns. They provide leadership and manpower for all social work in the villages and neighbourhoods. They have earned numerous laurels in the field of sports and games at national and international meets. The elder children in most families take charge of the education of their younger siblings. This has become possible because they have a higher qualification and a better employment than their parents.

The greatest contributions of the youth of our region to our society has been in four areas sports and games, arts and culture, social movements (like the AASU's, for example) and in voluntary service to society on special occasions and emergencies.

3. Problems of the youth

3.1 Unemployment

There was a time when every educated person found a government job. As the number of the educated grew, corruption, favouritism and nepotism crept in, with every appointment going to the highest bidder rather than to the best qualified. In Manipur today there are over 4.5 lakh educated people registered at the employment exchanges in the State out of a population of 23 lakhs in Assam, 1.5 million. It is estimated that the educated unemployment level is over 40% in Nagaland.

The situation of unemployment is bound to grow worse. All State governments are now bloated. After the implementation of the recommendations of the fifth pay commission the States are unable to raise enough resources to pay their present employees. There is a ban on fresh recruitment. Instead, efforts are on for down-sizing. Private investment in the Northeast has always been negligible and will continue to be so for a while for a variety of reasons: the paucity of industrial raw material, the poor infra-structure for transport, communication and power, insurgency, the law and order situation, etc.

There are a lot of people from the region who have found employment with the central services and various private enterprises elsewhere, though our contribution is low when compared to most

other States. Most of these passed out from schools after 1990 and had opportunities to study outside the region. This also means that the beneficiaries belong to the elite. This has caused further dissatisfaction among the youth who would like to see an equality of opportunities for all.

Those who did all of their studies within Northeast India are reluctant to leave their home territory for emotional reasons. Often there is also a lack of self-confidence to launch out beyond the region. Some tend to see the emigration of talented and qualified youth from the States as a loss in the form of a brain drain.

Others hope that these young people abroad will remain emotionally attached to their own people and return one day with greater expertise, and the capital to invest here. Only the families of this Diaspora have so far benefited from this emigration through the remittances they make from their earnings. Investment by them is hampered, they say, by the law and order problem. This same problem is a block to investment even by the enterprises they work for. Besides, the tedious procedures to be completed if any foreign national is to visit the States that comprise the province of Dimapur discourage all such attempts.

The lack of access to credit is also a major block to self-employment within the region itself. Banks give credit only to established businessmen, people with a steady salary and those who have solid collateral. They do not give loans for government-sponsored self-employment schemes because of our society's extreme concept of the welfare States. The rate of recovery of such loans is very low because people do not feel the need of repaying money borrowed from the government. Many creditors would not be in a position to repay the loan, even if they wanted to, because, often enough, the money they borrowed was not put to any productive enterprise but into one-time consumption. In some government schemes tools for particular jobs are distributed to educated unemployed individuals, even to those without the skills needed for these jobs because they are the only schemes available at the moment.

There is a strong feeling that there is discrimination within the employment that is, in fact, available.

3.2 Inadequate educational services

The problem of educated unemployment is closely related to the nature of the education the young people receive. This continues to be mostly in the line of general academics with negligible attention to vocationalisation, very limited facilities for professional courses and a lack of any emphasis on self-reliance and entrepreneurship. Vocationalisation of education has been attempted at the +2 level, but with little success. The charm of white-collar jobs has failed to fade away since their earnings are so vastly superior to those of skilled labour.

There are three other aspects of this problem of inadequate educational services that should concern us, Salesians. One is that despite all the efforts of the government, of the Church, the Salesians, other individuals and NGO's, there still are lots of villages in our area that do not have any sort of schools at all.

The second is that the quality education we and other private parties offer is beyond the reach of vast sections of the population.

The third is that we have not succeeded so far to improve the quality of education offered by the schools around us. For most part of our history we did almost nothing in this regard. We have done something in the last few years, but we have not reached very far yet.

3.3 Dropouts

Dropout rates in the Northeast are alarming. In Assam, in the year 1999-2000, it was 69.81% between class 1 and 8, in Arunachal 64.92, in Nagaland 40.27 and in Manipur 43.08. These young people are without skills, remain jobless and misfits in society as they do not like to return to the land, but are unable to do anything else. They are good material for the recruiters of militant groups.

3.4 Child labour

We certainly do not have millions of children working in factories of various sorts as we find in Tamilnadu, Rajasthan and elsewhere. But the problem is not unknown in our area. There are children working in the tea gardens, in repair workshops, in restaurants and tea-stalls, and as servants in the houses of people and babysitters in families. Many of these children are exploited in various ways, and almost all of them receive no form of education whatsoever.

3.5 Lack of guidance

This element is one of the reasons for the problems of education and employment. All those in the schools, just go ahead with their general education with no apparent analysis of their own aptitudes and the needs of the labour market. Often they merely choose streams of study that demand the least effort. They end up with qualifications that make them capable of working only as clerks in offices or teachers in schools. They do not possess the skills required by the specialised jobs available today. Their own parents and teachers lack knowledge of the fast changing scenario in the country beyond the Northeast. Hence they are not in a position to guide the children in their choice of study and career.

3.6 Lack of exposure

The poor means of communications between the Northeast and the rest of the country have kept the entire population almost isolated from all that is taking place beyond our area. They are more in contact with the fantasies presented by the television through their Hollywood and Bollywood films than with the reality of the situation. This circumstance makes career guidance and counselling even more imperative.

Our young people lack the benefits from greater exposure. A music contest among bands from the Northeast organised at Delhi by Arun Shourie in the last days of April 2003 was an eye-opener for most of the participants. There is a need to make our region, people and culture better known and recognised all over the vast country and expose our youth to the realities beyond the Northeast. Youth exchange programmes could be organized. Mutual knowledge will lead to mutual respect.

3.7 Substance abuse

A section of the older generation of Northeast India had the habit of smoking ganja and eating opium. The use of drugs started in the 70's with tablets, LSD, Mandrake, etc. In the 80's the youth went in for these as a consequence of the hippie cult, flower children, etc. Around the year 1980 brown sugar and heroin came into use. These things were easily available since we are on the transit route to the metros from the Golden Triangle further to the South-East of us. So we had a serious addiction problem here even before it had reached the cities of India. The most common of the recent fads are inhalation of dendrite and injections of Spasmo Proxyvon.

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Curiosity, boredom, the search for thrills, ignorance of the power and devastating consequences of addiction, and peer pressure are the forces that spread the malaise. Children as young as 11 years are becoming abusers. Parents have no time to spend with their pre-adolescent and adolescent children. They are busy with their job or with looking for one. The bonds within our traditional joint families have loosened. But we remain tradition bound as regards taboos on discussing with children matters of importance to them in their period of growth and development. Children are left very much to fend for themselves. Often only their peer group meets their need for attention and for a sense of belonging. To gain acceptance youngsters do almost anything. Once they are hooked not even the fear of death can stop them from taking drugs.

When the children are still in school they are closely followed up by their parents and their teachers. They receive no training for a responsible use of a gradually increased freedom. When they leave school and go to college, the style of relationship with the teaching staff is totally different. Parents, too, do not follow them up any more, feeling that they are grown up enough. The sudden absence of any sort of supervision, presence, and attention leads to addictions.

Among women there is another interesting phenomenon. Some girls/women have a boyfriend/husband who is addicted and confesses that he is not able to give up his habit. The women argue that what is lacking is only a strong will power and determination. To prove their point they themselves start taking drugs with the intention of giving it up later as a model for their loved one. Finally they too end up as addicts, unable to get out of the abuse.

Frustration and a sense of hopelessness due to the lack of a job or other reasons is another cause. The family background also contributes. Broken families, parents who have divorced or been widowed and remarried, alcoholic parents, parents who do not give adequate care, time and attention to their children, parents who are too rigid and strict or too 'loving' and weak, parents who do not discipline their children as they grow up, parents who are inconsistent in the discipline they impose, parents to whom children find it difficult to talk (unless they get a high first), the combination of a large family and a weak economic situation - these are the characteristics of the families of most addicts.

There are no counsellors or role models for young people, and no one they can go to for reliable information, guidance and advice. They listen to each other, copy one another, and fall into the same mistakes.

Recreational facilities are very limited. There are no amusement parks and theme parks that abound elsewhere in the country. Young people have no places where they can gather socialise and relax through healthy, wholesome activities under proper supervision. So they meet clandestinely and experiment with all that tickles their curiosity.

In 1994/95 some insurgent groups started shooting drug addicts. This led to an apparent reduction in substance abuse whereas there actually was only a reduction in the reporting of cases of addiction. Some NGOs succeeded to persuade the militants that killing addicts was not the right approach. They stopped shooting and started sending them to rehabilitation centres. The government and numerous NGOs are engaged in preventive and remedial action but we are nowhere close to eradicating the problem. Instead, all indications are that drug addiction is on the increase.

Alcoholism is a far greater and more widespread instance of substance-abuse than drug addiction. It does not draw an equal amount of attention, preventive care and curative treatment because alcohol consumption is socially accepted. The lack of reliable data about it is itself a sign of our neglect of the problem.

It is true that by the time the 'alcoholic' stage is reached the individual is generally beyond the 'youth' category. Nevertheless it is a youth problem because the habit is picked up at a very young age. Even preadolescents consume alcohol at parties, picnics, etc., at times without even incurring the displeasure of their parents, but with serious consequences to their academic career. There is no doubt whatever that misuse of alcohol is at the root of much of the problem of drop-outs, unemployables, teenage pregnancies, premature marriages, broken families and poverty stricken households.

3.8 HIV/AIDS

As in the case of substance abuse, the region has been leading the nation also in the spread of HIV/AIDS. Manipur has 0.2% of India's

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population and 8% of her total HIV positive cases. It is the third State in the country (after Maharashtra and Tamilnadu) in the number of victims. When looked at the rate per million people, Manipur is the worst, and its situation is 6 times worse than Maharashtra's and 20 times that of Tamilnadu. The early victims were injecting drug users. This ultra-vulnerable group was targeted by awareness programmes, and yet the latest sero-surveillance (January 2003) a sero-prevalence of 59.84% was found among the IDUs, which is one of the highest in the world. In the mean time the disease has spread to the general public. The spread of the virus through sex and from mother to child has been growing rapidly. The government and numerous NGOs are active in spreading awareness about the problem. But there is no improvement in the situation. The number of HIV positive cases reported has grown. The number of deaths due to AIDS has also increased. The stigma attached to this dreaded disease refuses to go away, and that has not contributed to an open discussion of it and prevention of its further spread.

Suffice it here to draw our attention to two facts: a) 8.43% of all HIV positive cases in the Manipur fall in the 11-20 year group, 55.51% in the 21-30 year group and 26.71% in the 31-40 year group; b) the highly emotional nature of our young people has made its contribution to the problem. It is not unknown for young people to have unprotected sex, or even to cut each other intentionally and mingle one another's blood. This is done not out of ignorance, but as a show of unconditional love and blind trust.

The situation in Ngaland is not far below that of Manipur. Assam and Arunachal are better off, but there is no doubt that it will get worse before it stabilises.

3.9 Lack of self-discipline

The hills used to have their 'morungs' (dormitories for unmarried boys and girls). Some societies in the plains too had corresponding institutions. The Meeteis had the pakhang phan (bachelors' dormitory) and leishabi phan (maidens' dormitory).

Parents loved, petted and spoilt their children till they were old enough to be admitted into the morung. The older members of the morung trained the younger ones in discipline and taught them traditional values such as courage, honesty, hard work, community spirit, sacrifice on behalf of the common good, etc. Today the

morungs are gone, the parents have remained indulgent as before, and schools (and even our boardings) have not been able to fill the vacuum. Young people are unable to set priorities, control the need for immediate satisfaction of their drives and desires, or make sacrifices for long term goals. In short, they lack the self-discipline that is needed if they are to achieve true greatness.

3.10 Teenage pregnancies and premature marriage

One of the things that young people are unable to control and direct is the sex drive. Human beings are physically most fit at the age of eighteen. The lack of self-discipline drives them to experiment with sex before they have completed the long process of education that today's labour market demands. They indulge in sex before they are ready to support a family. Teenage pregnancies, premature marriage, and even infection with HIV are the unfortunate results.

The young person in the West would not consider marriage or children before he has a secure job because he has to bear alone the entire responsibility for the family he would start. The young person in Northeast India, even in his teens, may beget children because of the security provided by his extended family and clan.

3.11 Uncritical consumption of the mass media

Through the mass media we are aware of the pleasures and luxuries that money could bring us, but we do not have the wherewithal to enjoy these. We are exposed to images of the standards of living of the most advanced countries, knowing for certain that neither we, nor our children, will ever achieve that quality of life. The youth have unrealistic expectations from a welfare State that has gone bankrupt, and is unable to meet their aspirations. The mass media, particularly the visual media television and videos have influenced our young people at least in three directions sexual licentiousness, violence and consumerism. Young people want quick fix solutions and immediate gratification of their desires. The consequence is a general restlessness among all the youth, particularly the 'educated' ones among them. We have some of the fruits of the latest technology without having understood how to use them for our genuine benefit.

3.12 Consumerism

This characteristic deserves separate mention as it is not merely the result of an uncritical consumption of the mass media; it lies also at the root of a lot of frustration, violence and other forms of crime.

3.13 Secularisation

All our people are deeply religious by nature and culture. If anything, the tendency is greater towards fundamentalism. Secularisation is now not just creeping in; it is rushing in. I hope I am wrong, but my impression is that our catholic youth are more affected by secularism than the young people of any other community perhaps because of our own very liberal values and style of life.

3.14 Lack of recreational facilities

One of the shocking realities of the Northeast is the almost total lack of facilities for leisure time activities, entertainment and relaxation for the general public and for the young in particular. In most of our major towns the only means of relaxation is the cinema. The ban on Hindi films enforced in Manipur has forced the closure of cinema halls. In Kohima there just isn't any cinema hall at all. The result is a mushrooming of video parlours where most of the films screened are of the pornographic variety with predictable results. We need not even refer to the (lack of) recreational facilities in villages.

How many zoos do we have? How many parks and theme parks? How many dancing floors or discotheques, places with possibilities for playing indoor games, traditional and modern ones? Where can the young go to have a chat among themselves? What facilities do we have for a little social life outside of the family?

People have no outlets whatever. The only place where they can relax in safety is their own home. No one, especially no young person, likes to remain locked up in his own house 24 hours a day, day after day, week after week.

If you travel the 55 kilometres or so from Chennai to Mamallapuram, you would pass by a crocodile bank, several beach resorts, a number of speciality kitchens, the Dizzee World, the Dolphin City, the Water World, a Water Sports facility, the Merryland, a snake park, and the Little Folks amusement park. Not even one of our towns can boast of even one facility that approaches any of these opportunities for amusement.

3.15 Lack of role models

There is no doubt whatever that the youth of our area are influenced by their heroes and heroines just as much as their peers elsewhere. Unfortunately there are no ideal role models for them to look up to within range of their personal acquaintance.

3.16 Identity crisis

This is a fundamental problem of our youth. It comes in the wake of all the changes that are taking place in every field and amidst the confusion of nationalistic movements mushrooming in the region. “Who am I? Am I a Moyon? Am I a Naga? A North-Easterner? An Indian? A Christian? What is my identity? What is expected of me? Where do my loyalties lie? Should I be proud or ashamed of who I am? In which direction are we going? What have I to look forward to?”

This looks like pure speculation and theoretical philosophising. But it is a fact that the uncertainties and insecurity our young people are immersed in are having a telling effect on them.

4. Salesian response

4.1 Schools, higher secondary school, colleges

Salesians have responded to the situation in our well-known, traditional, efficient style. We have found the material resources to establish numerous schools, Higher Secondary Schools and Colleges. A detailed study of this response is presented in two other papers at this seminar.

4.2 Non-formal, job-oriented vocational formation

There is a full paper on this topic and I shall not go into it.

4.3 Youth work through parishes

Since the Northeast was and still is an area where the work of first evangelisation is still fruitful, we have done a lot of work for the youth through our parishes. This, too, is looked at in two other papers at this seminar.

4.4 Youth centres, oratories, groups and movements, work of DBYES

This is yet another area of our youth work that has been treated in a paper of its own.

4.5 Intensive course

There are many children in our villages who never go to school or drop out after a couple of years of schooling in a local government school. The reasons could be lack of interest on the part of the parents and children or the total ineffectiveness of the school. When these children reach the age of ten or above, they compare themselves to their peers who have gone to private schools and have continued their studies, and they regret the fact that they did not study more. They would like to start studying once again.

By this time these children have a far more developed brain than our normal nursery or KG children. They do not need the time required by our four-year-olds to learn the basics of the language or of Mathematics. The normal school system has no provision for the special requirements of this group. If they are put into the nursery or KG class, they feel shy because they are far bigger than their classmates. They find classes very boring as they learn things much faster than the rest of the class. They would be far too old by the time they would complete high school.

In an intensive course, only boys and girls of this category are put together and they have classes only in Mathematics and the languages. In a short period of time they are able to change from nursery books to KG books, and on to class I books, etc., the change of syllabus limited only by their own speed of learning. It has been found that within one year of such intensive coaching students can be prepared to join the regular school in class III to V.

During this one year the children are not made to study subjects like Geography, History, etc. The principle behind this is that up to class V or so children are only being equipped with the tools for learning other subjects. All these other subjects are meant merely to improve their mastery over the language.

This system was experimented within Tamenglong for the first time in 1989. It has later been used in Imphal, Maram and perhaps elsewhere too. The system has given a new future to numerous children who otherwise would have been 'lost' in various ways. Some children who were rescued in this fashion have gone on to become nuns and nurses. This year one of them has completed her MSW with honours.

4.6 Bible school at Tinsukia

The principle of the Intensive Course is actually what has been in practice also at this institution, in as much as anyone who came to the school was automatically placed in 'class VI' even if he/she had studied nothing till then. With intensive coaching over a period of five years they were prepared to write the Matriculation examination. What is an additional feature of the Bible School is that within these five years the students also make a thorough study of the entire Bible, enabling them to become effective missionaries in their neighbourhood.

4.7 Slum schools

Fr T O Sebastian is the pioneer of these schools and they are functioning in three of the poorest localities of Dimapur. Children who are too poor to attend regular schools get their first opportunity to learn something through these schools.

4.8 Literacy programme

The students of Salesian College, Dimapur, have been able to motivate young people in and around Dimapur to dedicate a part of their free time to give the poorest children in their neighbourhood the possibility to learn at least to read and write.

At Imphal the literacy programme has become a mammoth multi-pronged operation. Alongside the literacy classes, the other 'prongs' in our strategy are: organising the mothers of these children into self-help-groups, matching grants for start-ups of income generating projects, animation programmes in a number of regular schools, a regular service of counselling in several schools, a youth centre, prevention of substance abuse and HIV/AIDS, free distribution of healthy literature to students and young people, etc.

There are 32 groups of children benefiting from this programme making a total of over 800 children. The effort is to provide a basic minimum of education to children who are in the normal school going age, but who are actually not attending any school at all, mostly due to poverty.

The principle in play here is that we should not wait for children to come to school. Let the school go to the children. Classes are conducted in a room or veranda of the house of the teacher. The subjects taught are Manipuri, English and Arithmetic. In the process of language learning, children also learn some science, geography,

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etc. A lot of emphasis is given to values such as health, hygiene, cleanliness, good habits, honesty, etc.

The number of students in a batch varies from 15 to 40. They belong to different age groups. The teacher tries to follow up each group according to the level they have achieved. Since the students come from the immediate neighbourhood the teacher knows each child and his/her background very closely and gives each one the attention he/she needs.

Students are not required to bring textbooks, nor are they in uniform. Each teacher gets a complete set of the books prescribed by the States board of education for this age group. We provide classes, but no notebooks or pencils. We do not want the children nor their parents developing total dependence on us; we want them to have the dignity of contributing at least something to their education.

Teachers have no special qualifications, but are closely followed up by well-educated animators. They receive some formation once a month, and a longer training every few months.

The biggest single beneficiary community is that of the Muslims. The teachers are supervised and assisted by nine animators under the direction of one project manager or coordinator.

The method we are following has several advantages:

1. The children do not have to go far to reach their 'school'.
2. There are no expenses for the transport of children to and from school, nor for textbooks nor for uniforms.
3. Reasons for absenteeism are substantially removed.
4. Parents are not worried about the risks of accidents on the roads.
5. Parents are not reluctant to send girls to a family in their own neighbourhood.
6. The children's classmates are the same as their playmates at home. Hence there are fewer problems of 'eve-teasing' (sexual harassment) or bullying.
7. Teachers know each child and its family intimately.
8. Teachers belong to the same community as the students tribe/caste, language, religion, etc.
9. Teachers are almost never absent.
10. There is absolutely no expense on buildings, playgrounds, toilets, or other infra-structure.
11. There are no problems of indiscipline associated with crowds of children coming together.

There are some disadvantages, too:

1. Children do not get enough exposure to other communities.
2. They have only 2 to 3 hours of class per day.
3. Not using 'textbooks' limits learning to an extent.
4. Some centres do not have enough light, a clean and dry space, toilets, nor space for games.
5. Children interact with only one teacher.
6. The teachers are not specially qualified for this type of teaching process.
7. Supervision is difficult due to distances between centres.

Nevertheless, we do consider our work a success, deserving to continue and to expand. Here is evidence of success:

1. About 240 children who were formerly not going to any school at all, have this year taken admission into regular schools.
2. Some of these children have been selected to be 'class-captains' or 'monitors' or leaders in the classes they have joined.
3. The older children have started also learning some job-skills, motivated by the teachers and animators.
4. The parents respond positively whenever we call them for meetings.
5. The mothers have embraced the idea of forming self-help groups among themselves to improve their family situation in every sense.
6. Children participate enthusiastically in all 'co-curricular' programmes, visits and activities we organise.
7. People from the public have come forward with assistance blackboards for new centres, clothes, shoes, books, pencils and other items for the children, snacks for the children on special occasions, chairs, tents, sound systems and other equipment for special celebrations, etc. One person from the public has started paying the salaries of two teachers.
8. Though we have made no efforts for publicity, we have been reported about on the local cable television network a number of times.
9. There are numerous and regular requests for opening up new centres. It is with difficulty that we maintain a controlled, planned pace of growth.
10. In some areas where we started literacy centres, government institutions like anganwadis have suddenly revived.

4.9 Evening classes

Another initiative attempted in a few places is to hold classes in the regular schools after the normal school hours in the same classrooms as the regular school. The poorest children of the neighbourhood are invited to attend these classes.

4.10 Coaching for failed matric students

In some instances this is an activity after the results are announced and before the students write their compartmentals or make their second attempt. At least in one institution Kohima's Youth Centre this has become a regular programme, offering a full year of classes before the students repeat their examinations.

4.11 Scholarships for intelligent, economic poor children

The province itself and several institutions and even individuals offer scholarships to a very large number of students at all levels.

4.12 Training of teachers

We now have a full-fledged B. Ed. College. Also, practically everyone of our schools conducts at least one training programme every year for all the teachers. In the last several years we have offered similar training programmes to teachers of other Catholic schools, other private schools and even government schools. A magazine is published regularly in order to follow up the teachers who have been trained by us.

4.13 Leadership of diocesan youth programmes

In at least two of the dioceses of our region the guidance of the diocesan youth programme was entrusted to us. We have responded effectively, organising a vast number of camps, retreats, and other types of training programmes for parish youth groups.

4.14 Scout troops and other groups and movements

Most of our schools have scout troops and guide companies. We have also been the agents for the formation and training of scout troops in numerous other schools of our area. Mini-Boscorees, bringing together scouts and guides from troops and companies associated with us have been held annually¹.

4.15 Scoutmasters' training

We have also rendered an invaluable service to scouting in the region by conducting an annual training of scoutmasters. It is open to all those who are interested in this activity².

4.16 Special camps for the youth such as STAR, RUNWAYS

This area will also be treated in depth in another paper. These programmes have served to motivate and form the youth³. There is a magazine published by DBYES to follow up the trainees.

4.17 Vocation promotion

This also has to be considered a youth service⁴.

4.18 Promotion of self-help-groups

This is a major activity of AIDA, DBYES and other institutions in various parts of the province. Since it is a well known concept I do not go into the details of it here. Self-Help-Groups have been found to be effective in improving the incomes of families as well as in empowering women and transforming society in various ways⁵.

4.19 Matching grants or partial loans for income generation activities

On a minor and experimental scale we have given out loans ranging from Rs 500 up to a maximum of Rs 8,000 to carefully selected deserving individuals to help them start some income generating activities. This, too, will be treated in the paper from AIDA⁶.

4.20 Guidance and counselling

We have introduced counselling services available on a regular basis to the high school students in at least three of our regular schools, with excellent results so far. At least in one instance a full time counsellor has been employed and her services made available free of charge to a number of schools run by private individuals and NGO's. DBYES is also engaged in career guidance⁷.

4.21 Formation of educated unemployed (unemployables) finishing course

A lot of young people with certificates, diplomas, degrees and other official qualifications are quite unemployable because they lack

the polished skills demanded by the job market of today. Yet, certain elements in the culture, nature and education of the people of Northeast are in great demand in the national and even international markets. Unfortunately the official 'finishing schools' are far too expensive and, in fact, do not exist in our area. We have conducted a one-month programme in this line with partial success satisfactory for a first attempt. There are plans to expand these services if we could find the funds to subsidise the courses since the resource persons for this level of training need to be paid well.

4.22 Prevention of drug abuse and HIV/AIDS

We have entered into this field, in partnership with a few other NGOs. We leave the care of the already addicted, and the already infected to NGOs specialised in those sectors. We are concentrating on our speciality of preventive action, particularly among the young. Convinced that prevention of HIV is primarily an education in life styles, we approach young people to carry forward the message of healthy living in all its aspects. As a part of this programme we distribute to thousands of school children free of charge leaflets on various values in life. This and other services through publications will be dealt with in the paper on our contribution through the mass media.

4.23 One big failure

There is one area of youth concerns where we seem to have made almost no response at all, at least not a positive or a proactive one, i.e., the field of violence. Speaking at the Salesian National Consultation on the Young at Risk, held at Bangalore in 2000, Fr Jerry Thomas of our province had this to say, "We have retreated more and more into our institutions especially in areas where violence has been the most appalling. We have tried to run our schools more efficiently, in the face of all the problems, in the belief that education is the panacea for all the problems of the Northeast."

Our response to violence has been nil, or one of fear, paralysis, retreat and withdrawal.

5. What more could we do?

Considering our limited resources of personnel and finances, we are certainly rendering a wide array of services on a massive scale. And yet, true to our charism as Salesians, children of the visionary

Don Bosco we cannot help asking ourselves, 'What else could we do?'

5.1 Counselling

A start has been made in this area in a few institutions. We ought to do much more. We need to train personnel equipped with counselling techniques as well as armed with a wide range of information of everything under the sun to guide our young people as regards their education and their career. We could render an invaluable service also by guiding adolescents through the processes of their growth in our own institutions and those others around us.

5.2 Catechism, moral science and value education

Salesians of our province have written textbooks of catechism, church history, Bible study and moral science. All of our parishes and schools have catechism classes and moral science classes. At least in one centre a Salesian teaches moral science in a neighbourhood school and catechism in another school (boarding). We could offer ourselves as teachers of these subjects in more of the institutions close to us. We should also be offering specialised training for teachers of Catechism and Moral Science.

5.3 Dropout prevention

The Salesian college at Tirupattur in Tamil Nadu conducts a massive programme to prevent children dropping out of school by arranging free tuitions and supervised study for the weaker students in their neighbourhood. They even offer the children incentives of nutritive food. Perhaps our schools are more geared to producing dropouts than preventing dropouts from our own schools or the other schools near us.

5.4 Coaching weaker students for matric, plus 2, etc.

This is already being done in some centres. The coaching could be for weaker students making their first attempt or failures who are writing their compartmental or redoing the entire set of examinations. As far as possible the programme should be open to students from all schools. These students need personal attention, the tutors should be qualified and experienced, and the fees charged should be as low as possible.

5.5 Scholarships, freeships

We are already helping a lot of students, but mostly for basic education and high school studies. A start has been made towards sponsoring carefully chosen individuals for higher levels of professional qualifications. We could do more of this in a systematic manner targeting particular individuals and areas of formation.

5.6 Nurturing seeds of high potentials

We could select the best one or two students from our own schools and the schools around us and give them every year a specialised programme of a week or two to help them develop all their talents to the full. If we start with the students of class VII or VIII and get the same students year after year we could form them to be leaders for every sphere of human activity.

5.7 Study centres coaching for medical/engineering entrance tests, IIT/IISc/IIM/IAS/ central services, etc

To help confront the unemployment problem we could offer coaching classes. We would need a rich, specialised library, and effective tutors. This could cost a lot; but it would be a great service.

5.8 Finishing school / preparation for interviews

This is another activity to answer to the unemployment problem. Our young people have many qualities that employers at the national level are looking for good quality English, pleasant personality, positive attitudes, openness to multicultural life, Christianity, ... They lack good English pronunciation the mother-tongue-influence is too strong. Their grammar and spelling would need touching up. They do not have self-confidence when facing interviews. They need to acquire international good manners Professional finishing courses are extremely expensive and are not available at all in the area of our province.

5.9 Teachers' training general, subject-wise, administrators Salesian system

On-going training of our teachers has become an annual ritual. Often enough we are not even in a position to tell the resource person we are inviting what exactly we would like him to do with or for our teachers. We could draw up a syllabus for the on-going formation of our teachers and offer these courses also to the teachers of other

schools. We could give general formation in areas such as class-room management, discipline, counselling, child and adolescent psychology, educational psychology, principles of teaching and learning, motivation, rewards and punishment, evaluation and self-evaluation, etc. Training could also be given for subject teachers on the teaching of their own subjects, administrative skills for those who share responsibilities with us for the management of our institutions, etc.

Above all, we may find to our surprise that what teachers in our own schools and in other schools would appreciate most from us would be a complete course on Don Bosco, his life, values and principles, his method of education, the aims and objectives of the societies he founded, the *raison d'être* of the Salesian congregation, our aims and objectives in the Northeast, and in our local institution, organisational structure of our society, the variety of our apostolic services, etc.

5.10 Training of boarding masters

Due to our shortage of clerics the majority of our boardings are probably cared for by lay people under the occasional supervision of a Salesian. Almost all the boardings attached to diocesan parishes are run by lay people. They would certainly appreciate it a lot and a large number of children would benefit from it if we would only make it possible to share our skills with these young, enthusiastic but unfortunately, inexperienced persons.

5.11 Entrepreneurship training

Educated young people could be prepared not only to seek employment, but also for self-employment and to create employment for others.

5.12 Seed money cum business consultancy

This would be the natural next step to entrepreneurship training. We could help young people find soft loans to start up income-generating activities of their own and follow them up with professional advice that could help them succeed.

5.13 Training of leaders of trade unions, student unions, young politicians

We have so far tended to fear and avoid contacts with leaders of all forms of unions, organisations and associations. Interacting with

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them one would discover that they suffer from uncertainties, hesitation and lack of self-confidence due to their inexperience and lack of accurate knowledge and information. We could render an invaluable service to the youth and even more to society if we could train such leaders, giving them an understanding of the constitution of the country, national and State level laws regarding the areas of their concern, principles and functioning of democracy, organisational skills, effectiveness in public speaking, the art of negotiating, techniques of influencing public opinion, management of campaigns, innovative methods of fund raising that do not harass people, office management, effective correspondence, prowess in debating, etc.

5.14 One- to three-months training courses on the bible, christian doctrine, church history

The churches of our separated brethren find numerous takers for courses of this nature, even though no jobs are offered to the candidates at the end of the programme. It is not surprising then that any Catholic boy or girl that marries someone of another faith ends up surrendering to the creed of their partner. If courses of this nature are offered to the Catholic young people around us they may shock us by turning out in large numbers. We never know till we try it out, and do it seriously and professionally right from the first attempt.

5.15 Care of the handicapped

This is one category of the disadvantaged youth that we do not seem to have done much for, with the exception of a few sporadic helps given by individuals here and there. As access to medical services improves we are bound to have more and more of the physically 'differently-abled' in our society, since many of those who would formerly have died from their handicaps or injuries will survive through better medical care. Many tribal communities do not have very positive attitudes towards the handicapped (there are tribes that see something wrong even with twins or children with an extra finger on the hand!). We could look into this area to see what we could do for the young that fall into his category.

5.16 Substance abuse

It is truly unfortunate that, though our area was the very first in the entire nation to have a serious problem of drug addiction, we have done almost nothing in this field. In fact we have mostly frowned

upon and put obstacles before individuals who got involved. We ought to have a whole series of structures for detoxification, rehabilitation, half-way homes, community follow-up, etc., in this line. Until we have our own trained Salesian personnel we could at least offer our infrastructure, financial resources, managerial skills and, above all, our Salesian loving presence, to run centres where the personnel that deal directly with the technical aspects of the problem would be hired professionals.

This applies equally well to the problem of alcoholism, a problem that is even more widespread than drug addiction.

5.17 HIV/AIDS

If it is true that we have done almost nothing in the field of substance abuse, it is even more so about victims of HIV and AIDS. Fr Antonio Domenech, the general councillor for the youth was asked during the Salesian National Consultation on the Young at Risk, at Bangalore in 2000, whether the care of drug addicts and those infected with HIV/AIDS could fall under the Salesian charism since Don Bosco's work is supposed to be preventive above all. His reply was that there are very many different levels of 'prevention'. We could prevent a rich young person from falling into poverty and call it Salesian work. It is far more Salesian to prevent the addict from dying of an overdose or an AIDS patient from dying in despair, cursing his God and the people around him.

We could think of some Salesian work of such 'prevention' among those who are, perhaps, the most 'wretched of the earth' today.

5.18 Peace building

When we look at the rate at the nature of the work most of us are engaged in, in combination with our neglect of the problems of the more vulnerable sections of our people Drugs, alcoholism, HIV/AIDS and that of violence we have to ask ourselves whether we have not forgotten our target group to an extent. We need to reflect more on what the weakest among the youth of our region actually need and whether we could make ourselves capable of offering it.

The problem of violence has been dealt with earlier in this paper. The NERYC has some initiatives towards a response to the situation. We, Salesians, need to do much more in this line.

5.19 Reaching families through our children

Don Bosco himself proposed that we could get access to adults through their children. We have experienced this in practice in the early years of our work of evangelisation in this area, and even in the recent past when we had no other way of preaching the faith in Arunachal Pradesh. But once we have 'settled down', we forget this advice of Don Bosco. With the excuse of following up our school children we could organise their parents in various ways and render them lots of service in the social and even the religious sphere. We could do this (almost everything except the sacraments themselves) even in families that are not in our parish.

5.20 Youth as evangelisers of the youth

Here, too, Don Bosco is our leader, model and guide. He gave responsibilities to the natural leaders among his ragamuffins. No doubt, he must have had his failures, and we will have even more of them since we are not as good at evaluating the personalities of people while selecting good leaders. But, in an adapted version of the Peter Principle, we could state that 'People rise up to the responsibilities we thrust upon them'. If we take reasonable risks, trust the young, train and follow them up, they will grow, become capable, lighten our burden substantially and render great service to their peers and juniors.

6. Challenges facing Salesians

Let me merely list some of the challenges facing us, Salesians, in the field of our work with the youth without elaborating too much on each of them.

1. Transform our education the target group, our methods, the content - to produce educated people, particularly leaders, who are honest, unselfish and service-minded.
2. Provide education that enables young people not only to bloom personally and develop their personalities to their maximum, but also give them skills that have a demand in the job market.
3. Change and adapt ourselves and our services over time, from place to place, from tribe to tribe, from situation to situation.
4. While providing education to the masses with general education, prepare young people who will lead the society in all fields.
5. Create services, situations, facilities and activities that develop ALL talents and facets of the young, not only their

linguistic-logical-mathematical skills. Offer a greater variety of services to develop a greater variety of their gifts.

Jerry Thomas in one of his presentations mentions a criticism of Fr Joel D'Cuhna, the then national director of the youth at the CBCI that we Salesians have educated people and produced individuals who are very well equipped to look after themselves and their families, but have no social involvement or commitment at all. Jerry goes on to support the judgement and ask us to reflect on this failure of ours. It is certainly good to think about this deeper, but before we do that we might first add that Joel was speaking through his boots and from the top of his head, taking refuge in clichés and making superficial judgements without making efforts to discover the reality. Taking just one institution that I know rather well though I have worked there only 11 years out of its history of 47 years let me list just from my superficial memory alone, and not from official records, a few of the individuals produced by Don Bosco, Imphal, who have dedicated themselves quite admirably to the service of the people Mr Angelus, who is one of the highest leaders of the NSCN-IM, Yambem Lama who was acting chairman of the Manipur Human Rights Commission, Babloo Loitongbam, a great human rights advocate who is now at the United Nations in New York, Sebastian Muisang, who risked his own life for several years while fighting the Indian army in the law courts in the famous case of Oinam, Grinder, another famous defender of human rights, Dr Lotha and Dr Yanthan, who are leaders in the Naga Hoho one of them being the secretary or joint secretary Mani Charanemei, recently elected member of parliament. These are besides the DGP of police, at least two commissioners, several secretaries in the government, numerous IAS officers.

But, as I said, we ought to reflect on this fact more, and revamp our education to produce more people with a social conscience, and involvement in social problems.

On the other hand, while furthering the social co-operation that comes naturally to our young people from their culture, develop their competitive spirit a little more and their personal ambitions, along with the capacity to make the sacrifices to fulfil them.

Produce not only educated employable young people, but also create employment and employers.

6. Identify and serve those who need us most, those who cannot survive without us.

7. Not wait for the poor and needy to come to us, but go in search of them.

8. Shift from children to youth.

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9. Shift from schools to the out-of-school.

10. Shift from parishes to youth work.

11. Shift from formal to non-formal.

12. Shift from institutional service to service of the youth. There is no harm in running the best schools in the States and offering to the States various forms of services to the young in our institutions. It might be even better if we could widen our sights and offer our services to the institutions and communities around us. Instead helping a few to achieve 100%, is it not better to help these few achieve 80% and help very many more to achieve at least 60% ?

13. Shift from urban to rural. We are so few in numbers. So we would like to place our services strategically in the towns of our region. Because of this those who benefit from us the most are not the Catholics and the rural poor who need us most. APJ Abdul Kalam, our president, has proposed a strategy for development that we could adapt to our own needs. He suggests making a ring road serving a group of eight to ten villages. He would then place the headquarters at the hub of this wheel and spread out other services evenly among all the villages on the ring. Perhaps in this fashion we could think big by thinking rural and small.

14. Push the young out of our school compound, out of our parish church. While it is a good strategy for us to select the best from among our youth, develop them and use them in our schools and parishes, it might be better for them and for society if we could train and motivate the best among our youth to go and serve where we cannot be.

15. Shift from what people want from us to what we truly know the people need from us. It is a sign of our success in the sphere of education that we are all the time in demand from numerous quarters, including bishops, to open new schools. The ordinary folks are not even aware of what our real charism is and the multiplicity of services we could offer.

16. Shift from the former problems of the youth to their actual problems today. Today there are many others who can offer us equally good education. Instead, we have certainly much more to do as regards unemployment, drugs, HIV/AIDS and violence.

17. Produce Salesians who are comfortable with the young dynamic, creative, adaptable, daring, committed, indefatigable, enthusiastic, open, democratic,

18. Give specific formation to our confreres in formation towards working with the youth.

19. Collaborate more with other religious, NGOs and individuals, allowing them to 'shine' and even to take up leadership over us where appropriate.

20. Create an army of lay Salesians, Hindu Salesians, Muslim Salesians. Perhaps almost the only aspect of Don Bosco's system that people of other faiths feel incompetent to pursue is the frequent reference to Jesus Christ as our personal saviour. While we cannot and will not omit this in our own work, there is a very big army of potential Salesians waiting out there to take on enthusiastically our values, principles and methods to carry out lots of our activities the Salesian way. Of course, it will never be complete without the proclamation of Jesus. Perhaps we could do more of this proclamation and allow this army of 'other Salesians' to carry out a lot of the work we waste our time on right now.

21. Become role models for our youth. We are admired as indefatigable workers and great achievers. If we could also be seen as more spiritual and religious than we are now, we could be great role models for our youth.

NOTES

1. More about this in another paper on "Oratories, Youth Centres, Groups and Movements and Work of DBYES".
2. More about this in another paper on "Oratories, Youth Centres, Groups and Movements and Work of DBYES".
3. More about this in another paper on "Oratories, Youth Centres, Groups and Movements and Work of DBYES".
4. Since this topic will be studied under other aspects I do not go into details.
5. More of this in the paper on "Salesian Involvement in Human Developmental Activities".
6. See the paper on "Salesian Involvement in Human Developmental Activities".
7. See the paper on "Oratories, Youth Centres, Groups and Movements and Work of DBYES".

Chapter 4

YOUTH MINISTRY IN DIMAPUR PROVINCE

John Pudussery SDB

Introduction

A study of the oratories, youth centres, groups and movements and Don Bosco Youth and Educational Services (DBYES) of the province of Dimapur is indeed apt and is a need of the time. A study of the kind would help not only documentation of what is being done in the province but also be an eye opener for many of us. The Salesians at large can become aware of the possibilities that are at their disposal and the problems they are facing with regard to the youth ministry. I have made an attempt to examine closely the activities, problems and future plans of all our major youth activities in the province.

1. Don Bosco Youth and Educational Services (DBYES)

DBYES, Dimapur, registered as Yuva Jyothi Youth and Educational Society (YJYES), on 24 October 2000 under the societies registration act, 1989, is the youth development wing of the Salesians of Don Bosco, province of Dimapur, and it carries out non-formal youth development work in Arunachal Pradesh, upper Assam, Manipur and Nagaland.

In the year 1992 when the province of Dimapur planned for the formation of youth centres, DBYS (Don Bosco Youth Services) in Dimapur was under the direction of Fr. Tony Pellissery. In the year 1995 Fr. P.X. Francis was appointed as the youth director of DBYS-

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Dimapur. Since there was no separate building for the DBYS it was based in the 1st floor of Don Bosco-Dimapur residence. Later on Fr. Francis changed the name of DBYS to DBYES (Don Bosco Youth and Educational Services). In the later part of the year 2003 Fr. John Puthussery (P.A) SDB was appointed as the assistant director of DBYES, Dimapur. In January 2004 Fr. Francis was transferred and Fr. John was appointed as the director. In the same year DBYES moved into the 1st floor of the new building in the Don Bosco premises.

The Salesians carry out a lot of educational and other formal youth development activities in the province through schools, colleges, technical institutes and parishes. Youth programmes are organised for young both within the formal as well as non-formal settings.

The following may be considered as a mark of identity of the organisation.

1.1 Mission

1. To be creative and daring in reaching out to young people, especially those at risk.

2. To offer to young people skills, opportunities and choices to improve the quality of their lives and to minister to their peers.

3 To inspire and enthuse young people to be persons of integrity and vision, competent and committed to building up a more just and humane society.

4 To play a networking and leadership role in the region in providing resources and expertise in the field of youth and youth ministry.

1.2 Values

1. *Positive Regard*: We believe in the innate goodness of young people and their capacity for heroism and self-giving.

2. *Mutual Respect*: We value at all times the dignity and worth of all young people in the diversity of their cultures and circumstances.

3. *Total Quality*: We judge ourselves by the witness of our lives, the quality of services and their relevance to the specific situations of the young people of the region.

4. *Equity and Justice*: We strive to ensure that everyone irrespective of sex, race, colour, class and religion has equal opportunity for expression and for utilising his/her potential

5. *Participation*: We ensure an ambience of collaboration and invite young people to active participation in youth ministry.

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6. *Honesty and Transparency*: We are committed to be accountable for the effectiveness of our actions and to be open in our judgements and communication.

7. *Humility*: We recognise that we are part of a bigger alliance in the cause of the young and that our presentation and behaviour at all times ought to be modest.

1.3 Work space

The area of operation of the DBYES consists of the Northeast Indian States of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland and upper half of the State of Assam.

Development has taken a slow pace in the Northeast, in comparison to many parts of the country. One important reason for the tardy development scenario in this region is the prolonged state of political unrest in the region. Since 1947, the year of India's Independence, the Naga people of Nagaland and Manipur have been agitating for a sovereign State for themselves. In the following years, other tribals like the Mizos, the Tripuris, the Bodos and the Karbis of Assam, the Kukis of Manipur and, on a lesser scale, the Khasis and Garos of Meghalaya and some of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh have also taken to the path of a quasi secessionist war. The tribals in the Northeast of India have Mongolian racial roots and do not identify themselves with the rest of India culturally or emotionally. They are also largely Christian, unlike the Hindu majority of India. What is surprising is the fact that even the groups like the Manipuris and the Assamese who are Hindus are also pressing for independence, overcome by a sense of alienation from and neglect by Delhi rule. Though the ordinary majority of the region is dejected about this prolonged volatile political situation, they can hardly do anything since the young people are held hostage by revolutionary and adventurous ideas, stirred up by vested interests. Attitudes of young people, and therefore the future of the region, is viciously affected by this scenario. This deteriorating situation has given rise to a vicious cycle of violence leading to underdevelopment and lack of development leading to further violence. Those who lose the most in the bargain are the majority of poor tribal people who live in the interior and mostly inaccessible hilly regions of Northeast India.

Speaking of upper Assam, it must be stated that, it is the basin of the tea industry in the state of Assam. DBYES work concentrates on the young people of the Adivasi tribal community in upper Assam. The British tea garden managers brought them to Assam as cheap

labour towards the end of the 19th century from their original habitat in Chotanagpur in central India. As the time passed, they felt neglected. The youth of the Adivasi community has suffered in such circumstances, that it has led them to a lack of motivation, confidence and self-respect.

Except for the town area of Dimapur, Nagaland is totally tribal and hilly State. The Nagas are a family of the most proud tribes of the region. They have relentlessly fought for sovereignty from the day India was independent up to now. Though the urban centres of Nagaland and some of the more advanced Naga tribes are taking up Western habits, facilitated by a free flow of Delhi money into some pockets as a token of appeasement, the majority of tribals in Nagaland live in fear and abject poverty. They are afraid both of their own insurgent militants and the Indian army. Living in a culture of violence and resistance, young people of Nagaland are fast falling into the trap of hostile behaviour and a bohemian youth culture. Some Nagas live in Arunachal, Assam and Manipur, and the problem of militancy has therefore spread also to these States.

Manipur has a great cultural history. Its cultural seat, the Imphal valley is a plateau, surrounded by steep mountains and deep gorges, inhabited by the tribal people. However, its sizeable tribal population is neglected and is on a warpath. Leaving its glorious past, Manipur today is the prime example of a chaotic State. In fact, the most chaotic in the region. Militant groups are sprouting even among the Hindu majority in the Imphal valley. The Naga and Kuki tribal groups are constantly at war with each other and with the rule of Delhi. The tribal young people in Manipur resemble those in Nagaland with the difference that they experience poverty and tribulation on a greater degree.

Arunachal Pradesh is a tribal majority and hilly State with the lowest literacy rate in the country. This has much to do with the policy of the government that barred the entry of Christian missionaries to Arunachal till recently. Poverty reigns in inhuman forms in most parts of Arunachal and some of the most primitive practices are still found in abundance in the rural areas of the State. The newly educated young people of the State lack motivation, aim and knowledge about skills to better their opportunities and think for their society.

1.4 Organisational structure

The general body of DBYES consists of all its members. Though this body is ultimately responsible for the organisation, its authority is usually vested in the governing body. The governing body of DBYES is comprised of Salesian and non-Salesian members. It is the ultimate decision making body and it meets at least two times every year and whenever need arises.

Day-to-day affairs of DBYES are carried out by the management team, with the help of four departments, namely, finance manager, office management team, publication and press cell and youth work team. Executive decisions are the prerogative of the director. However, following the EPP, a lot of room is given for discussion, dialogue and co-operation, leading to collaborative decision-making.

Among the four departments of DBYES, the youth team is the most important when one considers the goals for which the organisation exists. This team works in collaboration with five regional centres of the vast operational area of DBYES. There is a co-ordinator for each region who functions under the direct supervision of the director. This way the objectives of DBYES are met. Funding partners from India and abroad sponsor DBYES.

The publication cell of DBYES takes care of the publication of a bimonthly magazine, the *Youththought*, books, pamphlets and the preparation of training materials. DBYES also has a mini-press, which works through a Copier and photocopying machine. Printing in small quantity for the institutions of the area is done and it is one of the income generating activities of DBYES.

The finance and office management teams play a very significant role in the organisation. They take care of important aspects like correspondence, bank dealings, accounting, auditing, financial forecast, official engagements, reminding the executive teams regarding targets and reports, documentation, dispatch of publications and reports, internal evaluation, etc. DBYES also has a resourceful youth library.

1.5. Training programme offered

1. Challenges in education today
2. Teacher effectiveness
3. Personality development

4. Living by objectives
5. Community building
6. Time management
7. Career guidance
8. Training in inter-personal relationship
9. Summer time youth ministry.
10. Training youth ministers and animators
11. Salesian Teachers Orientation Programme (STOP)
12. Educative Pastoral Planning (EPP)
13. Media awareness
14. Salesian Animators Leadership Training (SALT)
15. Scout Master's basic course
16. Salesian youth leaders meet

1.6 Strengths

1. The commitment and availability of the personnel for programmes
2. The programme content is well thought out.
3. The programmes reach to the rural areas to a great extend
4. Good rapport with diocesan clergy and other religious congregations
5. Credibility and acceptance among the various groups
6. A young team that is committed and eager to learn
7. At the end of each training programme an evaluation is done and the proceedings documented.

1.7 Weaknesses

1. Intervention is mostly through schools, parishes and other structures and through annual camps or training programmes. There is little direct contact with unorganised youth.
2. Training programmes are mostly on personality development.
3. No systematic long-term impact assessment of the programmes has been conducted so far.
4. There is a lack of collaboration with NGOs and governments.
5. Training programmes do not generally result in either forming a group so as to carry out your activities or identifying certain leaders or volunteers who can take the

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- initiatives in the absence of a youth centre or youth director.
6. While youth programmes lead to individual development there is no support base on which any concrete long term programme and scheme could be built later.
 7. Information regarding programmes does not reach non-institutionalised youth.
 8. There is very little animation for Salesian communities as regards their role in the formation of youth leaders and in youth animation in their localities.
 9. There is no written policies for youth work in the province.
 10. Its success with the training programmes is the greatest weakness of DBYES. Since the existing programmes are successful, no new ground has been broken in youth work over the years¹.

1.8 Observations and recommendations

During the meeting of the directors and representatives of the NERYC, DBYES and DBYS with Mr. Frans Goossens of the Bilance, the Netherlands at Guwahati on 21 October 1997, it was agreed to conduct an evaluation study of the youth work being carried out by the three regional agencies. The following suggestions and recommendations were forwarded to DBYES by the Evaluation team.

1. There are many training programmes but they need to be integrated into a well-developed plan along a clear long-term vision.
2. Most of the programmes are aimed at school going youth. Much more needs to be done for the young at a higher level.
3. Greater and consistent efforts should be made to motivate the Salesians themselves before any serious youth work can take place. The director needs to take it as a priority, lest the entire responsibility of youth ministry be considered his alone. It was reported not by the director that the response from local communities towards a new venture is often negative.
4. Take the youth ministry beyond the traditional mould to answer the needs of the youth situation.
5. Define a youth policy for the province. The youth director should have sufficient autonomy to function within this policy.
6. The youth ministry in the province should move out of

structured environments to a more flexible, well thought out non-structural and non-institutional form, which would help also to reach out to the unorganised youth.

7. The DBYES team is new and small, and though enthusiastic, it has little training. Expansion and training of the staff should be taken up on a priority basis.
8. It would be possible to meet more of the actual needs of youth if DBYES were to use the human and material resources available with the governments and non-governmental organisations in the region.
9. The role of the director involves a number of factors that call for a strong support team and sharing of roles and responsibilities.

1.9 Future plans

Leaning on the years of experience and on the recommendations from various agencies we have realised the needs of our youngsters. We have done a study on our target group to understand the need of the hour and the findings of the study are as follows:

1.9.1 Qualified staff

The demands for the DBYES programmes are on the increase. This would bring in the need for more staff in the team. Some staff leave the office in search of better opportunities due to many reasons like, salary, difficulties, etc. However this year DBYES hopes to enhance the team with more qualified hands.

1.9.2 Vocational skills training

It is important to give practical guidelines and assistance to the youngsters in their effort to stand on their feet economically²

1.9.3 Assistance in education

Many young people continue with their education because they have nothing else to do. "There is no ambition, goal or vision that keeps them in schools or in colleges."³ DBYES team strives to increase the ambition and motivational level among the students and teachers.

1.9.4 Career guidance for school dropouts

A survey done by DBYES has shown an alarming growth of school dropouts in the region. This group in all the states are unemployed who are looking to kill the time through cheap thrills, which would eventually make them victims of many evil practices. "No study is complete without the solution". The team has designed various income-generating activities for these target groups.

1.9.5 Awareness in HIV/AIDS and drug abuse

In spite of the fact that there are many agencies organising HIV/AIDS awareness programmes in the region for the past 10 years the number of victims are on increase. A reflective study on this matter has shown that best method to create an AIDS free society would be to convince the students on the dark side of the sickness and the ways by which the killer virus is spread. Young students are more receptive and they can be convinced faster than others. DBYES team hopes to reach out to the students in this regard as well for they form the future society.

1.9.6 Personality development programmes

The young people themselves, especially in the tribal areas, say that they lack self-discipline that is required for hard and sustained work, to save and utilise money wisely and to postpone the gratification of their desires. Often they lack foresight, the maturity to judge, the ability to analyse situations and to think critically. Thus they always remain at the bottom. Among the Adivasi youths there is a lack of confidence in themselves as a community, which rubs onto the individuals, however talented they are. This dampens their ambition whether for education or employment or a career. In order to curb these feelings among the tribal youngsters DBYES has strengthened its personal developments and leadership programmes. In the programme sheet of the organisation for the year 2004 has the enlistment of various programmes for the Youngsters of Adivasi communities⁴.

1.9.7 Health awareness

Youth programmes and activities have not given much emphasis to hygiene and health. Awareness about health, consequences of sexual relationship between boys and girls before marriage and about impending disaster through AIDS, is not adequate. While urban

youth seem to be more or less aware of these dimensions, the rural youth are in general unaware of them⁵. The DBYES team plans to give stress more on the village youth programmes where in 'Hygiene' and 'Primary Health Care' would form a major part.

1.9.8 Recreational facilities and leisure time activities

The youth, whether educated or uneducated, in the villages of this region, has every little to do to use their time and energy. There is little by way of leisure time activities, such as clubs, reading rooms, sports and games facilities, theatres, etc. in the Northeast. Many just do not know what to do with their time and most spend time socialising and "roaming" with friends. That is the time many young people get into addictive habits and come under influences that are detrimental to themselves. Taking part in militant/insurgent activities become a way of utilising time and beating boredom. "The youngsters should be kept busy with some recreational activities, and groups and movements of youth are the best for it"⁶ The thrust of DBYES activities of this year is the formation of 'Youth Groups' in all the centres with the help of the local Salesians. These groups would help the youngsters to keep themselves busy in organising programmes and other recreational activities for them in collaboration with the local Salesian community.

1.9.9 Cultural, educational and revival programmes

The young need to find their cultural moorings. Encourage traditional arts, folk songs and folktales, dress, festivals and values of the young to feel proud of their tribes and communities and to build self-confidence in them. At the same time they should be taught to respect the culture of other tribes⁷. DBYES team intends to organise many cultural exposure programmes in the coming years. Together with the Jesus Youth Movement (JYM) the team plans to organise cultural exchange programme in Kerala where in many youngsters can get exposure into others culture and an opportunity to share their own cultural heritage with others.

1.9.10 Entrepreneurship training

It has been found that the people of Northeast in general have poor business skills and entrepreneurship. Vocational training therefore needs to be strengthened with a well-planned entrepreneurial training

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for the young who show the aptitude. Such training would enhance the chances of the young employing themselves and creating employment for others in the region. In order to assist the youngsters of the region in this regard DBYES hopes to get such projects done for them, which would help the youngsters in getting started with some kind of income generating activity like, poultry, piggery and fishery.

1.9.11 Youth groups

In the past years DBYES has managed to create some youth groups in certain areas. However the effort to organise a formal and well-organised youth group remain far from realisation. In the past DBYES organised some of its programmes in centres where the local Salesians were not involved. As a consequence, the longevity of the group and its smooth functioning became difficult, as the team was not able to do a regular follow-up without the help of the local Salesians. In the coming years DBYES intends to organise youth groups in all the possible centres in collaboration with the local Salesians. The team has decided to organise further youth programmes for these groups basically through the youth groups themselves so as to involve them fully in the DBYES activities.

1.9.12 Scout adventure

During the span of ten years DBYES organised many scout/guide programmes and trained many scout masters and organised Camporees and Boscorees. The team is convinced of the good the Scouts and Guides can do for their schools and communities but we need to keep them interested. In the coming years DBYES hopes to organise scout adventure programme for 10 days in Pachmari in Madhya Pradesh, even by giving them incentives like scholarships and other helps.

1.9.13 Training the youngsters

DBYES has realised the importance of the volunteers and helping-hands in various centres of our activities. In order to strengthen the team with the help of the smart youngsters from the centres, DBYES hopes to identify interested and talented youngsters during the residential programmes. These selected youth would be sent for

further training. These volunteers would be of great help especially in the AIDS/HIV awareness programmes.

In all that is stated above about the work, problems and future plans I have based myself on personal interviews I have done with those in-charge of youth centres and others involved in working with young people.

2. Sunday oratories

2.1 Rua Home, Jorhat

Rua Home, Jorhat, Assam, is a Salesian aspirantate and the pre-novitiate house of the province of Dimapur. The Sunday oratories help the young aspirants to get a taste of the Salesian mission and the typical Salesian youth ministry. The oratory activities are a help to create in them an interest for the youth activities and the importance of the youth ministry in the life of a Salesian. During the initial days of Rua Home, there was no favourable response from the people of the neighbourhood. There were altogether 12 oratories then. All the aspirants (with the exception of the first years as they are new to the local language) would leave for the oratories on every Sunday afternoon. They walk to the nearby villages and tea gardens and meet young boys and girls whom they would teach, instruct in the faith and organise other activities. Each centre is assisted by an aspirant who knows the local language. In 2004 there are five oratory centres and 32 aspirants were engaged in the oratory apostolate. They make use of the village school buildings and tea garden schools to gather the children and conduct programmes.

2.1.1 Activities

1. Basic education (spoken English classes).
2. Organising games and competitions.
3. Assistance to schools in organising coaching classes.
4. Family visits.
5. Tuition classes for various subjects.
6. An yearly Youth Meet for the boys and girls of all the oratories.

2.1.2 Problems

1. One of the major problems is lack of co-operation from the village people, as many people in the locality fear that they would be converted to Christianity.

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2. Failure to adapt ourselves to the genuine needs of the youngsters.
3. Lack of motivation and interest among the youngsters of villages.
4. Lack of competence among the aspirants to engage in youth ministry.
5. Most of the aspirants are not exposed sufficiently to the culture and language of the local people.

2.1.3 Future plans

1. Make available for the oratories more materials useful for the youngsters, like books and reading materials.
2. Conduct awareness programmes on various topics through 'street theatre'.
3. Make use of the Don Bosco school building to cater to the local youth.
4. We could think of a youth centre attached to the school, which can look after the coaching classes, spoken English classes, health club, etc.
5. We need to give to the young aspirants a clear understanding of the Salesian youth ministry.
6. Enhance the aspirants with more input programmes on youth ministry, skills in dealing with youth, etc.
7. Organise the oratory activities with the help of volunteers from the villages.

2.2 Novitiate, Zubza

The Salesian novitiate at Zubza, Nagaland came into existence in 2003. Hence Sunday oratory activity is still in its infancy. However, Sunday oratories are organised by the novitiate community for the benefit of the novices in order to give them an experience of the youth ministry, which is an important dimension of the Salesian life. The novices have four Sunday oratories, including an orphanage. The villagers are happy to have the novices with them.

2.2.1 Activities

The novices conduct the following activities in the various oratory centres:

1. Singing class for the youngsters.

2. Spoken English classes for youth.
3. Games and competitions for the children.
4. Family visits.

2.2.2 Future Plans

1. The novitiate aims to give to the novices an opportunity to be in touch with the real difficulties the people around them face.
2. To do something for the school dropouts of the area, especially through coaching classes.

2.3. Salesian College, Dimapur

In March 1982, in an agreement between bishop Abraham Alangimattathil of the diocese of Kohima and the Salesian province of Dimapur, it was stated that the staff and the students of Salesian College would be given ample opportunities for apostolic activities in the neighbourhood. Accordingly, right from the beginning, the College has considered Sunday oratories both as an integral part of the formation imparted to the young Salesians as well as a way of being at the service of the local Church and the people. In the early days of Salesian College, many villages in the neighbourhood (mostly Baptist) were quite hostile to the presence of the Catholics in their midst, because they feared a 'Romanisation' of their people. Hence, harassment, intimidation and even physical assault of the students of Salesian College were not uncommon. However, over the years the situation has improved for the better. In fact, as a result of the Sunday oratory activities, tangible changes are seen in the lives of the people.

Lately, Salesian College oratories have been given a re-orientation by Fr. Jose Kuruvachira by initiating the young Salesians to work for the illiterate youth and to conduct awareness programmes. In many centres the young Salesians organise literacy and education campaign, and awareness programmes on a variety of topics, especially through the medium of 'street theatre' and mini seminars. In most of the villages there are regular tuition classes and the volunteers organised by the young Salesians of the respective centres look after them. As per the statistics of June 2004 over 400 children, youth and adults are helped through the literacy and education programme, and in this apostolate some 35 volunteers, assist the

college on a minimum remuneration. Added to that, the College has introduced spoken English classes for the adults in several villages. In some villages supervised evening study is also introduced, which aims to reduce the number of school dropouts.

2.3.1 Activities in the oratories

In the oratories, a variety of activities are being carried out for the benefit of the youth, such as:

1. Catechism class.
2. Value-education and awareness programmes.
3. Adult literacy.
4. Tuition for school going children.
5. Class for school dropouts.
6. Spoken English class for adults
7. Input programmes for the volunteers of literacy and education.
8. Games and competitions of various kinds.
9. "Newspaper apostolate"⁸
10. Identify and help school dropouts (both boys and girls) to undergo non-formal training.
11. Computer literacy for rural youth
12. Video films and slide programmes on select themes.
13. Organisation of Sunday Mass, rosary services, street plays on social themes, etc.
14. Annual Youth Meet.

Many of these programmes are also open to the adults of the villages, irrespective of age, gender and religion.

2.3.2 Problems

1. Lack of correct motivation among the youngsters and elders of the villages.
2. Only limited hours are available for the youth apostolate.
3. High rate of illiteracy in many villages, especially among girls and women.
4. Lack of competent helpers.
5. Pure understanding of the youth apostolate as an important element of the Salesian mission.
6. Inability of the young Salesians to adapt themselves creatively to the situations of the villages and the youth.
7. Lack of real apostolic zeal of some young Salesians

8. Poor leadership quality and organisational ability of many young Salesians.
9. Lack of real interest among many young Salesians to learn the local language (Nagamese).

2.3.3 Future Plans

1. Assist the school dropouts to get back to the school.
2. Vocational assistance to the uneducated village youths.
3. Assist promising boys and girls to do higher studies and professional courses
4. Extend the literacy campaign to as many villages as possible and make the campaign a movement in villages with the view to achieve 100 percent literacy.
5. Create a reading room in every village
6. Organise special educational and empowerment programmes for girls and women
7. Programmes on health care and sanitation for the villages.
8. Programmes on the problems of alcoholism and drug addiction.
9. Promote the idea of open school and encourage and assist as many youths as possible to pass class X examinations.
10. Strengthen the involvement of the volunteers in the Sunday apostolate.
11. Medical assistance to physically challenged children.
12. Encourage as many rural youth as possible to become computer literates.

2.3.4 Suggestions

1. Must make the young Salesians aware of the importance of the youth ministry in their Salesian vocation.
2. Give training in youth ministry right from the aspirantate days.
3. Must give the young Salesians in the philosophate training in youth ministry outside the philosophate.
4. Learning of local languages should be given more importance in the aspirantates, novitiate and philosophate.
5. Province should realise that youth work is the mission of the province.
6. In the province there should be a strong youth team with both 'frontline people' engaged in the youth ministry as well as people who undertake serious research in the youth problems of the region.

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7. The province should take interest in organising periodically research seminars on youth ministry.
8. Timely meeting of all the directors of youth centres to share ideas, experiences and problems.

3. Youth centres

In January 1992, the Salesian Province of Dimapur formally set up its Don Bosco Youth Services (DBYS) team with three members: Fr. Tony Pellissery, Fr. V.A. Thomas and Fr. K.D. Tom. Fr. Tony was to fulfil the duties of the warden at Ravalico Hostel, Imphal, Fr. V.A. Thomas was the assistant headmaster at Don Bosco School, Dibrugarh and Fr. K.D. Tom was at Don Bosco, Kohima.

The team faced many uncertainties as regards to the nature of the youth work, finance and *modus operandi* and no clear directives were forthcoming from the superiors. In the meantime a number of activities were started. These included camps for high school students and teachers, retreats, skills-building sessions for the youth, and seminars for those in formation. Due to the unavailability of space, Fr. K.D. Tom was given a temporary shelter at Christ King Parish.

One of the first proposals of the DBYS team to the provincial and his council was to work towards the establishment of full-fledged youth centres at Dibrugarh, Dimapur, Imphal and Kohima. Fr. K.D. Tom was asked to study the possibility of setting up a youth centre at Don Bosco School, Kohima. The basic draft for the ideas and action was submitted to the Provincial on 9 August 1993. Since no response was made to the above, a fresh proposal with practical hints was made on 31 January 1994. This too failed in creating the much needed support at community and provincial levels. Thus from 1992-94, though many activities were carried out by the DBYS in Nagaland, nothing concrete was done for the establishment of the youth centre.

In 1994, Abu Catherine and Catherine Kckrushie were sent to Nitika, Calcutta to participate in the National training of animators for FRIENDS from 1-5 July. On their return to Kohima, FRIENDS movement was started at Kohima with over 20 members. The Friends Club was involved in getting the suggestions for the proposed youth centre at Kohima. In the meeting of the Friends Club on 13 November 1994, the following suggestions were given by them.

1. Counselling: counsellors should be available and meeting arranged with prior appointment.
2. Remedial classes for class X students onwards.
3. Computer classes.
4. Reading and consultation rooms with textbooks and consultation books.
5. Preparation for competitive exams.
6. Music classes with proper teachers.
7. Open school.
8. Short courses on house keeping, health care, child care, etc.

3.1 DB youth centre, Kohima

In the early part of January 1995, Fr. K.D. Tom was informed that he would be appointed as the In-charge of the Youth Centre, by the then Provincial, Fr. Varghese Palathingal, with the additional charge of the Asst. Teacher in the school. Fr. K.D. Tom who had a feeling that he would not be doing justice to the youth centre activities, resented the appointment letter given by the provincial. He had the following reasons:

Priority was given to teaching in the school where two other qualified priests worked as full timers. (Fr. A.J. Sebastian with a Doctorate and Fr. C. M. Jose with a Masters). He felt that the youth centre was given no importance as it was treated like an appendix to the regular activity of Don Bosco School, Kohima.

On 11 February 1995 the Salesian Co-operators who held a meeting at Kohima suggested the following activities for the youth centre.

1. Career guidance
2. Games facilities (Indoor games)
3. Courses on first aid and health care
4. Awareness programmes on topics like:
a) self employment b) mass media
c) printing d) sign boards
5. Library and reading room facilities.

On 15 May 1995 the Hon. Minister of School Education Mr. Nillo Rengma inaugurated the youth centre at Kohima with a colourful function in the Don Bosco School auditorium. Bishop Abraham Alangimattathil blessed the reading room.

3.1.1 Activities

Ever since its inauguration, many Salesians and non-Salesians were roped into the youth work that was organised by the youth centre at Kohima. Hundreds of young people attended the various programmes that were organised here. Some of the programmes, which need special mention, are:

1. Intensive coaching for private candidates
2. Coaching for competitive exams (IAS prelims, etc)
3. Seminars on self employment & entrepreneurship
4. Bible camps
5. Retreats
6. Runways (one month long training programme for the young)
7. Celebration plus (training for teachers & leaders)
8. Leaders orientation programme
9. Basic computer education
10. Music classes
11. Leadership camps
12. Peace ventures
13. Group Leaders Orientation Workshop (GLOW)
14. STAR programmes
15. HORIZONS
16. Life lines (Bible & life skills)
17. Youth camps

Later on the youth centre was made available for the following programmes as well:

1. Training programmes for the Church leaders (for other denominations as well)
2. Catechists training programmes
3. Training for catechism teachers
4. Training programmes for youth groups (Baptists)
5. Tribal youth programmes organised by their welfare agencies.
6. Post-graduate student fellowship.
7. HIV/AIDS awareness programmes under the State Govt.

3.1.2 Problems

1. Lack of competent personnel
2. Lack of understanding of the youth work of the province
3. 'Sectarianism' in our works.
4. Lack of support from the provincial community

3.2 DB youth centre, Wokha

Fr. John Bosco Perianayagam began to organise coaching classes for the students who failed for the class X examinations, as their number was very high in and around Wokha town. Later on he began to give few other educational and career oriented assistance to the youngsters as the need of the time had guided him. Slowly the youth of the area expressed their desire to have an organised youth centre for them. As response to the interest shown by the youngsters, in the year 2003 the Wokha youth centre was inaugurated. Fr. C.P. Mathew was appointed as the first director of the youth centre.

3.2.1 Activities

Youth centre at Wokha organises various programmes for the youngsters of the region through out the year. Some of the programmes organised by the Centre are:

1. LEAP (Learn Effectively and Act Pro-actively, a month-long training for youngsters)
2. Computer training for the students at various levels.
3. Training in life skills like, tailoring, knitting, etc.
4. Career guidance, which includes classes on journalism, medicine, army, etc.
5. Coaching classes for students, especially for the students who failed in class X.
6. Awareness programmes on HIV/AIDS.

3.2.2 Future plans

1. Organised work for HIV/AIDS.
2. Translation of HIV/AIDS related movies into local languages.
3. Make new movies for AIDS/HIV awareness programmes.
4. Organise volunteers for AIDS/HIV awareness programmes.
5. Quiz programmes for schools in order to make learning interesting.

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6. Coaching classes for competitive exams.
7. Weekend modules on different topics.

3.2.3 Problems

Wokha youth centre feels the following as the obstacles to their better functioning,

1. Finance (People are used to receiving our services as gifts)
2. Lack of trained staff.
3. Lack of personnel.

In general, we have had a biased opinion on the issues connected with the youth of the region either we have thought that this was not the area of our work (problems of drug abuse, HIV/AIDS and alcoholism) or we have not had the guts to take up such challenging works. As a province we have not prepared young Salesians to take up real 'youth issues'. We were comfortable in doing school and parish apostolate and prepared the young Salesians to take up work in schools as teachers.

The youth ministry was done by the individual Salesians who thought it important to do something for the youth of the region, sometimes even with opposition from the local communities.

We have not taken youth ministry as the *primary* work of the province. If it were to be so, the province would have invested in the ministry more personnel and finance, as we did for schools. We consoled ourselves by saying that that school was an excellent means of youth ministry and practically did nothing outside the four walls of the classroom.

Sometimes youth work was branded as a work for the “weak” Salesians who would not like the disciplines of religious life. As such, the others considered them as people who had no “depth”. Such an attitude spread in our province and stood in the way of a serious, organised and well thought out youth ministry.

3.2.4 Suggestions

1. We should have a dynamic leader as youth pastoral delegate, who is free to go about organising the youth ministry of the province
2. Province should try to strengthen the DBYES team.
3. Training in specific youth ministry should be given to the young Salesians, beginning from the stage of post-novitiate.

3.3 DB youth centre, Dimapur

Don Bosco School, Dimapur has a beautiful ground attached to it. After the class hours many boys of the area regularly make use of it for games. Seeing the number of the boys coming together in the evening Fr. N. Joe SDB began to organise something for the youth of the area, which resulted in the formation of “Friends Club”. Members of the Friends Club from Dimapur had constant interactions with the Friends Club of Kohima and the youth centre. As the need for a regular youth centre was felt, and as there was a growing demand from the Friends Club, Don Bosco School, Dimapur began a full-fledged youth centre. Ever since its birth, the vice-principals are the directors of the youth centre Fr. K.M Francis, Fr. Patrick Warjiri, Fr. P.A. John and Fr. Sabu who is presently the director of the Centre.

3.3.1 Activities

Dimapur youth centre has very many activities.

1. Coaching classes for competitive exams.
2. Computer training for the students.
3. Music classes and music practice for the students.
4. Organising various competitions.
5. Library and reading room.
6. Spoken English classes for adults.
7. Coaching classes for class X failed students.
8. Career guidance programmes.

3.3.2 Problems

1. In Dimapur many of the colleges begin early and end by 11.00 a.m as they follow shift system. Hence the youngsters have lot of free time at their disposal. As the centre depends on the school for place it becomes difficult to organise anything for the youngsters during the school hours.
2. As the school started the higher secondary section, the available classrooms are reduced to two for the youth centre, especially for the music practices, library and recreational area.
3. Vice-principal may not be the right person to be director of the youth centre as he is often busy with the affairs of the school. One can spare only a part of his time at the Centre. There is need for a full-time director.

3.3.3 Suggestions

1. The province should take an extra care in nurturing the youth centres.
2. The one in-charge of the youth centre should not be burdened with many additional works, in which case he will fail to do justice to his duties.
3. At the province level there should be a meeting of all the youth centre directors once a year.
4. Practical trainees could be appointed directors for youth centres.

4 *Karsang Takar* (Mising apostolate)

Karsang Takar, which means “Rising Star”, aims to empower and set on stage tribal youth through a one year of intense drilling in principles, skills and practices, to become servants of the people and proactive leaders of the society.

4.1 Philosophy of the centre

Karsang Takar, works under Institute of Culture and Rural Development (I-CARD), that endeavours to create servant leaders from among the youth of the Mising community. It is a residential programme that hopes to revive and keep alive the concept of the Mising Murong Ghar ('Youth Dormitory'), where young people, at the threshold of their adult life, stayed together for brief period of time in order to get acquainted with and be trained in all aspects of Mising socio-cultural life.

This institute seeks to develop leaders who are empowered and who will reach out for the holistic development of the whole tribe. It also takes special note of the particular situation in which Mising women find themselves.

In addition, *Karsang Takar* hopes to build up a people's organisation, increasing their responsibility and involvement in the society in which they live.

The objective of the course will be to create agents for socio-economic, social, cultural, educational and developmental work in villages. *Karsang Takar* will generate young leaders who are committed to ethics and who will become working models for other young people.

4.2 Programmes and course content

Karsang Takar offers a one-year course to its trainees. The programme begins on 31 January each year. The course is prepared and designed by Fr.Thomas Kalapurackal (K.A) SDB and other experts so as to develop the trainees as human beings, Mising and servant leaders.

4.2.1 Development as human beings:

Self improvement: Personality development, communication skills, public speaking, organisation of public functions, public relations, etiquette and manners, conflict resolution, group dynamics; Academic: spoken English; health and family: Yoga, Acu-pressure, health care, family life.

4.2.2 Development as Mising:

Cultural and Artistic: performing arts, satriya dance Mising dance and singing, creative dance and other local dance forms, street theatre, stage acting, radio plays, script writing, drama preparation and stage work, fine arts- drawing and painting, story telling.

4.2.3 Development as servant leaders

Development: participatory rural appraisal, social analysis, political education, entrepreneurship, co-operative system, self help groups, agricultural practice and animal care. *Karsang Takar* looks to religion to give a strong foundation, meaning and depth to the whole programme in the process of becoming servant leaders.

4.2.4 Religious training

Scriptures, religious living, prayer meetings, village animation. Other relevant subjects are added in course of time.

There is fieldwork, training in data collection and animation in village for short periods during the year. After seven months of training at *Karsang Takar*, the trainees are taken for an exposure programme lasting three months, outside Sadiya.

During the stay at the *Karsang Takar*, the candidates prepare a professional two-hour cultural programme. This programme is presented to the public in schools, collages and other institutions. This is to help cultural exchange between the Mising and other tribes of Northeast India.

4.3 Medium of instruction and learning environment

The medium of instruction is English, Assamese, Hindi and Mising. Utmost care is taken to create a complete learning environment, with all relevant modern equipment and facilities, and expert instructions in all fields.

4.4 Instructors/animators

Experts who conduct specific short-term programmes assist the trainees. There is one full time director who co-ordinates the training programme and activities. Besides, a team of experts evaluate and monitor the performance of the staff and the trainees at *Karsang Takar* periodically. DBYES, CHAI, NERYC, BRO and AIDA also assist the staff of *Karsang Takar*.

4.5 Trainees

Karsang Takar is designed to accommodate 20 tribal young men and women, between the ages of 16 and 25. Smart trainees are selected from a list of applicants that should have gone to school at least up to class VII. Those who are admitted participate in all the modules of the one-year course.

4.6 Course fees

In exchange for the free training received at *Karsang Takar*, as service to the society and as servant leadership training, the *Takar* give six months of voluntary service in areas assigned to them by I-CARD, after the completion of their course at *Karsang Takar*.

4.7 Evaluation of trainees

A continuous system of evaluation has been the reason for development of *Karsang Takar*. This evaluation takes into account the grasp of the subject matter rather than memory work. The emphasis is on good performance and developing of correct attitudes.

4.8 Re-orientation programmes

Every year all the *Takar* get together with *Karsang Takar* trainees for two weeks of re-orientation. These meetings are held in April and October and they help in networking and evaluation.

5. Boscome, Dimapur

Fr. T.O. Sebastian, seeing the poor condition of the village youth in and around Dimapur, began to give them some kind of coaching in basic education. Later, in the year 1999, Fr. Sebastian presented the

possibilities of this kind of mission in Dimapur to the provincial council. The council, though grasped the idea, did not give Fr. Sebastian an approval. However, the house council gave him a green signal. Finally, with few supporters on his side he began the coaching centre in the school of Mr. Rio a prominent politician of Nagaland, for the poorest of the poor, mostly from the rickshaw pulling communities. The Boscome gives priority to the poor children within the age group of 5 to 14.

With the passage of time Fr. Sebastian gained favour of many people within and out side the congregation. Strengthened with more support he introduced more of these in different places. At present Boscome has five basic education centres in Dimapur, namely, at Signal Basti, Nagagaon, Kevijau Colony, Tahekhu Village and K. Sachu colony. In all there are 250 students enrolled in the network of schools with eight teachers who render voluntary service with minimum remuneration.

5.1 Activities

1. Boscome provides educational shelter to the poorest of the poor.
2. Boscome brings the poorest children into the group of the literate.
3. Boscome takes classroom to the vicinity of the poor and their setting.
4. Boscome admits children from all castes, creeds, tribes and nationalities.
5. Boscome gives them a package of basic education free of cost.

5.2 Problems

1. Right from the beginning Fr. T.O. Sebastian had troubles. The initial days of his mission were difficult for him, as many Salesians in the province did not consider his work seriously.
2. In the initial days many wanted Fr. Sebastian to keep away from the non-locals for whom he was working, as they feared the fury of the local Naga people.
3. Finance was one of the big problems Fr. Sebastian faced in the beginning.
4. Lack of place and proper shed for the children to come together to learn.
5. Lack of people to assist him to teach children.

5.3 Plans

1. Fr. Sebastian wishes to start Boscome centres in many places, in rented building, as he sees the need is very high.
2. To give textbooks and uniform for the students of Boscome centres.
3. Boscome intends to have a regular school where there will be classes for 1 to 4 and recognised by the Nagaland Government.

6. Intensive Rural Education (IRE)

Fr. Dominic Pendanam has initiated an experiment in rural education in the remote district of Kurung Kumey, Arunachal Pradesh. The project is called 'Intensive Rural Education (IRE). The experiment began in 2003 with a group of 60 students⁹. In 2004, there are about 80 students who are pursuing this programme.

For the intensive education project, children both boys and girls belonging to the economically backward families of the Nyishi community are selected to come to Don Bosco Centre at Yupia, Arunachal Pradesh. Food, accommodation and textbooks are provided free of cost. The children selected are between the ages of twelve and fifteen. The condition for admission is that they are to be children who have never attended any school or school dropouts or studying in lower classes.

At the Don Bosco centre, the students are put to an intensive study programme under the supervision of a group of committed teachers. They rise at 5.0' clock in the morning, have a wash, pray and go to study in the morning. It is followed by five hours of regular classes. In the afternoon, coaching classes are conducted for weak students. It is followed by manual work, bath and evening study, supper, rosary and recreation. The children remain at the centre for ten full months (March to December).

The students are evaluated through weekly and tri-monthly tests. They are given promotion according to their performance in studies. In the course of the ten months some students even reach up to Class V. At the end of the ten months of intensive training, they are helped to attend regular schools outside the Don Bosco institution.

In the course of the year, the children also have a lived in experience of Easter and Christmas celebrations. On Sundays and holidays they are given Bible classes.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the province of Dimapur is engaged in a variety of works with youth. DBYES is the 'apex body' that co-ordinates much of the youth ministry of the province. At the same time there are also works with young people that do not fall directly under the purview of DBYES. In some cases our work with youth is the fruit of the initiative and creativity of certain individual Salesians. They should be encouraged and supported by the province. At the same time, as sons of Don Bosco, we need to read with greater attention the signs of the times and be more sensitive to the needs of the young people so that our youth ministry truly meets the needs of the youth of our region. There is also a need for greater awareness among the Salesians of the primacy of the youth apostolate in our pastoral engagements. It is here that formation of Salesians to youth ministry becomes important. These are some of the problems that need to be addressed with urgency so that the youth apostolate of the province can become more effective and fruitful.

NOTES

1. "Evaluation of Youth work in North East India" a study by AIDA.
2. "Evaluation of Youth work in North East India" a study co-ordinated by AIDA Dimapur sponsored by CORDAID, THE NETHERLANDS, p.12, No.2 a.
3. "Evaluation of Youth work in North East India", p. 19, No.8
4. "DBYES 2004-2005" p. 7, No.3.
5. "Evaluation of Youth work in North East India", p. 23, No.13.
6. From the minutes of Fr. Antonio Domnic's meeting with the DBYES team, 2004.
7. Evaluation study organized by the DBYES in January 2004, p..6 No.4.
8. It aims at making newspapers reach far-flung villages on every Sunday. At present newspapers are made available to the villagers in three languages: English, Hindi and Assmese. The target is to

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make every family where there is a person who can read, subscribe to a newspaper.

9. Out of 60 students, two dropped out and eight left the institution due to sickness.

Chapter 5

WORK OF EVANGELISATION AIMS, METHODS AND IMPACT ON CULTURES

Francis Thottathimyalil SDB

Introduction

The scope of this paper is vast and the term evangelisation is sometimes used as in *Evangelium Nuntiandi* (EN)¹ and more often than not in the common parlance of the evangelical activity of the Church. This paper deals mainly with Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur where the Salesians of Dimapur province work.

1. A brief historical note on the Church in the province of Dimapur

The catholics were not the first of the foreign Christian missionaries to come to the Northeast India. Hence the original experience of Christianity and their evangelical methods have a bearing on our present subject. The English Baptist Mission at Serampur was a pioneer in the opening of the region to Christianity. By the methods of preaching in the vernacular at market places, distribution of published sections of the Bible and Christian literature, their missionaries, Krishna Chandra Pal in Sylhet, James Rae in Guwahati and Alexander Lish in Cherrapunji were able to lay the foundations of the beginnings of the Christian presence in Northeast India.

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The American Baptist Mission came to Northeast India in 1836 with the intention of entering Burma and working among the Shans of upper Burma and Yunnan China. Realising that their ultimate goal of reaching China was difficult, they directed their energies to working first among the hill people, of what is today the eastern part of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur and in much of the Brahmaputra valley. Their pioneer missionary Oliver Cutter, was a printer by profession. He was the first to have the vision of using the Roman script for reducing tribal languages into writing.²

The first contact with the Nagas were made by Mr. Miles Bronson in 1839 in the present Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh. Though he set up an elementary mission school, he had to leave the mission due to ill health.³ The work among the Nagas was interrupted till the arrival of Rev. E.W. Clark in 1869.⁴ Other Christian missions that worked in Assam were the Lutherans, chiefly among the tea garden labourers and the Anglicans.

1.2 The arrival of the catholic missionaries

The earliest recorded visit of catholic missionaries to Assam was that of the Jesuits Stephan Cacella and John Cabral who arrived in Assam in 1626. They were also on their way to Tibet and China. Later Augustinian Friars made periodic visits to minister to catholics of Portuguese descent, who were in the service of the Mughal, Cachar and Tripura rulers. One such visitation in 1714 was that of bishop Laynes of Mylapore accompanied by Fr. Barbier. For these early catholic missionaries neither Assam nor Arunachal Pradesh had few evangelical attractions. These were mere transit routes to Tibet⁵.

The catholics made another attempt, this time by the Foreign Missionaries of Paris, to reach Tibet⁶. Frs. Rabin, Bernard, Krick and Bourry arrived in Guwahati on June 27th 1850. Their adventure ended with the cruel murder of Krick and Bourry in Arunachal Pradesh by a Mishmi chieftain named Kaisha as they tried to enter Tibet. The seed of Christianity was sown in Arunachal Pradesh in 1854⁷.

The first resident catholic missionary to Northeast however was Fr. Jacopo Broy, PIME (Milan Fathers) who stayed in Guwahati from 1872-1890. The Holy See entrusted the "Assam Mission" to the Salvatorians in 1890. With great zeal the Salvatorians managed to

establish the catholic church in the Northeast on firm foundations, setting up mission centres, churches, schools, an agricultural school, a technical school, plans for religious congregations of local women, a catholic monthly magazine called *Ka ling Khristan*, Catechism books and hymn books (*U Nongialam Catholic*). When they had to leave India due to the World War I in 1914, the number of catholics were about 5000. The catholic mission of Northeast was entrusted to the Jesuits from 1914-1921. It was only in 1922 that the "Assam missions" were entrusted to the Salesians of Don Bosco⁸.

1.3 Salesian presence in Nagaland

The first resident catholic priest in the Naga Hills was Father Emmanuel Bars Sdb. He reached Kohima on 31 December 1948 as a chaplain to the Sisters of the Society of Christ Jesus (SCJ) from Spain. The Church grew thanks to valiant Salesian Missionaries like Fr. Hubert Marocchino, Fr. Paul Bernick, Fr. Orestes Marengo, Fr. John Med and Fr. Bollini.⁹

1.4 The Salesian presence in Manipur

Though some visits to Manipur were made from Nagaland as early as 1948, active missionary work began in Manipur only after the erection of the new diocese of Dibrugarh in 1951 and the consecration of its first bishop, Orestes Marengo on 18 May 1952. The bishop himself with his secretary Fr. Aloysius Ravalico made their first extensive tour of Nagaland and Manipur in 1953. The next missionary to join the band of pioneers was Fr. Peter Bianchi in 1955.¹⁰

1.5 The Salesian presence in Assam

The Salesian mission in Assam really took off on 15 December 1922 when Fr. Louis Mathias was officially appointed the Prefect Apostolic of Assam. Soon the Salesian Sisters too joined the mission of Assam in 1923 setting up centres in Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Tezpur and Jowai. By the time the second 'expedition' of four priests along with Leo Piasecki of Poland, known as the *lion of the Brahmaputra* had arrived, the Salesians had six centres. Fr. Constantine Vendrame was another great Salesian who left the Salesians a legacy of evangelisation methods. His love, affection, friendship and sympathy for the simple people and identification with them won

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many to the faith. He cut short the period of catechumenate with great apostolic success. The normative period in the missions was two years of catechumenate. At the insistence of Fr. Vendrame this was now changed and reduced to a period of six months. This Vendramean method of evangelisation was accepted by most of the Salesians and is being fully advocated by present day missionaries like Fr. Sylvanus Sngi Lyndoh SDB.¹¹

1.6 The Salesian presence in Arunachal Pradesh

In 1944 the catholic mission of North Lakhimpur was opened by the Salesians of Don Bosco. Fr. Cerato of this mission admitted a number of tribal boys from the Nishi, Adi and Apatani tribes to his boarding. But there is hardly any evidence to show that through these boys many became catholics¹². The land hallowed by the blood of the martyrs was blessed by the courageous footprints of Fr. Job Kallarackal and numerous touring missionaries like Prembhai in those early days. Fr. Kulandaisamy of Tezpur diocese was responsible for the breakthrough in mission work in East Arunachal Pradesh. When he was staying in the Dulahat parish in view of opening a mission in Simalguri for the Boro community, he was led by providence to choose Harmutty as the centre instead of Simalgurl. He resided in an Adivasi village called Malu Basti close to Harmutty. In 1983 Harmutty was handed over to the Salesians. When Fr. Kulandaisamy left, his tireless zeal for the spread of the Gospel and his amiable character had attracted to the Church around 8000 catholics from Arunachal Pradesh.

The second phase of the growth of the Church in Arunachal Pradesh between the year 1983-1994 was under the dynamic leadership of Fr. Chemparathy Jose (C.C) in the West and Fr. Palliparambil George (P.K) in the East. Before the Salesians could actually set foot in Arunachal Pradesh in 1993-1994, the relentless Spirit of early missionaries coupled with zeal for souls moved the frontiers of the Church to the borders of Tibet in the West and Burma in the East. The work of expansion while consolidating the gains of the early days was carried out by Fr. Thottathimyalil Francis (T.J) and Fr. Francis Tinglung in Palin, Fr. Thuruthiyil Sebastian (T.J) in Yachuli, Fr. Kottarathil Mathai (C.D) in Borduria and Fr. Thomas Vattoth (V.T) in Minthong from 1994-1995 onwards.

2. Protestant missionary methods

God has many ways to communicate his love to the people. The early Protestant missionaries made use of every available means to preach the Gospel.

2.1 Study of language

The learning of the local language was extremely effective in the work of evangelisation as seen from the life of Rev. Clark. He not only mastered the different languages but also committed them to writing. As Fr. Joseph Puthenpurakal puts it: "It was all the more imperative, because in the whole structure of Baptist evangelisation work, both the spoken word and the written word played a major role."¹³ It is said that Pettigrew learned Manipuri and found a way to enter Manipur¹⁴. He was able to master about a dozen languages, including Hindi, Bengali, Manipuri and later Tangkhul¹⁵. It was the early missionaries who gave a written literature to many tribes by adopting the Roman script for them¹⁶. It is the zeal for the kingdom of God which made them learn and master many of the North-eastern languages. Clark compiled the Ao dictionary, a catechism, a hymn book and translated the Gospels according to Mathew and John.

2.2 Education

Clark realised that it was only through the opening of schools that access could be obtained to new villages.¹⁷ With this in mind he prepared as many boys and girls who could be send to the villages as teachers and preachers. Nearly all the Christians of the early years were students of the schools. In the course of a few years village schools and boardings became the chief forum of evangelisation among the Nagas.¹⁸ What Clark did in Nagaland, Pettigrew did in Manipur. They were not however, so much interested in secular education for its own sake. They wanted to further the cause of Christianity through the teaching of Scriptures and Christian hymns in the local language.

2.3 Medical services

The early missionaries were allowed to enter some mission territories because of the medical services that they could render. They won the confidence of the people. People from far off places

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came to the missionaries for treatment, while they were also given a dose of Christianity¹⁹. Dr. Bailey was a full time medical missionary among the Aos and Dr. Crozier was sent to Manipur on the request of Pettigrew.

2.4 Music and singing

The tribals who love singing and dancing were easily won over to Christ and the Gospel through the ministry of music and choral singing. The novelty of hearing Godhula singing Gospel hymns in Assamese attracted the people towards the missionaries. Clark himself is said to have carried his violin along with him when he first landed on the soil of Nagaland. Thus many barriers and prejudices were broken.

2.5 The role of the students and native evangelists

It was through the instrumentality of the students and native evangelists that the adherents to the Baptist movement increased both in Manipur and Nagaland. The missionaries gave regular Bible instructions to the students, held common prayer meetings and through them a chain of contacts were slowly established with new villages.²⁰ A commendable job was done by “Gospel Teams” and native evangelists touring the villages.

2.6 Other methods particular to the Protestant churches

2.6.1 Public preaching of the gospel

Public preaching of the Gospel and administering baptism was the main work of Clark and Godhula. In every village there is a place for public gathering and the missionaries made the best use of these places to preach the Gospel. C.D. King himself expressly said, regarding the propriety of the preaching of the Gospel. To preach the Gospel, is the first requirement of our commission.²¹ They used the Bible extensively in their public preaching and always ended with a call to repentance and a commitment. They took down the names of those who came forward and were baptised soon after.

2.6.2 Sunday schools

This was an effective programme of evangelical activity especially involving the children and the young people. Bible classes introduced in the various schools and regular Sunday schools

brought many to the faith. Graded Sunday schools for the children up to the age of 17, with common examination and issue of certificates has done much to consolidate the faith. To these classes, both the Christians and non-Christians were invited and songs and Bible stories were taught to them.

3. Present Salesian missionary methods

The need of taking the Gospel to the ends of the world prompted the Salesians to come to the Northeast in 1922. The province of Guwahati had done much to the spread of the Gospel in Northeast till 1981. After the extraordinary visitation of Fr. Thomas Panakezhram, the Guwahati province was divided and Dimapur province came into existence on 18 June 1982 on the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The decree of erection of the province was issued on 8 December 1981. The dates of erection and inauguration of the province are very sacred to the memory of Dimapur province. Dedicating the Dimapur province to the Sacred Heart under the protection of the Immaculate Conception, the first provincial Fr. Mathew Pulingathil launched this 'missionary province'²².

The time-tested methods of evangelisation developed by St. Paul and St. Peter (touring missionaries), the method used after emperor Constantine known as *cujus region egus religio*, the method of Matteo Ricci (cultural accommodation), of Robert De Nobili (cultural adaptation), of Constantine Lievens (fighting legal battles for the oppressed), Vendrame's method (thirst for souls, visits, and friendly Salesian presence), Fr. Sylvanus' method (Philip's method in Acts.8.39) carried out through witnessing, preaching, healing, schools, education, developmental works were retained by the early Salesians²³. These methods of evangelisation are known to everyone and so without going to the minutest details, let me list them.

3.1 Direct evangelisation

The early missionaries in the province of Dimapur fanned out to all the nook and corner of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Upper Assam the zeal and dynamism of any trailblazer of the past. They toured the remotest villages, finding their delight in being with the people, in learning their customs and languages. They suffered all sorts of privations and some even suffered martyrdom²⁴ for the sake of the Gospel, in setting up mission centres educational services, Churches, dispensaries, boardings, convents, developmental works,

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etc. Much energy and more money have been spent. Dimapur province has been blessed with great pioneer missionaries and visionaries like Fr. Peter Bianchi, Fr. John Med, Fr. Paul Bernick, Fr. Matthew Tharakan, Fr. Joseph Edakkudan, Fr. Sebastian Manianchira, Fr. Michael Mundathanathu, Fr. Devasia Kollenkunnel, Fr. Joseph Murickal, Bro. Raphael Bara, Fr. Thomas Arackel, Fr. Benjamin Toppo, Fr. Chacko Edamala, Fr. Dominic Barwa, Fr. Thomas Kannath, Fr. Chacko Kakkanatt, Fr. Thomas Karthikapallil, Fr. Philip Kokkapallil, Fr. George Mukala, Fr. Joseph Nangachiveettil, Fr. Mathew Narimattam, Fr. Scaria Nedumala, Fr. Nathaniel Topno, Fr. Joseph Variathukalayil, Fr. Thomas Vattoth, Fr. Mathew Pulingathil. This list is not meant to be exhaustive. Only a few senior and erstwhile missionaries in the field are mentioned here. The unlisted ones are the ones who presently carry on the work of these pioneers.

3.2 Youth and culture

'Youth for others' is the motto of the new Salesian missionary experiment initiated by Fr. Thomas Kalapurackal (K.A). He organises the youth, motivates and empowers them to do the work of evangelisation. This he does by promoting the literature and culture of the Mising people. The magazine *Pro-Mising-action* is the official organ of this movement. Fr. K. A. Thomas SDB who knows the Mising language has been with the young for the past 5 years believes with St. Irenaeus that the "the glory of God is man fully alive". The youth of the area is picked and chosen and put to a rigorous one year of intensive training programme to affirm the total person and finally to lead them to the fullness of the truth."²⁵ Fr. Shaji Valiarambil of Golaghat who has in-depth knowledge of the culture and language of the Adivasis also believes in similar missionary method and says, "the cultural dance, their traditional beliefs, proverbs, wisdom sayings are used to show that the Bible is much related with their traditional religion"²⁶. In Imphal Fr. George Menamparambil is promoting the Manipuri music with Christian and catechetical content as a method of evangelisation. Fr. George Palliparambil who has been a great missionary in East of Arunachal Pradesh for a decade sums up this missionary method when he says, "taking the people as they are with their cultural and religious traditions, accepting them as they are and making them feel that they are recognised and loved will make miracles of conversion and fidelity"²⁷.

3.3 'Come and see programmes'

In Imphal, Fr. George Menamparambil had been able to baptise over 120 Meiteis and bring the light of the Gospel to hundreds of Kukis over the past two years. He explains this method of invitation used by Jesus (Jn.1.39,46) in the following words, "We invite people to come and stay with us for a few days. Each group is of only one language. They are non-Christians and non-catholics men, women, boys and girls. We get 15-20 in each group. They get classes during the day and audio-visuals in the evening. The subjects covered are Bible, Christian doctrine, Jesus, history of salvation and Church history. The duration of their stay is from 3 to 10 days. The participants are people who are curious about the Bible, about Jesus and what Christians believe about Jesus. There is no obligation to become Christians. We call these 'come and see' seminars or camps. Participants are asked to pay anything. Several such programmes have been held. We are trying to hold programmes of this type for college students, intellectuals and Baptist Church leaders in the future. We are also planning a one month long residential programme for Catholics and Church leaders free of charge if necessary"²⁸.

3.4 The apostolate in the school

It is a known fact that the Salesians in our province are carrying out the mission of education as envisaged by Don Bosco and the tradition of the Congregation. Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen once remarked: "The growth of your society is nothing short of a miracle. You Salesians have worked out a very practical solution to today's educational problems, you work for the poor. You teach trades. You know how to keep the youngsters happy. Stick to that sort of work and the miracle will go on"²⁹. The formal educational and evangelical efforts at Salesian College of Higher Education, Dimapur, Salesian College of Teacher Education (BEd. College), Dimapur, Don Bosco College, Maram, Don Bosco College, Itanagar, and in all the higher secondary schools and high Schools are commendable. Besides the non-formal vocational training centre at Dimapur, Golaghat and Maram, there are many other non-formal schools that are run in most centres as part of the work of evangelisation to seek out the poorest of the poor. There are a few non-formal schools that deserve special mention. In Imphal there are over 40 evening schools in and around the city run by volunteers and community leaders in their own

locality. Here school is brought to the child and not the other way around³⁰. They have been a fine way to get into the Meitei and other communities perceived to be inimical to the Gospel. At Tamenglong Don Bosco, an educational experiment known as 'Intensive Education' to put students into class VI from KG I in one year's time has been successfully going on for the past 12 years. Many who went through this programme have finished their graduation and four among them have become religious. In Dimapur *Boscome* is another response to the youth at risk by Fr. T.O. Sebastian, a great educator. He has been able to bring into the mainstream many unemployed young people who would have otherwise been a threat to the society.

3.5 The apostolate of the media

Translating the Bible into tribal languages was both an evangelising method and a means of catechesis for the faithful. The Gospels in Upper Nyishi was made ready in 2000 and the revision of the whole New Testament in Upper Nyishi is going on at the time of writing this article (June 2004). The revision and the translation of the full catholic Bible in Rongmei is almost completed. We have brought out the first ever dictionary in Rongmei in 1992 and the Rongmei grammar in 1993. The translation of 'The Holy Week liturgy', Novena of Perpetual Help, Divine Mercy prayers, prayers for the dead, a hymn book, a Catechism book (*Aniu le bam duangmei Raguang* in 2003), numerous hymns and articles in Rongmei have been but efforts to preach the word in season and out of season³¹. Fr. Devasy Palatty has been instrumental in bringing out the New Testament in Maram language in 2003. The grammar and hymnbooks by Fr. Sebastian Thurithyil and Fr. Joby Mattappally in Lower Nishi are other monumental works. Numerous audiovisuals in Sadiri language by Fr. Jonas Kerketta and by Fr. Theophilus Ganlari in Boro have done much to the cause of evangelisation. Fr. Mathew Pulingathil and Fr. Nazarius Lakra have been of late engaged in full time catechetical apostolate with various audio visual materials. One of the apostles of the press in Dimapur province is Fr. John Med with his prolific and amazing output of the printed word. Numerous books, catechisms, translations, pamphlets in different languages have been financed, published and distributed by him in these past years with his indomitable zeal for the true faith and to deepen the faith of those wavering due to the militant activities of fringe churches. Mention also should be made to his *All You Hills* hymn book running into

several editions singing the praises of God from every hill and dale of Northeast. In the field of serious journalism and research, to counter the vile propaganda of the resurgent militant Hindu fanatics the name of Fr. Jose Kuruvachira has become a force to reckon with, on national and international fora. Use of scientific tools to defend and propagate the faith has always been a priority in his scheme of things. The numerous parish bulletins, magazines and publications to spread the faith is also to be noted as an effective method of evangelisation in our province

3.6 Lay evangelists and catechists

The growth of the Protestant Churches in the Northeast was possible mainly due to the work of the native evangelists. The Salesian missionaries have also availed their services and have become second line of helpers for evangelisation. The Bible School at Tinsukia, Assam, the Catechists' training at Yachuli, Arunachal Pradesh, the many boardings and hostels run by the Salesians have become breeding grounds for good native evangelists. The efforts of equipping the catechists with skills for their ministry through seminars, exposure trips, monthly meetings deserve special mention. The presence of 'Jesus Youth' in many of our mission centers has given added impetus to the work of the lay leaders.

3.7 Youth ministry

The work of the youth animation in the province has been a singular method of evangelisation. The friendly face of Salesianity through the ministry of Salesians like Fr. Francis Charuvila (P.X), Fr. Anto Tharakan, Fr. Joseph Thettayil, Fr. John Puthussery and Fr. Cyriac Pulinthanath has brought many to Christ and the Gospel values. Like them there are also many other Salesians who are engaged in youth work. Fr. Jerry Pathikulangara has done much research into problems and possibilities of youth with an evangelisation perspective. He presently heads the diocesan youth activities of Northeast at Guwahati. The youth animation team has prepared the youth of the region to equip themselves for life through hundreds of camps, seminars, courses and youth animation programmes. The regular training programmes for the scouts and guides is another way to inculcate Gospel and Salesian values to the young. The youth centres at Dimapur, Dibrugarh, Doom Dooma,

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Kohima, Khonsa, Imphal, Tinsukia and Wokha and so on give quality services to the young of the region to discover their potential, training in employment skills, leadership and value education to empower them. Many youth of other Christian denominations come into close interactions with the Church through the in-service training programmes for teachers and Church leaders conducted by these centres. The province runs college hostels at Dibrugarh, Itanagar, Kohima, Maram and Imphal which trains and imparts Gospel values to the future intelligentsia of the region.

3.8 Development and evangelisation

Human development has been an integral part of evangelisation all through these years in the province. The Agency for Integral Development Action (AIDA) which grew up into full stature under Fr. Bimal Lakara, Fr. Jerry Pathikulangara and Fr. George Thottappilly (T.D) is doing yeomen service to the region under the leadership of Fr. Tony Pellissery. Don Bosco Social Welfare (DBSW) at Tamenglong is one of the few partners of Action Aid India in the Northeast working in more than a 100 villages to empower the marginalised. The Sevak Kendra of Tirap district and AGUA social service centre at Doom Dooma are the human face of Christ to the poor and the needy working for a sustainable development of the marginalised tribal society the victims of militancy, rampant corruption and neglect by successive governments.

The many credit societies, Self Help Groups (SHGs), co-operatives, Mother and Child Health (MCH) programmes have opened up the floodgates of development and hope to thousands. Social evils like commercialisation of women, female infanticide, child marriage, polygamy and drug abuse have been addressed through the empowerment of women and other developmental efforts of the Salesians. Thousands of poor children are enabled to finish the school and college studies through scholarship and sponsorship programmes. The Church has been able to enter into certain areas only because of the developmental activities carried out irrespective of colour, sex and religion.

4. Challenges

The present study is not just meant to pat our backs in complacency. It is an invitation to repentance, renewal, reformation, the launching of an internal 'perestroika' to critically evaluate the

validity of our methods of evangelisation and to suggest changes for the future. I want to present a few challenges to the way we do mission of evangelisation.

4.1 Being a supra-local mission

The Salesian mission in this province is at best a national and international effort. There is little effort to localise and 'customise' the Church. F.S. Downs speaking of this says that the Protestant strength lies in the close relationship between the church and the tribe. That gives the Protestant Church a strong indigenous identity. Despite its long standing interest in and promotion of cultural 'indigenouness' the catholic Church has had to struggle to establish the same identity with the local societies that the Protestants have had³². We do not have sufficient local Salesians to take over the present works. After 50 years of our presence among certain tribes, we do not have a single Salesian from them. Our evangelisation methods should reflect a shift from hegemony to partnership (2 Cor.9.13). We must be prepared to hand over control of the local church to the indigenous clergy and to work as partners in building up the Kingdom.

4.2. Missionary was the method³³

There is a crisis of the method of evangelisation because in the past, the missionary was the best method but now missionary becomes the greatest obstacles to evangelisation. The enthusiasm and commitment to be preachers of the Word and dispensers of sacraments is waning. Structural comforts and lethargy is slowly eating into missionary ideals. The training of the greatest method the missionary needs greater attention³⁴. He should shed all sense of superiority. There needs to be greater humility, respect, dialogue, acceptance, sharing and communicating what is lived and experienced by the Missioner. The message will be the medium. Mission will be the missioner.

Since "the best mission method is the missionary", he should have all the human qualities that are expected of an ordinary person. The ten commandments of Nehru to any administrator going to a tribal area is valid for us:

1. He must be prepared to enter their huts, talk to them, eat and smoke with them, live their lives, and not consider himself superior or apart. Then only can he gain their confidence and respect and be in a position to advise them.

2. Humility is the most dominant virtue of the most successful administrator.
3. He should be able to mix freely with them on terms of equality. They expect him to be always accessible.
4. He should have great patience and an even temper.
5. He should show genuine interest in their customs and traditions and should admire their textiles and arts.
6. Tribals are admirers of men and women who work hard.
7. Tribals have a great sense of truth and a belief in justice. They hate lies and promises which one cannot keep.
8. A knowledge of the language is the window by which we see into the tribal mind: it is the door through which we shall most readily receive affection and co-operation.
9. They should be not only tribal minded, but also rural minded. They expect you to work with your hands.
10. Broad based participation of the population in decision making process at different levels is a must.³⁵

These ten commandments should become part of any missionary's dictum for effectiveness. To crown all this, the intensively communitarian aspect of any tribal society should also be understood. Hence the challenge is not incarnational method- which is impossible- but to try and become part of the people to whom the mission is addressed.

4.3 The charismatic method

All work of evangelisation started in the Church after the Pentecost. It was the Spirit that decided the mission strategies in the Acts of the Apostles.³⁶ It is impossible to evangelise without the gifts of the Holy Spirit. There is no other way of being a missionary without being Charismatic. In this age of the Holy Spirit, reading the signs of time like Don Bosco, we need to be Spirit filled persons to keep abreast with the Spiritual movements that are taking place around us. This is one reason why other churches like the Pentecostals and Revivals are making headway. The Catholic Church is losing many of its members because they do not get an experience of the power of the Holy Spirit in our Church. Their missionaries are Spirit filled and Word centred and people who seek a life in the Spirit seek them out rather than us. They are not sent out without being filled with the Spirit³⁷. They are anointed by the Holy Spirit to preach and to heal in a matter of few weeks. In spite of our long years of training the gifts and charisms of the Spirit are seldom seen to be operative in the life of the Salesian missionary.

A word should be said also of personnel for evangelisation. The selection and choice to work in a pioneering mission field has got tremendous repercussions on the future of that mission. Everyone in a missionary team is important. We may, however, note that the role of the pioneer is unique. The pioneer is a Charismatic figure and should be given ample scope. Pioneers who have exhausted their Charism in one place can be of great advantage in another place. Whenever a pioneer has been identified with a particular place and people, or a particular mission as someone's fiefdom, the cause of the Gospel has always suffered.

Giving prominent place to the Holy Spirit calls for a discerning of the Spirit when new centres are opened. The Holy Spirit will help us to go to places where He would send us. It will help us to concentrate on responsive groups and areas. Every effort must be made to sow on fertile soil and thus reap a rich harvest for the Lord. Discerning the *kairos* of God, we should be there at the right time and the right place. This will also help us to avoid unnecessary concentration of personnel and resources.

4.4 Paradigm shift

A shift from a methodology of 'doing' to 'being' Church is a must. The aim of evangelisation should be not just to baptise and proceed. The Church in Arunachal Pradesh has now over 2 lakh Christians, thanks to the wind of the Holy Spirit and the pioneering zeal of many missionaries including the young people. The author once baptised 700 people in one night at Sangram. But mass movements, unless effectively followed up leave behind a measure of superficiality. Such conversions are not always total. Paganism persists in the life of the Christians Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil, quoting Daniel Ropes says that 'very often Christianity was but a veneer, thinly covering the animism or totemism of yesterday'³⁸. Hence an adaptation of the method of preaching and the organisation of Christian life and worship in Arunachal Pradesh is called for. Church structures need to be adapted to suit its social needs.

The concept of territorial dioceses with metropolitan and patriarchal sees is essentially Roman. The Church structure in Arunachal Pradesh could be in the shape of village and district councils like the social structure of administration in the State. The faltering faith there needs to be built up with traditional methods of evangelisation and a method from 'below'. What it needs is not stones but the Spirit. We do not need to build structures to project a

'Powerful Church'. We are not called upon to build palatial residences or monumental churches but to build up the Church, that is, to heal the sick, cast out the devils, preach the Gospel and gather disciples.³⁹ The danger of stagnation or regression because of the wrong idea of consolidation should be avoided. The missionary thrust of our province should continue if we should be a vibrant group of religious faithful to our vocation at this moment of history. The past history of seeking to stretch the frontiers of the Kingdom of God was made possible through sufficient personnel. Shortage of personnel is the direct result of slackening in mission.

4.5 The formation to methods of evangelisation is inadequate

There is hardly any immediate preparation to equip the missionary to be effective. The province which is a microcosm of various tribal and cultural identities does not have even a cultural or language laboratory to prepare persons *in loco* for the mission. The missionary usually has to reach a place without knowing much about the people, language and culture for whom he has to work. There has been hardly any specialisation in the culture and language of the area by the Salesians. No doctoral studies on the culture, customs, language, folklore and traditions have been undertaken by the Salesians. Tribal Anthropology should be made a compulsory subject for anyone preparing to work in our province. Better late than never.

4.6 Methods from other churches

We should be critically open to missiological break-throughs and evangelical principles of other Churches to be effective. Donald McGavran's⁴⁰ Church Growth principles like "win the winnable while they are winnable", or principle of homogenous unit that says "homogenous churches grow faster" are valid for our study and reflection. The rebuke of Dr. Ambedkar to the Church in India is a rebuke to all of us. He wrote: "You Christians have what we need, the right kind of religion. It works now for a few of our people. Some who have come to know Christ have proved that the Chamars can be as good and as smart as any people, *but you are too slow*. We cannot wait. By your programme it would take generations for all our people to be rescued. We will have to find a quick way"⁴¹. Win the winnable while they are winnable. They will not wait for us. Those Churches that are growing make evangelisation their business of life and resort

to tried out methods like personal contacts, door to door home crusades, Zenana missions, correspondence evangelism, Sunday Schools, Youth evangelism, power evangelism, etc. All these indicate the passion of a hardcore missionary. Any method is valid if there is a burning faith which cannot keep the joy of salvation for themselves. As a province we could take up the 'Sunday School' method of the Baptists Church for school evangelism.

4.7 Methods of evangelisation for a tribal church

Many of our works in the province are for tribal societies and hence it calls for a tribal method of evangelisation. The tribal societies are generally oral societies. To these oral societies any written form of information and communication has very little value. Personal encounter is a basic requirement and oral or verbal communication is the most effective method. The Gospel should be communicated through indigenous methods. The use of songs, drama, dance, stories, proverbs, visual illustrations (audio-video), music, art and rituals are some of the effective oral methods for communication.

The Bible is God's greatest picture book, the greatest drama in symbols. The story of OT is God communicating to oral societies through stories, symbols, songs, proverbs, ten plagues, ten commandments, miracles, signs and wonders. In the NT we see God becoming man (God's effort to communicate with human beings). Jesus used stories, parables and miracles. The whole of the NT is a salvation drama in signs and symbols (Word made flesh, immersion at baptism, the breaking of the bread, the cross, etc). Hence we need to use these same methods of evangelisation. In concrete ways it calls for a radical change in our present approach to mission in the following ways:

1. We go to them when we are free, during the daytime when they are out working in the fields. They ask us to come at night when they are back from the field and when they are ready.
2. We go with plenty of literature, books, hymn books, Bible, tracts, etc. to these semi-literate people. They ask us to come for a discussion in a public meeting or prayer meeting, preferably at night, and that too around the fire.
3. We go to 'preach' the Gospel and 'say the Mass'. They ask us to sing for them using their own songs in their own tunes and 'celebrate' the Mass.

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4. We go to take Bible classes and conduct camps. They ask us to show pictures and films about Jesus. They ask us to demonstrate the power of Jesus over evil spirits.
5. We go with the latest gadgets, guitar, etc. They ask us to bring the drum or tribal instruments to make them dance and to move.
6. We go with a catechist or an interpreter. They ask us to speak in their language, to sing their songs, narrate their stories and use their proverbs and idioms.

These will call for a series of methods of evangelisation not *from above* but *from below*. We need to change our time and timetable. Instead of the catechists coming to the centre, the missionary goes to the local church, stays the night equipped with petromax lights, sleeps in their houses and not in a house apart. He needs to speak their idioms and sing their songs and dance to their tune. The tribals have songs for all occasions and they sit and sing the whole night singing the same tunes⁴. They need to be taught 'lyric theology'. They like Christian doctrines to be taught to them in traditional tunes. Songs against idol worship, witchcraft, blood sacrifice, alcoholism, immoral living, etc. are accepted and appreciated. Composing the Gospel message in their tunes and singing them is the best way to communicate the Gospel. Hence it is absolutely necessary that he be present at all moments of their tribal existence at birth, the naming day, the harvest festival, the wedding, the funeral. He is also expected to pray for them and to intercede for them in these different moments of life and for specific needs like healing, deliverance from evil spirits, good crops, etc. They believe in prayer and miracles and the missionary who does not believe in prayer or in miracles, is not qualified for the Gospel work among the tribals. After the service and prayer, he should invite the people for the greatest of miracles, belief in Lord Jesus and conversion. Praying over those who come forward to the altar reinforces their commitment and faithfulness as they do not have double standards. The next stage known as *power evangelism*, bringing people from Satan's kingdom to God's Kingdom through signs and wonders in the power of the Holy Spirit, is *the mandatory method* of evangelisation in the gospels⁴³ which we hardly use.

In these oral cultures it is expected that they should be taught to memorise Scriptures. It is God's word that gives life to the people. The selected verses should relate to their daily life to comfort them in

sorrow, to give them courage and strength, for good health and good crops. The selected verses should be read aloud and repeated till they commit them to memory.

Tribals are like children and they are simple minded (but they should not be treated as children) and so the Biblical stories of the OT and personages (the creation and fall of man, the flood, the tower of Babel, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Samson, David, Solomon, Esther, etc) need to be narrated. The gospel stories of miracles and parables should be related. The stories of Acts of the Apostles should make the best teaching on Church history. The tribals enjoy *seeing things rather than hearing things*. So the use of pictures, statues, visuals, films, Bible dramas, street plays, etc. is very effective.

Conclusion

Putting down roots in a variety of cultures without transplanting the Gospel message requires a variety of methods of evangelisation suitable to the particular milieu. So there are no best methods in mission. All are best methods as we wait upon the *kairos*, the time God has fixed for his grace to be most effective. The few methods suggested are mostly from personal experience as a missionary for the past eighteen years and may be useful in certain contexts.

I would reiterate that the basic component of any method is the missionary. Without apostles there is no mission, no method. So in all our works in the province we should pray for the 'ministry of the evangelist', that is 'those who have the ability and dedication to share the joy of the Good News with their non-Christian brothers and sisters. *Redemptoris Missio*⁴⁴ reminds us that the missionary must be a contemplative in action who should be a person of the beatitudes. He should "forget his own country, his own people and his father's house"⁴⁵.

Evangelising is not a propaganda campaign but a witnessing experience and therefore its methodology is not mastered by learning tricks and props but by following examples. Yet, history teaches lessons and the methods of today should have the Charismatic dimension that were present in the primitive Church, the whole community living in a *state of mission*.

Our study of the methods of evangelisation used in the past and in the present, has only one scope, namely, to devise the right methodology for the future missionary action. Improving methods is a constant challenge to our apostolic inventiveness. While the modern world attaches much importance to planning and strategy, the missionaries of Christ can not lag behind. *If we fail to plan, we are planning to fail.*

NOTES

1. Cfr. Paul VI, *Post Synodal Exhorttion Evangelium Nuntiandi* 14, 18,24. Evangelization is a complex process made up of varied elements: the renewal and transformation of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entry into the community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiatives.
2. Cfr. David R.Syiemlieh, *A Critique of Evangelisation Methods in S.Karotemprel, Evangelizing Methods in North East India- Some clarifications and evaluation*, Shillong 2003, appendix 7, p.187 (unpublished).
3. Cfr. J.Puthenpurakal, *Baptist Missions in Nagaland*, Shillong: Vendrame Missiological Institute, 1984, p.51.
4. Cfr. A. Yonuo, *The Rising Nagas, A Historical and Poltical Study*, Delhi: Vivek Publishing House, 1974, p.114. More on the mission methods of Clark. Cfr. J. Puthenpurakal, *Evangelizaton among the Nagaland Tribes*, in S. Karotemprel, (ed)., *The Catholic Church in North-East India 1890-1990:A Multidimensional Study*, Shillong: Vendrame Missiological Institute, 1993, pp. 220-221.
5. Cfr. C.Becker, *Early History of the Catholic Missions in North-East India*, translated and edited by F.Feicht and S.Karotemprel, Shillong: Vendrame Institute, 1989, pp. 93-112.
6. Cfr. Ibid., pp. 99-153.
7. They were martyred in Tibet or on the border of Arunachal Pradesh. Cfr. C.Becker, *Early History of Catholic Missions*, p.149.
8. S. Karotemprel, *Evangelizing Methods*, p.18
9. For a detailed study of the growth of the Catholic Church in Nagaland , the contribution of other men religious like the Jesuits, the diocesan clergy in the person of Fr.P.C. Mani , Fr.T.J. Chacko, the Women religious like the SCJs, SABSS, and CMCs, the laity etc Cfr..Sr.Angeline Lotsuro MSMHC, *The Nagas-A Missionary Challenge*, Shillong: Vendrame Institute, 2000, pp. 57-64.

10. For a detailed study of the growth of the Catholic Church in Manipur, 11. Cfr. Ibid, pp.66-69.
11. Cfr. Devasia Vazhayil, "Methods and Praxis in the Silesian Mission of N.E India" in *Missionary Praxis and Primary Evangelization*, Calcutta: Nitika, 1999, pp. 47-60.
12. Cfr. F. Thottathimyalil, "Evangelisation among the Nishis", in *Missionary Praxis*, pp.63-71.
13. J. Puthenpurakal, *Baptist Missions*, p. 140.
14. Cfr. F.S. Downs, *The Mighty Works: A brief History of the Council of Baptist Churches in the North-East India the Mission Period 1836-1950*, Guwahati: The Christian Literature Centre, 1971, p. 91.
15. Cfr. C.Jajo, *Christian life in a tribal context in Manipur*, Calcutta: Swapna Printing works, 1990, p.27.
16. Cfr. Ibid., P.69.
17. Cfr. J. Puthenpurakal, *Baptist Missions*, p.143.
18. Cfr. S.K. Barpujari, *Christianity and its Impact on the Nagas: An Assessment of the Work of the American Baptist Mission in S. Karotemprél* (ed.), *The Tribes of North-East India*, Shillong: Vendrame Missiological Institute, 1984, p.108.
19. Cfr. P Singh, *Nagaland*, New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1972.p.185.
20. Cfr. J. Puthenpurakal, *Baptist Missions*, p. 112.
21. Cfr. Ibid., p.98.
22. Cfr. DMR/Cir/1/1982.
23. Cfr. S. Karotemprél, *Evangelizing Methods*, pp.119-120, 134-143.
24. We recall here our 'martyrs', Fr. Nedumattathil Jose (1997), Fr.Paliakara Raphael, Fr. Andreas Kindo and Cl. Valliparambil Shinu Joseph (2001).
25. The views expressed are of Fr. K. A. Thomas in an interview (2004).
26. The quote is by Fr. Shaji Valiarampam in an interview (2004).
27. The quote is by Fr. P.K. George in an interview (2004).
28. The quote is by Fr. M. C. George in an interview (2004).
29. Quoted by Fr.Joy Kaippananickal, "The Missionary enterprise of DB and the Salesian Congregation", in *Bosco Udayam*, 29, 2004, p.26.
30. This commendable work is an initiative of Fr.M.C.George SDB. (Editors)
31. For these pioneering works in Rongmei and Nyishi credit should go to Fr.T..J. Francis SDB who is an expert in both these languages. (Editors)
32. As quoted from S. Karotemprél, *Evangelizing Methods*, p.121.

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33. Cfr. Joe Lobo, *Mission Methods in Gujarat*, Shillong: Sacred Heart Theological College, in *IMR* Oct.1988 ,
34. Cfr. S. Karotemprel , *Trents in Evangelization in Asia* in *IMR* Jan. 1989 Vol..2 No.1, p.11.
35. Cfr.. Book by the Christian Association of Arunachal Pradesh, *The Defenceless Christian Minority in Northeast India- the Tragedy of Arunachal*, 1979. pp.20-21
36. Cfr. Acts.13.12; 15.28; 16.6; 16.7-8.
37. Following the command of Jesus to his disciples in Lk.24.49 “*Wait until you are clothed with power from above*”.
38. Thomas Menampampil, *Lesson from Mission History in S.Karotemprel (ed.), The Catholic Church in North-East India 1890-1990*, Shillong: Vendrame Institute, 1993, pp. 104-106
39. Cfr.. Walbert Buhlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church*, St.Paul Publications, 1974, pp 362-371.
40. Cfr. Donald McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, Michigan, 1970.
41. Cfr..as quoted by S.Devasagayam Ponraj in *Tribal Challenge and the Church's response*, Mission Education Books series No.6, Madhupur, 1996, p.218.
42. The Baptists and other denominations have “Christian songs for all occasions” which all sing.
43. Cfr. Jesus' method in Mt.4.24 and his commissioning his apostles in Mt.10.1, 8; Lk..10.9,17; Mk.16.17.
44. RM, 91.
45. Ps, 44.11.

Chapter 6

CHALLENGES TO SALESIAN MISSIONARY WORK TODAY

Mathai Kottarathil SDB

Introduction

Challenges represent difficult, demanding and stimulating tasks. Thus the challenges to the Salesian missionary work in the province of Dimapur constitute those difficulties, demanding and stimulating tasks that await the Salesian missionary. But the challenges also offer the possibility of great fruitfulness and personal satisfaction in the work. In the following pages we take cursory glance at some of the major challenges facing the missionary work in the province of Dimapur¹.

1. Geography

The province of Dimapur is geographically extensive, covering the States of Arunachal Pradesh², Upper Assam³, Manipur⁴ and Nagaland⁵ with a population of over 19, 68, 694 of which some 3, 88, 990 are Catholics⁶. It is economically and educationally backward⁷. The geographical extension and terrain is a big challenge to the missionary who has often to trek to the villages in order to administer sacraments and to catechise.

2. Communication

Northeast is noted for its poor state of infrastructure especially in the areas of road and rail transport. Air link is also extremely poor. Within the circumscription of the province of Dimapur there are four

airports⁸. A few towns of Arunachal Pradesh are linked by helicopter service. The condition of the roads are extremely poor due to a variety of factors like type of soil, mountainous terrain, incessant rain, frequent landslides, poor maintenance, etc. The public transport system too is not adequate especially in the States of Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. Hence for much of the mission work the missionary has to depend on vehicle of the mission.

3. Poverty and economic backwardness

The people of Northeast are economically discriminated against. The per capita income is US\$ 460-470 which is quite low compared to the national average. Poor infrastructure and lack of marketing facilities have throttled the economic development of the region. Extreme and widespread poverty is a serious challenge to the Salesian missionary. While developmental activities were taken up locally, dependent on the initiative of confreres, the establishment of AIDA⁹ in 1985 has brought much planning into our work for the poor and the marginalised.

We have seen radical change in the egalitarian structures of most of the tribal societies of our province. The richer members of the tribes are bent on acquiring more wealth. They readily flaunt their wealth and power and are utterly callous to their less fortunate brothers and sisters. The gap between the rich and the poor has kept widening, leading to serious unrest. Poonam Kaushish writes: "The tragedy of India is that no one cares two hoots for the country for ending its scourge of corruption which has gripped us in its cancerous tentacles. Instead of searching for their conscience and salvaging the remnants of national pride, our leaders have reduced graft to a farcical political pantomime. The threat does not rise from the ISI or our eastern flanks. The enemy resides within"¹⁰.

Here is the challenge of true evangelisation. The message of the Gospel needs to transform persons. To solve the crisis of poverty, inequality, injustice and corruption, what is required is, therefore, a new awareness of one's dignity as a human being, which is the foundation for the recognition of the same dignity in another. It is based on this firm belief in the ultimate worth of the human persons that one can look for mutually beneficial relationship in every human enterprise, reach for ways of co-operation even areas of competition and build up solidarity between peoples¹¹.

4. Terrorism, insurgency

Much of our province is plagued by the problem of insurgency. The Naga aspirations predates the independence of India, while insurgency problems in the Manipur valley began in the eighties. In Manipur insurgency has seriously hampered our mission especially in the wake of constant demand for money and the cruel murder of three of our Salesians on 15 May 2001. The emotional upheaval that followed the latter has certainly upset the evangelisation work in Imphal valley and to a certain extent also in the hill areas of the State. The tragic murder of Fr.N.V. Jose at Maram in 1997 too has affected the missionary enthusiasm of many confreres. Ten per cent of those whom I interviewed has said that terrorism is a serious problem affecting evangelisation. The years 1998-2000 were trying times for the Salesians and the Christian community of Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh as the NSCN factions especially NSCN(K)¹² put intense pressure on many of our Catholics to become Baptists. The security forces too harassed our Christian communities.

But we need to face these challenges and not to be cowed down by the threats of militants and courageously continue to witness to Christ. "Fear is the foremost enemy of mission. Fear is cast out by the fullness of love" (1Jn.4,18)¹³. Courage in Christian witness is bound to produce a spiritual counter-culture, which engenders from transformation of society. Here the decisive factor is not the dangers represented by the enemies of faith but the quality of life of the disciples¹⁴.

5. Linguistic diversity

The linguistic diversity of our province is a serious challenge to all of us Salesians. Over 50 major dialects are spoken in the different parts of our province. Nagaland has 12 major dialects and Arunachal Pradesh has 20 major dialects. To be an effective proclaimer of the Word we need to study the local dialects. Some of the confreres of the province have acquired deep knowledge of the local dialects and even made substantial contribution towards the development of the language and literature. Thus, Fr. T.J. Francis has made lasting contribution to Rongmei and Nishi 'languages'. Fr. K.A.Thomas to Mising language and culture. Fr Mathew Narimattam to Assamese. There are also other Salesians who have made important contribution to local languages and dialects¹⁵.

However, we need to pay greater attention to the study of local dialects. This may require greater stability of personnel. Frequent transfers may sap the interest of confreres to learn local languages¹⁶.

6. Person of the missionary

Along with the spirituality of the Christian missionary there are other factors that contribute to the making of a successful missionary. The person of the missionary continues to be a serious challenge. A warm, cordial, intense personal contact with people is the secret of the missionary success of Northeast India. It is a common knowledge that those missionaries who were capable of greater warmth or great intensity of human relationship, other qualities not wanting, worked the bigger miracles. Are we today losing some of the very human qualities that endeared the Salesians to the people of Northeast?

Some 33 per cent of those who responded to my questionnaire felt that there is a lack of spirit of sacrifice and missionary enthusiasm among the Salesians. It appears that, there is a growing preference for urban settings and more, and more Salesians seek an easy and comfortable life.

7. Missionary Spirituality

Again and again the one theme that strikes one about mission life is the quality of life of the missionary. More than the words, the actions speak louder. It was Karl Rahner who observed that the Christian of the 20th century is a mystic or no Christian at all¹⁷. This is true much more for a missionary. Today many Salesians of our province are not known to be spiritual persons. The laity and other religious do not find us as men of prayer or as competent spiritual guides¹⁸.

For the missionary to be effective he should be imbued with the love of Christ. He should be able to reach out to every one, the young, the old, the poor, the rich, the intellectual and the learned¹⁹. All feel an innate attraction to spiritual persons. While evaluating the Catholic mission work in Nagaland, historian David Syiemlieh says that only a deep spirituality and personal holiness on the part of the clergy and the religious can adequately contribute to the fulfilment of the mission of the Church in Nagaland²⁰. This can be very well applied to Salesian missionary work in Dimapur province.

Missionary spirituality will not come after perpetual profession or ordination. It has to be nurtured from early on. We need to have a sound missionary spiritual formation. Only a deeply spiritual person can be a successful missionary. "The missionary of today and tomorrow, more than ever before, will have to be a profoundly spiritual man, a man of deep faith and fervent prayer"²¹. We must

examine whether we are doing enough in order to inculcate this at the various stages of Salesian formation.

8. Inculturation

In the context of evangelisation, inculturation has been a hotly debated topic. *Redemptoris Missio* speaks of inculturation as the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures²².

When we look at our Salesian missionary approach to the local cultures one probably feels that enough has not been done in the field of inculturation. While analysing the impact of Christianity on the Maram Nagas Dr. Joseph Athical observes that one of the flaws which we noticed as critics of the Catholic inculturation of Maram culture, was the fact that the Catholic missionaries have not brought in elements of local culture in Catholic worship and liturgy. The liturgy is predominantly Western and latinised²³. This is true also of the other parts of our province. Efforts have been made in the parish of Tamenglong, Manipur, to introduce traditional music and liturgy. The Angamis have a few traditional hymns in their hymnal²⁴. Other than these, very little effort has been made at inculturation.

At the same time we have to admit that Salesians have done a great lot to protect the tribal culture, languages, etc. Archbishop Dominic Jala while speaking of our mission among the tribals says that Christianity introduced changes in materials while much of the social content remained unchanged. Aesthetic components like dress, ornaments, songs and dance were to a great extent preserved²⁵.

A serious challenge facing the Salesian missionary is the need to transform cultures. Every culture has the possibility to accept divine revelation²⁶. But the Christian transplant of cultures requires grace and Christian witness, which is capable of widening every culture, favouring the progress of what is implicit in it, toward its full expression in truth²⁷.

Salesian missionary efforts have certainly transformed the cultures of the Northeast. Whether it has been conscious or not is a question yet to be studied. We can call the missionary professional agents of cultural change. For there is no other way of establishing, consolidating, and perpetuating the Church in society than through its culture²⁸.

9. Education

Twenty percentage of those who responded to the questionnaire has considered schools as one of the important factors that have contributed towards the success of the missionary work of the Salesians of our province. According to the statistics of 2001 the literacy rate in our region is as follows: Arunachal Pradesh is 54.74%²⁹; Assam 64.28%³⁰; Manipur 68.87%³¹ % and Nagaland 67.11%³²ot.

In 2001 the Salesians had 27 school-settings with a student strength of 30,449. In 2001, 35 confreres were engaged in school ministry. Manipur is fast growing in the rate of literacy due to the impact of missionary education. In 1955 about 11.4 % of the people of Manipur were literate, whereas in 1961 the percentage rose to 30.4% and in 1971 it was 32% and in 1981 it went up to 47.1% and in 1991 it was 60.96% while the all India level was 52.11 %. In 2001 the Catholic schools in Manipur had 5.58 % of the total enrolment of students from pre-primary to Class XII and those of Salesians schools was 1.36. In the state of Nagaland the overall enrolment in Catholic schools was 18.12% and that in Salesian settings was 3.46%³³.

Education is an integral part of the evangelising mission of the Church. It has been the strong point of the Salesian missionary enterprise in Northeast India as well as in our province. Speaking of the contribution of missionaries to the education scenario in Northeast India Dr. S.K.Barpujari says that if the missionaries would not have come to the rescue of the British administration by taking over the charge of the education of the tribes, the progress of education which was slow in the hills would have been slower still. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Christianity and education developed in the hills of the Northeast, like twin sisters³⁴.

While evaluating the history of the Catholic mission in Rajasthan Fr. R.H.Lesser considers the total neglect of education as one of the serious problems in the evangelising mission of the French Capuchin fathers who had charge of the mission up to 1947. When the last of the French bishop died in 1947 there was only one Catholic secondary school in the whole of Rajasthan and the most highly placed Catholic officer in the government was only an upper division clerk³⁵.

We can say that in the recent past our province has shifted its priority to higher education with five Higher Secondary Schools, one Junior College, three Degree Colleges and a B.Ed. college. Even so primary education and literacy continues to remain a challenge to the Salesian missionary work of our province as 45% Arunachal Pradesh, 35% Assam, 31% Manipur and 33% of Nagaland are still illiterate.

10. Laity

The success of the missionary enterprise in Northeast owes a great deal to the significant contribution of the laity, especially the catechists. In the hill areas often the lay groups go from village to village preaching the Gospel. The young people of our province are eager to join hands with the priests and religious in the work of evangelisation. A wonderful example is the phenomenal growth of the Church in Arunachal Pradesh under lay leadership.

We need to change the laity from being disciples to apostles. Small efforts have been made by the confreres at Don Bosco College, Maram to encourage missionary spirit among the young with mission exposure programmes. Mr. Linus, a Salesian Co-operator from Kohima has over the years encouraged and supported missionary spirit among the Angami youth of Kohima. To be commended is the innovative training being given to young people at *Karsang Takar*, Sadia, by Fr. K. A. Thomas. The Jesus Youth Movement is also encouraging missionary voluntarism among the young. We have a vast pool of educated, committed and talented young people. If only we could encourage missionary voluntarism among them. The Catholic Union of Christ King Parish, Kohima has been running the Sunday catechism classes in the parish for the past ten years. Thirty young people teach catechism to over 300 students every Sunday³⁶. When the laity express their readiness to engage in evangelisation we do not always extend encouragement and support, especially by providing financial support, preparing the young for work through adequate catechetical formation by arranging areas of work, etc. The young people are not only objects of our pastoral care but they are also agents and co-workers in the Church's mission in her various apostolic works of love and service³⁷. A real conversion is called for from the Salesian to provide the young, space and time to understand themselves, to accompany and offer support to young people in their search for meaning and their efforts to build a better future.

11. Mass-media and social communication

Our relationship to mass media was confined to making use of it to spread the Gospel. We have used the audio and the visual media to communicate the Gospel message. Fr. John Med has done a commendable job in our province in using Christian literature especially of a catechetical and apologetical nature³⁸.

Rather than the challenge of using media to spread the Gospel, the media itself has become the missionary challenge for the Salesians of our province. The media today is destroying the cultural and ethnic identities of people, by seeking to create a single, uniform dominant culture that does not admit diversity just because it is not commercially rewarding. It is playing a pernicious role as a great leveller of culture³⁹.

As the mass-media is introducing into every aspect of human life creating new demands, setting norms of morality, especially affecting the minds of the young in their formation years, the Salesians of Dimapur province need to be seriously challenged by the mission to evangelise the world of mass media.

12. Ecumenism

In the context of the urgency of the mission, the serious challenges that the Gospel faces, especially secularisation and widespread indifference to Christianity that marks the western society and deep resistance to Christianity and pockets of persecution that the Gospel faces in much of Asia, the Churches need to come together. Dialogue is not a strategy for peaceful co-existence, it has its origin in the Father's loving dialogue of salvation with humanity through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a veritable vocation for the Church⁴⁰.

Very little has been done in the area of ecumenism in Northeast India. Our churches have maintained an antagonistic attitude to one another. A small beginning at common witness has been evinced in the face of ethnic conflicts at Kokrajar, Churachanpur and North Cachar at the initiative of Archbishop Thomas Menamparampil of Guwahati. The Churches have also acted jointly to dialogue with the terrorist outfits of Meghalaya.

In the province of Dimapur even less has been done and little initiative has been shown by the Salesians. As pioneer missionaries of the region the challenge of ecumenism needs to be accepted by the Salesians of our province.

Fr. Joseph Puthenpurakal while in Kohima diocese did make attempts to enter into dialogue with different churches of Nagaland. The martyrdom of the three Salesians in Manipur, saw the different churches of Nagaland and Manipur come together to express their shock, grief and deep anguish. These attempts are sporadic and far in between.

13. An academic centre for the study of Christianity

Northeast India has one of the most vibrant local churches in the country, and the Christian community in this region is dynamic and ever growing. In the near future, in all likelihood, Northeast India will become one of the nerve centres of Christianity in India with a sizeable Christian population having a great potential for leadership at the national level. However, the Church in this region is very young and it needs much sustenance in every aspect of her life in order that she may take deep roots in the region. One of the factors that can assist in the process of giving a solid foundation in Christian values to the people of this region, is to have a well established centre for study and research in Christianity. Such a centre can also provide intellectual leadership to the Church through the promotion and serious study and reflection on the cultures of the region from a Christian point of view. If the Church in Northeast India can have a Department of Christians Studies (DCS)/ Chair of Christianity as in Chennai and Mysore Universities it will be doing a yeomen service to the Church in Northeast India and even to the Christians from other parts of India, particularly those of North India where no such institution exists.

Such an academic institution can also help the Church to begin an effective dialogue between Christianity and the cultures of Northeast India. This is all the more compelling when we realise that practically all our existing centres for advanced studies in Christianity in this region are primarily meant for candidates to priesthood and religious life and not for the formation of the laity as such. But a DCS in the setting of a secular University can provide facilities for a greater interaction between Christian faith and non-Christian cultures, with the result that in a matter of few years we will also have lay people competent and well versed in matters of Christianity, and considering the intelligence and the ability of the people of this region I foresee that some of them might even turn out to be lay theologians of international standing.

The history of Christianity gives us ample evidence that wherever structures that foster intellectual reflection on Christian faith existed,

it also contributed greatly to the development of the peoples. On the other hand where such structures did not exist or were weak, the Church struggled for her identity and self-preservation and at times she could not withstand the onslaught of other religions and cultures. Perhaps establishing a DCS attached to a University can go a long way in giving to the Church in Northeast India a solid intellectual foundation in Christianity. Such a centre can also be a bulwark against other religions making inroads into the Christian areas this is to be expected all the more because Northeast India has already become one of the prime targets of attack by the RSS, VHP and the Sangh Parivar as a whole. From this point of view the proposed Department can also offer an intellectual defence against such attacks and initiate a dialogue for peaceful co-existence between religions and cultures.

14. Prophecy

St. Paul lists three ministries, which are important for the progress of the church: apostles, prophets and teachers (Cor.12, 28). The prophet is not the seer who foretells the future but the inspired pioneer, who traces new paths, points out directions that should be taken for the growth of the church. He is able to read the signs of the times and invite men and women to share his vision. The apostle on the other hand engages himself in the realisation of the vision given by the prophet. He is ready to launch out, taking risks, making new contacts, preaching and baptising and planting the church. Once the community has been established he moves onto newer pastures that prophecy will point out. Once the community has been established by the apostle, the teacher takes over the task of consolidation, of deepening of the faith. The teacher resides permanently in the place⁴¹. The province today has many teachers but certainly there is a dearth of prophets and apostles. The greatest tragedy that can befall our province is the absence of prophecy. The Palmist laments: "There is no prophet" (Ps.73,9). Without the prophets we shall be rudderless, engaged in so many apostolates but without success. Our resources of men and material shall be scattered without bearing fruits.

Conclusion

We the Salesian missionaries of Dimapur province need to realise that though we often feel like the disciples of Emmaus confused and disheartened, we need to be led like the Samaritan woman to discover the gifts of a missionary vocation. "If only you recognised God's gift,

and who it is that is asking for a drink, you would have asked him instead, and he would have given you living water” (Jn4:10). As the Holy Father Pope John Paul II exhorts us, we need to gather in the upper room to meet the risen Lord so that he can breathe the Spirit into each one of us, so that we can re-launch or missionary charism in the province.

NOTES

1. In preparing this paper, besides using the relevant books and articles, I also conducted interviews with some people and sent out a questionnaire to a select group of Salesians working in the province.
2. 83,746 sq.km. Cfr. Amar. Krishna Paul, *Northeast A to Z*, Guwahati: Good Books Distributors Publishers, 2003, 2.
3. 78,438 sq. km (the whole of Assam). Cfr. Amar. Krishna Paul, *Northeast A to Z*, 42.
4. 22,237 sq. km. Cfr. Amar. Krishna Paul, *Northeast A to Z*, 122.
5. 16,579 sq.km. Cfr. Amar. Krishna Paul, *Northeast A to Z*, 186.
6. Cfr. *Our Pastoral Ministry: Summary Statistics*, Province Plan 2002.
7. The figure of school dropouts of classes I-VIII for 1999-2000 for the States that comprise the province of Dimapur, is an indication of the extreme backwardness: Manipur 43.08%; Nagaland 40.27%; Assam 69.8% and Arunachal Pradesh 64.92%. Cfr. *Our Ministry in Schools: Summary Statistics*, Province Plan 2002.
8. Dibrugah, Dimapur, Jorhat and Itanagar.
9. Cfr. Sebastian Jose, “Salesian Province of Dimapur, India A Historical Perspective”, Research Seminar, 2004, 5.
10. Poonam, Kaushish, *Assam Tribune* 23 March 2001 in Thoma Menampampil, “When upward Mobility Combines with Apathy”, J. Varickasseril and M.Kariapuram (eds.), *Be My Witnesses: Essays in Honour of D r. Sebastian Karotemprel SDB*, Shillong: Vendrame Missiological Institute Publications, 2002, 10-11.
11. Cfr. Thomas Menampampil, “When upward Mobility Combines with Apathy”, 13-14.
12. National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Kaplant)
13. Valsan Tampu, “Mission and Fundamentalist Challenge”, *Mission Today*, vol. 2 (2002), 24.
14. Cfr. Valsan Tampu, “Mission and Fundamentalist Challenge”, 27.
15. For a detailed discussion on the contribution of Salesians to local languages and dialects see the article in this book by N. Guangdiat, “Salesian Contribution to the Indigenous Languages and Literature”.

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- 16.Cfr.David Syiemlieh, *A Brief History of the Catholic Church in Nagaland*, Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publications, 1990, 118.
- 17.Cfr. George Plathottam, "Christian Mission in the Third Millennium and the Information Super-highway: Challenges to Evangelisation", *Indian Missiological Review*, vol. 20, No. 4 (1998), 19.
- 18.Interview with Sr. Marykutty MSMHC on 24th June 2004, Khionsa, Arunachal Pradesh..
- 19.Cfr. Betty A.Maheu, "A Missionary Spirituality for Asia", *Mission Today*, Vol. 2, No.3 (2000), 322.
- 20.Cfr.David Syiemlieh, *A Brief History of the Catholic Church in Nagaland*, 125.
- 21.Jose Thuruthanathy, "Methods of Evangelisation" in *Evangelisation in India: Study Session for the Salesian Family on Evangelisation in Tribal Areas of India*, Roma: Salesiani Decastero per le Missioni, 1987, 74.
- 22.Cfr. *RM*, 52.
- 23.Cfr.Joseph Athickal, *Maram Nagas: A Socio-Cultural Study*, New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1992, 161.
- 24.Interview with John Bosco Sote, Kohima Village, Christ King Parish on 28 June 2004.
- 25.Cfr. Dominic Jala, "Mission Among the Tribals: An Assessment", *Mission Today*, vol. 4, No. 4 (2002), 307.
- 26.Cfr. *Fides et ratio*, 71.
- 27.Cfr. Juan Esquerada Bifet, "New Evangelisation and Missionary Spirituality at the Beginning of the Third Millennium", *Mission Today*, vol. 3, No. 4. (2001), 405.
- 28.Cfr. Louis J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, California, 1984, 6 as cited in L.Jayaseelan, *Impact of the Missionary Movement in Manipur*, Delhi: Scholar Publishing house, 1995, 128.
- 29.Cfr. Amar. Krishna Paul, *Northeast A to Z*, 2.
- 30.Cfr. Amar. Krishna Paul, *Northeast A to Z*, 42.
- 31.Cfr. Amar. Krishna Paul, *Northeast A to Z*, 122.
- 32.Cfr. Amar. Krishna Paul, *Northeast A to Z*, 186.
- 33.Cfr. *Our Ministry in Schools Summary Statistics*, Province Plan 2002.
- 34.Cfr. S.K.Barpujari, "Educational Development in the Hills of Northeast India: A General background" in *Social and Economic Profile of Northeast India*, Dutta Ray (ed.), Delhi, 1978, 284 as cited in Jayaseelan, 170.
- 35.Cfr. R.H. Lesser, "Evangelisation in Rajasthan: Problems and Possibilities", *Indian Missiological Review*, vol. 20, No. 4 (1998), 66-67.

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36. Interview with John Bosco Sote, Kohima on 28 June 2004. I am told that leaders from the parish also have visited the Maram and Konyak areas for spreading the Gospel.
37. Cfr. *EA*, 47.
38. For details concerning the involvement of the Salesians of Dimapur province in the field of mass media and social communication see the article in this book of Tarcisius Toppo entitled "Media Ministry in the Province of Dimapur".
39. George Plathottam, "Christian Mission in the Third Millennium and the Information Super-highway: Challenges to Evangelisation", 14.
40. Cfr. *E.A.*, 29.
41. Cfr. Carlos G. Valles, *Taste and See*, Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakashan, 1990, 180-181.

Chapter 7

FORMATION TO CHRISTIAN FAITH: METHODS, IMPACT AND PROBLEMS

Nazarius Lakra SDB

Introduction

‘Catechesis’ refers to efforts which help individuals and communities to acquire and deepen their Christian faith and identity through initiation rites, instruction and formation of conscience. It includes both the *message* presented as well as the *way* it is presented¹. Catechesis is complete only if it takes into account the constant interplay between Gospel teaching and human experience, individual and society, person and institution, sacred and secular².

It is twenty-two years since the province of Dimapur came into existence. During this seminar we would like to take a critical look at what has been accomplished so far in the field of formation of people to the Christians faith. We examine the impact of our work on the peoples and cultures of our region, the methods we have employed and the problems encountered in the work of deepening the faith of the people. We conclude the paper with some suggestions for improving the important task of faith formation of our people.

As we focus our attention on the province of Dimapur, we realize that tremendous amount of work has been done by the Salesians in the past. There are now some forty centres where we work. There are schools, colleges, college hostels, youth centres, non-formal technical schools, boarding for youths and parishes under our care. But the question today is how much have we invested in the field of faith formation? What impact does our work of evangelisation have

on the peoples and cultures of this region? Have we really succeeded in giving to the people a solid foundation in Christian faith? Though these questions are not easy to answer, we will make an attempt in the following pages.

1. Methods of faith formation

Saleasins are engaged in the faith formation of people using a variety of methods, taking into consideration the cultural background and the needs of the people and the region. The methods vary according to the types of institutions, the target groups and the conditions in which we work. I mention below some of the frequently employed methods in our apostolate of faith formation.

1.1 Catechism classes

The most traditional method of faith formation is Catechism class. Catechism has been described as a systematic summary of truths revealed by God and taught by the Church. Various methods of teaching catechism are regularly employed in all the parishes, villages and schools of our province. Though the practice of teaching catechism has been prevalent all over Northeast India, as many pastors have rightly observed in their response to the questionnaires, the frequency of the classes is far below the expectation and requirement. This is an area which needs serious improvement in almost all our parishes and educational institutions.

1.2 Village tours

From the questionnaires which were sent to a number of parish priests, I have come to know that pastors visit the village communities more than once a year. About 80 per cent of the respondents stated that they visit each village at least thrice a year, while 20 per cent said that they are able to visit only once a year. These visits seem to be the basic support which the Church gives to the people in order to sustain their faith. Each time a priest visits a Catholic community he offers the Holy Eucharist for them and gives them the opportunity to approach the sacrament of reconciliation. The visits are also occasions for the pastor to have a first hand knowledge of the actual living conditions of the people the nature of the faith, sense of unity, progress in human development, literacy and educational standard, problems they face, etc. Every visit of the priest is therefore an important moment for renewing and deepening the faith of the people. The more frequently the priests visit the village communities, the faster and deeper the faithful will grow in their Christian faith.

1.3 Family visits

Besides the regular celebration of the Eucharist in the villages, priests, religious sisters and catechists regularly visit families. It is a wonderful apostolate and a sure method of sustaining the faith of the people. Family visits are a wonderful occasion for the pastor to know the people, their aspirations and strengths and weaknesses. Family visits normally end with a prayer for the family members and their different intentions. During the touring programmes, sisters and catechists reach each house and meet the people and spend some time with them, enquiring about various aspects of their Christian living.

1.4 Music and dance

Music and dance³ are extensively used for catechetical purpose all over the world. Children and youth are fond of both. But music and dance by themselves make very little meaning in the process of faith formation unless they are mingled with other methods of catechesis so that they bring about a unique effect on the faith formation of the people.

2. Impact of our apostolate of faith formation

Ever since Salesian missionaries landed in Northeast India in 1922 they worked tirelessly for the spread of the Kingdom of God and for deepening of the faith of the people. In less than a hundred years, Christianity in Northeast has grown into a mighty tree. There are at present eleven dioceses⁴ and more than one million Catholics in the Northeast. About one-tenth of the Catholic population of Northeast is taken care of by the Salesians of Dimapur province in the States of Arunachal Pradesh, (Upper) Assam, Manipur and Nagaland.

Each year, we Salesians take care of and give faith education to more than 1,53,000 Catholics and impart education to more than 2,5174 students in our schools. In addition to the existing number of Catholics, we are regularly getting new members to the Church. Besides the Catholics, we come in contact with more than twenty thousand students of other religions and impart to them human and gospel values.

There is an atmosphere of freedom, friendliness and family spirit in our educational institutions, which makes them quite different from other institutions. There are opportunities for students to engage in co-curricular activities, which foster team-spirit, spirit of sacrifice, hard work and healthy competition.

Don Bosco institutions are well known to the people of Northeast India. People have recognised the yeomen service the Salesian have rendered to the society at large. We are known for our selfless service and the all-round formation we impart to our charges. We instil into the minds of the young the importance of living a just, honest and integrated human life. We promote responsible freedom, the value of human dignity and human rights. We help students to grow as mature persons and inspire them to work for a society based on genuine love, mutual acceptance, tolerance and social justice.

3. Problems in faith formation

In our region we are faced with many problems that hamper or make less effective our apostolate of formation of people to the Christian faith. I would like to mention some of the commonly noticed problems in our province:

3.1 Unwieldy size of the parishes

Some parishes in Northeast India are huge, both in the sense of size in area and in population. Some villages are some 100 to 200 kilometres far away from the mission centre or parish. Hence it becomes really difficult for priests, religious sisters and catechists to reach these villages even once a year. Some of the villages are far away in the mountains and there are no good roads and therefore we can reach there only on foot, and it takes several days of journey. Thus faith formation in these remote villages becomes extremely difficult. Some parishes / mission centres in our province have more than a hundred village communities. Hence catechesis becomes extremely difficult.

3.2 Poorly trained and overburdened catechists

Many catechists in the villages are not properly trained for the work of evangelisation and catechesis. Most of the village catechists are just selected from the Catholic communities and appointed to take care of the faithful in the villages without being properly prepared for the task. With an inadequate formation in the Christian faith it is almost impossible for them to do justice to the responsibility thrust upon them. In most cases they are also employed people or with heavy responsibilities towards their families. They are either office goers or employed in the tea-gardens or have to work on their own land. Hence it becomes difficult for them to spare time to work for the Church. Time spared or sacrificed for the catechetical apostolate is

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not sufficient for instructing people in the faith, for visiting families and seeing to the general organisational aspects of the Church in their respective villages.

3.3 Illiteracy

A good percentage of the Catholic population in Northeast is still illiterate or poorly educated, especially the older generation. Hence the possibility of providing them education to the faith through religious literature is almost ruled out. This means that we have to help them to grow in their faith primarily through personal contacts, audio and video programs.

Lack of education can be cited as one of the chief causes for the backwardness of the people in Northeast. It also hampers their knowledge of religion as no instruction through the printed word can be given to them. Backwardness in education has to be attributed not only to the absence of educational facilities but also due to the lack of proper motivation and interest among the people⁵.

Illiteracy and ignorance lead people to be easy victims of superstitious beliefs and practices. In times of illness, misfortune, accident, deaths etc., they do not hesitate to attribute them to the 'evil eye' or witchcraft. Belief in evil powers and superstitions do have an adverse effect on the quality of the Christian faith of the people.

3.4 Disunity

Due to differences in language, culture, customs and traditions people do not find it always easy to mix freely with others. This difference affects also the faith of the people as well as their relationship with their pastors. It is a matter of concern that there is disharmony in parishes due to misunderstanding between the people and their pastors and due to disunity among the faithful themselves. Faith of the people does not grow in an atmosphere of strained relationships. Rather it grows in a context of genuine love, mutual acceptance, unity and harmony.

3.5 Economic backwardness

Most of the Christians in Northeast India are economically poor. It is a fact that the primary concern of the poor is preoccupation with their daily bread, shelter, clothing and health. The economic situation in the tea-gardens of Assam has not improved even after several decades. The condition in the hill States of Arunachal Pradesh,

Manipur and Nagaland seems to be a little better off than the plains of Assam. In general, the people of the hills have sufficient food after the harvest. However, they too struggle for survival during the lean seasons of the year, especially before the harvest.

Faith does not easily grow in the hearts of people for whom daily survival is their highest priority. Their hearts and minds are preoccupied and justly too with the things that pertain to the basic necessities of life. Here we should mention that at times we come across people, though not many, who accept Christianity for the sake of economic benefits, educational facilities and prospects for a better life, and not as a consequence of their genuine search for God.

3.6 Lack of proper catechesis after first evangelisation

Missionaries have been working tirelessly for the spread of the Gospel in our region. They continued to engage in 'first evangelisation' without giving proper attention to catechesis. Often people are baptized and then left to themselves to know about the truths of their religion. In the questionnaires which I sent out to pastors, many confessed that people do not have sufficient knowledge of the basic truths of the Christian faith. There has been a certain lack of detailed planning and follow up with regard to educating the people to the Christian faith. We are still far away from a systematic way of helping the people to grow in their faith. In fact there are serious complaints from different parts of our province that many of our people are Christians only in name and that they do not know 'anything' about the truths of Christianity.

3.7 Alcoholism

Inordinate intake of intoxicating drinks is one of the reasons why people of Northeast do not progress neither economically nor religiously⁷. A drunkard is seldom concerned about God or his religion. Drinking leads to economic deprivation, breakdown of families, neglect of the care of children, ill health and even moral degradation. In addition to portraying a poor picture of Christianity and the Church, it also acts as a counter-witness to the non-Christians. Besides drinking, many Christians are also making illicit liquor and selling it to their neighbours.

3.8 Lack of proficiency in local languages

In all the four States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur and Nagaland, due to lack of proficiency in the local languages, many

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missionaries and pastors depend on translations. Homilies are often translated by catechists, students or past pupils. There are only very few Salesians who know well the local languages of the people. Often very little effort is made to learn them. Lack of proficiency in local languages is a serious problem which affects the effectiveness of our apostolic works. Only a person who has mastery over the language of the people with whom he works can give proper and adequate religious instruction.

3.9 Lack of audio and video teaching aids

People need both audio and video teaching aids in order to deepen their Christian faith, and this is especially true in societies where many are illiterate. The less educated the people are, the more dependent they are on audio and visual aids for learning. Unfortunately, very few teaching aids are available in our parishes and schools for teachers of catechism. From the questionnaire I have sent out, I have come to know that there is hardly any audio or video cassette available in the local languages of Northeast. As of now, all that is available to us for religious instruction are some Hindi and English audio and video cassettes. Since a long time we are dependent on the video and audio cassettes produced from outside the region or from abroad.

4. Some Suggestions for the future

Today the province is faced with many problems in the field of educating people in the Christians faith. I have already made references to certain methods in vogue in our province and have analysed some of the problems that we face with regard to catechesis. However, there are many possibilities open to us for the future. Below I make some suggestions in order to improve the quality of our apostolate of faith formation in our province.

4.1 Preparation of a good catechism text book

A systematically prepared catechism textbook is a must for all the faithful. This book must be prepared for different levels of catechesis for various categories of people, children, both rural and urban, adults, college students, etc. It must contain all the essential teachings of the Catholic Church in a language that is easily understandable and adapted to the target group. It must be prepared or at least translated into all the major languages spoken by the Catholics of our region, and must take into consideration modern pedagogical methods. Due

to the efforts and initiatives of certain individual confreres some work has been done in this direction. But we need to co-ordinate our efforts better.

4.2 Improvement in the quality of our homilies

Homily is a talk or discourse given by the priest or deacon on the Scriptural readings of the day. Through the homily the liturgy of the Word is brought to completion and fruition by the reflection of the participants. Often in our schools, boardings and parishes, sufficient care is not taken to prepare the liturgical readings. The homily must be prepared with utmost care so as to enable the listener to understand the Word of God in the fullest manner possible. This is an area where several of our priests can improve a lot.

Village catechists usually give homilies to the faithful of the village community when they conduct the Sunday liturgy and other services. The catechists must be prepared to give good homilies to the people. They must be helped to give the true teaching of the scriptures contained in the readings. This is a great help for the people to grow in their faith.

4.3 Greater creativity in methods used for religious instruction

In our effort to educate the people in the faith, there is need to employ greater creativity. However, this must be done taking into consideration the culture, standard of education and the goals to be achieved. Hence, methods such as story telling, games, skits, dramatisations, pictures and drawings, audiovisual programmes, films, videos, dance, music, singing, pilgrimages, picnics and excursions, Para liturgy, etc. can be creatively utilised for imparting faith education. Unfortunately, we seem to demonstrate less creativity in teaching catechism and invest even less in purchasing teaching aids. But there are also institutions in our province where teaching aids costing lakhs of rupees rest idle or are under utilised.

4.4 A Monthly news letter / magazines for catechists

Priests and religious have newspapers, magazines, television, radio, internet, etc. to update their knowledge. But do we ever think of the catechists in the villages who are engaged in faith formation? About seventy years ago there was a Hindi tri-monthly magazine for the catechists (called *Salesian Khabren* ('Salesian News')) printed at Catholic Orphan Press Calcutta and circulated by Fr. Leo Piasecki SDB from Dibrugarh. It contained guidelines to the catechists, world

and local Church news, anecdotes of saints and some relevant information. Suddenly it disappeared from the scene and it never came back again. More than ever in this age of communication, catechists need at least a monthly magazine or a newsletter which can help them in their apostolic work. Very few parishes have a parish magazine or a news letter which we could place in the hands of our lay people. It is highly advisable that these news letters or magazines are in the local languages.

4.5 Better utilisation of our institutions and existing catechetical materials

As a province there seems to be a general slackening in the attention we give to the teaching of catechism in our educational institutions and parishes. In some of our institutions, especially schools, teaching of catechism does not get the attention it deserves. The way in which catechism classes are arranged and the manner in which they are taught reveal that we are more concerned with good results in public examinations than imparting the truths of our Christian religion. At times any excuse is good enough to cancel Catechism classes. Often we forget that we are educators in the faith and that Don Bosco started his work with a simple catechism lesson to Bartolomew Garelli. In addition, those who teach catechism do not always prepare their lessons well or use methods that are attractive to the youth.

In some of our parishes and villages there is no systematic teaching of catechism at all. We should think in terms of training teachers other than catechists who can carry out this task in our villages and parishes. Catechism classes should be given not only to children but also to adults as we work in a region where a good percentage of our Catholics belong to the first or the second generations of Christians.

4.6 Production of catechetical materials in local languages

It would be worth considering the possibility of the province undertaking the publication of relevant catechetical materials in various local languages of the region, as materials to be used in our parishes, villages, schools, by touring sisters and lay catechists. The materials produced should be sufficiently cheap so that they are affordable even for poor parishes, villages, schools and rural Catholic communities.

4.7 Greater emphasis on faith formation

Parishes are privileged settings where faith formation should take place more than in any other context. Unfortunately, often our parish priests are burdened with many administrative works and other responsibilities. Consequently, they do not always get sufficient time to carry out the task of co-ordinating the work of faith formation of the people. Hence in our parishes and mission centres we should study the possibility of appointing a Salesian who will organise and co-ordinate the catechetical activities of the parish/centre. It is highly advisable that he be a person formally trained in Catechetics.

4.8 Greater collaboration with women religious and laity

In many of our centres the women religious are our close collaborators in educating the people to the faith. Methods of greater collaboration with them should be envisaged and activities connected with catechesis should be done in consultation and collaboration with them. If they are competent lay persons they should also be invited to collaborate with us and periodically send them for refresher courses.

4.9 Better preparation of village and touring catechists

Today much of the catechising activity in our parishes and more especially in villages are carried out by lay catechists. These persons are not always properly prepared to carry out the task entrusted to them. People should be selected, both men and women, from our villages and send them for a period of training in institutions set apart for this purpose of training people to be catechists. They should also be given chances for updating themselves. More attractive salaries for our catechists should also be considered.

4.10 Insistence on the importance of learning local languages

Perhaps it is right to say that our province is not any more primarily a missionary province. That era of the first evangelisation seems to be almost over, barring perhaps Arunachal Pradesh and some pockets in other parts of the province. The greatest need of the time seems to be, therefore, deepening the faith of the people who have already accepted Christianity. In order to reach out to these people more effectively, one needs to have proficiency in local languages. Thus insistence on learning local languages must be considered as a priority by the Salesian so that their work of catechising the people becomes more effective⁸.

4.11 Province-level catechetical animation programmes

The province should, in collaboration with the commission for evangelisation and catechesis and experts in the field, should periodically organise courses and renewal programmes for Salesians, priests, religious and laypersons engaged in the apostolate of catechesis in our region. Such courses are effective means to conscientise people of the importance of faith formation in our region, for the on-going formation for those already engaged in catechesis as well as for preparing future educators in the faith for our schools, colleges, parishes and mission centres.

4.12 Qualification of more personnel in catechetics

There is an urgent need in the province to qualify more confreres in catechetics so that there are sufficient competent people to animate the apostolate of faith-education in the province. In qualifying the personnel special attention should be paid to those persons who show interest in the field and who are proficient in some local languages so that after their training they are able to give religious instruction to people in their own languages.

4.13 Emphasis on catechetics during the various stages of formation

During the various stages of formation emphasis should be given on the importance of catechetics. A systematic teaching of catechetics and the various methods of teaching catechism can be very useful for those engaged in Sunday oratory activities, practical training, holiday apostolate, diaconate ministry, etc. Hence serious and systematic courses in catechetics should become part of the curriculum of the various stages of formation. Unfortunately, at times the way in which courses in catechetic are conducted is far from satisfactory. Often we are satisfied with offering them some crash courses in catechetics as if to fulfil an obligation. This situation should change and the subject should given its due importance.

Conclusion

As a conclusion to this paper I present below some of the points that have emerged from my questionnaire and the interviews that I had with people. I believe it will help us to understand, to some extent at least, the actual situation in the province with regard to faith formation and what people expect from us as educators in the faith. They have also suggested some methods for improving the important task of faith formation:

Formation to Christian Faith

1. There must be regular visits to the village communities by priests.
2. Pastors must learn the language of the people.
3. People must be taught how to read and write (eradicate illiteracy).
4. There must be better organised and more regular catechesis for all the faithful.
5. More Bible classes are to be conducted for the people.
6. There must be well organised catechism classes for all the Catholic students of our schools.
7. Up-to-date methods of social communication should be utilised for faith education.
8. There must be regular catechism classes for the children in all the parishes.
9. There must be compulsory annual retreat for all the faithful of the parish.
10. There must be some inter-parish competitions for the faithful on religious topics.

NOTES

1. Cfr, *National Catechetical Directory*, no. 5.
2. Cfr. *National Catechetical Directory*, no. 35.
3. Music is a passionate sequencing of thoughts and feelings that express meaning in a manner that has no parallel in human life. It is a universally recognised synthesis of the substance and style of our existence, a blend of personal, social and cultural elements. Dance is an emotional and physical space where the creator and consumers of music meet. Music excites the body to automatic movement, an exhilaration that defeats boredom and inspires insight See . Lull J., (ed.), *Popular Music and Communication*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1992, p. 1
4. Agarthala, Aizwal, Bongaigaon, Dibrugarh, Diphu, Guwahati, Imphal, Kohima, Shillong, Tezpur and Tura. - Some more dioceses may come into being in the coming years.
5. Cfr. S.Karotemprel., (ed.) *The Catholic Church in North East India*, p. 164.

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6. In fact, the economic condition of the people all over Assam has deteriorated and the people have become poorer than before. Many tea-gardens have stopped giving regular salaries, reduced or cancelled bonus. Some of the tea-gardens are sick and heading towards their death. Low standard of living of the tea-garden people is largely due to the low wages they have been receiving for a long time, though the price of essential commodities have been always on the rise.
7. Both the replies to my questionnaire and to the interview that I had with people showed that alcoholism is a serious problem for the Christians in many parts of Northeast.
8. It is my conviction that interest in learning local languages must be insisted upon already from the early stage of formation. Unfortunately, in recent times, we seem to neglect this important aspect. The province should also encourage confreres who show interest and aptitude in learning local languages, and provide them with opportunities for mastering any local language of their preference.

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Questionnaires

Interviews

Chapter 8

FORMATION OF SALESIANS: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Joseph S. Kulathunkal SDB

Introduction

This paper seeks to study some facts of formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco: past, present, and future in the context of the Salesian Province of Dimapur, India. Objectivity being the hallmark of this seminar as visualised by the organisers of the research seminar on the mission of Salesians in South Asia in the Third Millennium, this paper plans to meet the required expectations pursuing a rigorous scientific approach. This paper examines among other things 1) formation in authority, 2) formation in prayer life and 3) psychosexual formation.

1. Formation in authority

In normal circumstances, conformity to the schedule of the community events becomes the rule in the selection of candidates to Salesian life or priesthood in many cases rather than fitness of a candidate. Interestingly, after ordination or perpetual profession the new-found freedom leads many such confreres to a lifestyle bordering on misuse of or lavish use of community funds (and/or goods) on themselves and other aberrations¹. In all fairness, conformity in the early years of formation vehemently insisted upon often undergoes a change in the lives of those Salesians who do not live up to their religious or priestly expectations². Obviously, this trend seems to envelope the province. In this sense a critical phase has

been reached in the province. This poses a grave challenge, which can only be defeated by the united resolve of the confreres endorsed by the provincial superiors. The menace of individualism and authority for self-serving ends or vested interests nurtured by elements of un-Christian and un-Salesian credentials has shown its ugly head in the province. "You take care of yourselves, but never tend the sheep," (Eze. 34:1ff.) They seem to follow the standards of the world especially of the politicians; on the contrary the superiors/leaders should transform themselves inwardly by a complete change of their mind. Recently I heard a priest friend say: "After ordination, who bothers about where he goes, what he does and how much he spends. These were issues for many of us before ordination". In my estimation, it becomes difficult to digest this at times.

Sometime ago, I heard a confrere say: "I accepted to be provincial, because superiors asked me." Everyone knows that accepting authority differs from using authority responsibly. Any confrere holding authority, especially a superior, has to prove unequivocally, both to the people and the Congregation/community, that he puts the interests of the Congregation/community above his interests. He has to commit himself unconditionally to the service of his religious community primarily³.

The Biblical prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, voiced their unprecedented warning to those in authority.

The prophets and the priests are godless; I have caught them doing evil in the temple itself. The paths they follow will be slippery and dark; I will make them stumble and fall. I am going to bring disaster on them; the time of their punishment is coming (Jer 23:11-12)." The Lord spoke to me, "Mortal man," he said, "denounce the rulers of Israel. Prophecy to them and tell them what I, the Sovereign Lord, say to them: You are doomed, you shepherds of Israel! You take care of yourselves, but never tend the sheep. You drink the milk, wear clothes made from the wool, and kill and eat the finest sheep. But you never tend the sheep. You have not taken care of the weak ones, healed those that are sick, bandaged those that are hurt, brought back those that wandered off, or looked for those that were lost. Instead you treated them cruelly. Because the sheep has no shepherd, they were scattered and wild animals killed and ate them" (Ezek 34: 1-5).

Jesus told his disciples: "The scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practise and observe what they tell you, but do not do what they do; for they preach, but do not practise...But woe to you, scribes

and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you shut the kingdom of heaven against men”(Mt 23: 1- 36).

At the same time, it would be suicidal to under-estimate the recent happenings in some of our centres in Arunachal Pradesh and Upper Assam as isolated and localised. Often one hears confreres say that in our apostolic ministry it is the individual in a powerful position or a leadership role that matters, not the community, be it local or provincial. This seems to be the case in the overwhelming majority of our institutions, thus confirming the dictum - the key-keeper is the power-wielder. The times are trying ones and the only solution lies in the determination to realign our formation strategies in regard to the use and abuse of authority. Sadly, *Ratio* has dismissed the vital constituent of formation and authority in just two jottings, that is, about fifty words “Such a style of interpersonal relationships requires that the Salesian imbue his interactions with some specific human virtues, ... the ability to collaborate with others, the spirit of service, shared responsibility, and the acceptance of authority”⁴; “Everyone acts maturely and freely on the basis of motivations, serenely accepting the role of authority”⁵. And yet *Ratio* seems to be obsessed with human, intellectual, Christian formation etc in its initial stages of formation. Obviously, these references have practically nothing to offer in the formation of Salesians in the wise use of and ugly abuse of authority. In my estimation, that is the mortal weakness in an otherwise spectacular document.

In almost all spheres of activity in the West, authority has disappeared probably because it was abused in an intolerable manner⁶. History tells us the context of feudal society, monarchy and dictatorship in the West, where oppression and patriarchal chauvinism reigned supreme. Indeed dark areas of time and human disgrace! And this seems to explain why *Ratio* has watered down the relevance of authority in the reception and formation of candidates. In this sense, *Ratio* like any other book on theology, has more sophistries than anything. However, it has its own merits; it could have done a better job with regard to the formation of candidates in the use of authority. As in political circles, so also in religious and church circles, leaders can go wrong and fatally wrong.

Let us take a cue from the “Seeds of Peace”. Founded in USA in 1993, “Seeds of Peace” is an organisation, which promotes peaceful coexistence among teenagers living on the opposite sides of conflicts. Composed of high-school-aged youth numbering 2200, the

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“Seeds” or participants learn to listen, respect and communicate with their peers. They discover their common humanity, look for ways to get along and to serve. Normally, they are willing to listen and to learn from each other. Off their zones of conflict, they freely associate, think critically, share their experiences and serve others or peers in a quiet environment. A core factor, they are highly motivated and spontaneous to become ambassadors of peace, harmony and service, all of which articulate their mission. Back on their own home turf, they experience division, conflict, violence, peer pressure, and selfishness, but they apply their newly acquired skills and knowledge. In doing this they succeed; some sixty fold and others a hundred-fold⁷. Here they learn to use their well earned-power to serve; it is not imposed on them by formators. In the final analysis, they are willing to listen because they are happy to learn to use their authority/power to serve. Thus one notices a world of difference between the formation of our candidates and the “seeds.” In other words, each “seed” has become his own man for others. Justly, Jesus Christ is described to be a man for others.

The goal of a religious or a priest is to bear witness to Jesus Christ “who came to serve and not to be served” and who washed his apostles’ feet. More than anything else, our Salesian and authoritarian culture needs a paradigm shift in the direction of the Biblical teachings. Sadly, many may try to become priests or religious out of a desire for power and security⁸. Hence Jesus tells His apostles clearly: “You know that the rulers of the heathens have power over them, and the leaders have complete authority. This, however, is not the way it shall be among you. If one of you wants to be great, he must be the servant of the rest; and if one wants to be first, he must be your slave like the Son of Man, who did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life to redeem many people” (Mt 20:25-28).

St Paul has this to tell those in authority and those to be trained to shoulder authority: “Do not do anything from selfish ambition or from desire to boast, but to be humble towards one another, always considering others better than yourselves. And look out for one another's interests, not just for your own” (Phil 2:3). St Peter does not lag behind in his exhortation to the leaders or superiors. “I appeal to you to be shepherds of the flock that God gave you and to take care of it willingly. Do your work not for mere pay, but from real desire to serve. Do not try to rule over those who have been put in your care, but be examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:2-3).

2. Formation in prayer life

The quality of our formation should enable candidates to have a sweet personal experience of God in the person of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. In the long process of formation, candidates should tend to experience rather than knowing God. In the manifold stages of formation, its fundamental aim "is to immerse religious in the experience of God and to help them perfect it gradually in their lives"⁹. On the whole, Salesians in the province do not seem to be masters of the spirit and as such in this field certain widely recognised gurus should be invited regularly to impart this specific angle of spiritual formation. One cannot deny there is an acute shortage of such persons in the province. "Hindu gurus and Buddhist monks seem to be better at such ministrations"¹⁰.

At the drop of a hat, we either shorten or cancel our daily meditation, evening prayers and so on. The worst offenders in this area are some house councils of the formation houses. Time and again, formators sit in councils and forego their unsavoury (many times it looks so) adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, or community spiritual reading without qualms of conscience. At the same time the same council members take disciplinary action (including emotionally-charged corrections) against candidates who are late at these services, not to speak of absentees.

How about our retreats? Some describe our spiritual retreats as "noisy gossips". How few confreres are willing to preach a retreat! An unbiased survey on this aspect would throw up some interesting revelations. One should think of the excellent retreats conducted by youth teams leading to profound prayer¹¹. A spiritual strategy that is God-based has to be devised wherein like a network everyone gives and takes responsibly. Our traditional spiritual base seems to have cracks as manifested in our hollowness. However, the root cause lies in a shallow formation for a life of prayer. Nearly all our institutions especially formation houses seem to be citadels of knowledge but not citadels of prayer. In all appearances, there is an urgent need of spiritual gurus in the province to enable the Salesians to bear the torch of prayer burning bright in the third millennium.

3. Psychosexual formation.

It is known that there is a certain degree of sexual immaturity among many celibates, especially among the clergy as they opt for

religious life early in life¹². Such being the case, psychosexual formation of candidates to Salesian life is particularly important¹³. It is not something we can ignore.

Let us take a look at John Bosco as a youngster in his home setting. In the thinking of experts in Salesian studies like Pietro Stella, Frank Klauder and Morand Wirth, John Bosco's friendship with Jonah, a Jewish boy, and his friendship with Louis Commollo are significant. Being of the same age, John and Jonah were extremely talented. "Remarkably handsome," Jonah was "madly anxious" to be John's friend and would spend his free time in John's room singing, reading, playing piano and listening to stories." A sort of "disturbance and fight" threw Jonah into a crisis. At this John Bosco suggested the sacrament of penance as a ready solution to Jonah's guilt. Without delay, Jonah, the Jewish boy, received baptism and became a Christian¹⁴.

With regard to John Bosco's friendship with Louis Comollo, it could be affirmed that John sought Louis' friendship. Unlike John Bosco's friendship with Jonah, the latter confided in Comollo, a frail young seminarian whom he met at the seminary in Chieri, northern Italy and from whom John learnt to be a Christian. In their daily interactions, John trusted him completely and Comollo too trusted John. In almost every activity, they needed each other; John needed spiritual help and Comollo needed physical support¹⁵.

In our formation structure, many Salesians see in boy-boy (not to speak of boy-girl) friendships moral danger and therefore a disciplinary action is executed, the easiest solution. Easiest because, many Salesian confreres find it problematic, inadequately trained or inexperienced to counsel, sublimate, channelise and sanctify such relationships. In all appearances, John Bosco's pedagogical method of friendships, reason, religion, and loving kindness at various stages of formation has not sufficiently enlightened his sons.

In the meantime, John Bosco was dreaming of a self-help group called "The Society for a Good Time"¹⁶. He had his own initiative to choose his own companions of the Society for a Good Time (SGT) in his early student years. As always, the main aim of SGT was exactness in the performance of scholastic and Christian duties, honest living, helping one another, correct choice of a vocation, playing games, contributing to the good of others by taking tuition, avoidance of anything contrary to God's law, and finally

sanctification of the members and others. As a boy, John Bosco was courteous and friendly; he sought every chance to befriend others. Gradually he got to know the undesirables and avoided their company. As a zealous boy, John taught them by word and example obedience to parents, in his case his mother Margaret and his landlady Lucy. Lucy was so pleased with John; that Lucy appointed him as her son's guardian. John revealed, "I took John Baptist Matta in hand as if he were my own brother"¹⁷. In the course of the year, Matta became more tractable, obedient, good, studious and won honours in class¹⁸. As a result, Lucy cancelled John's rent. A monumental example of formation "in loco!"

The practice of psychosexual formation in religious houses and seminaries was not in the curriculum for a long time as it was found unsafe by the policy makers¹⁹. "Until recently, we educated our children into a world of fear and guilt. We assumed in practice a Jansenistic theology which sees man as essentially corrupted by original sin... We became obsessed with the danger of temptations, the horror of self-realisation, the value of self-inflicted martyrdom, preoccupation with sin and a conviction that we will be overrun by our passions if they are not repressed or denied. Formalised religious teaching became a series of prohibitions and negations... And in this religious context the sense of guilt was firmly reinforced"²⁰.

Over the years, there existed and still exist in parts of Christendom, an unhealthy rivalry between psychologists, theologians and ecclesiastical and religious leaders. We Salesians breathe in similar air. "Religious experience was essentially a psychic phenomenon to be studied by phenomenological methods only. Psychologist viewed behaviour once thought to be manifestations of saintly mortifications as really nothing but subtle forms of pathological masochism, and diagnosed martyrdom and other somewhat unusual activities as simply expressions of hysterical neuroses. The distance between the combatants in this generally futile war could be portrayed by the difference in their respective postures. It is a long way from being on one's knees in the confessional to being on one's back on a couch"²¹.

In psychosexual formation, care must be taken to understand the anthropological foundation of the genders. At the same time, formators and candidates should focus on "clarifying woman's personal identity in relation to man, that is, a diversity yet mutual

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complementarily, not only as it concerns roles to be held and functions to be performed, but also and more deeply, as it concerns her nature and meaning as a person”²².

However, formation guides may have academic qualification, but seem to be weak in their spiritual and psychosexual formation. Strictly speaking very few of them could be competent spiritual guides, models or heroes for our young candidates²³. God does not always call the qualified, but he qualifies whom he calls.

Consequently, a shift may be necessitated. Additionally, superiors should have a fair knowledge of psychology, counselling and spiritual direction. Our traditional practice of superior being the spiritual director can create problems when he has to take disciplinary or administrative action²⁴. In such cases, someone else, who is a wise and experienced guide, could give spiritual direction. It may be recalled that during John Bosco's time he heard confessions of his charges regularly. For wise reasons, this practice was discontinued at the intervention of ecclesiastical superiors. Therefore, a preferential option could be given to psychosexual formation of formators and candidates to Salesian life. The Church and the Congregation want the consecrated men and women to live a life of psychological and affective maturity²⁵. “Sexuality is a gift of God and a power that makes man and woman capable of communication, encounter and love... A Salesian must be mindful of the value of his body and its meaning.... He must recognise the value of masculine and feminine sexuality”²⁶.

Conclusion

With an overtaxed mind, a saturated spirit and overbooked schedules, no Salesian can legitimately claim to achieve Jesus Christ's profound example of prayer as lived by St. John Bosco. A sound sexual education could enable the clergy, religious and the Salesians in particular to understand human love from its physical, psychic, social and spiritual aspects²⁷. With regard to our prayer life, it is well to recall the words of Jesus Christ who told the Apostles who fell asleep during prayer, “Weren't you able to stay awake even for an hour?” (Mk 14:37). In our formation structures and values, it is crucial to avoid a tunnel vision of formation and to adopt a holistic vision including a missionary angle as our province is missionary. However, the holistic vision of formation should focus on the role of sexuality in the divine plan of creation, incarnation and salvation²⁸. “A balanced notion of change shows us that the person is a complex

reality of several levels: the physiological, psychological, ethical, and spiritual. Each of these levels defines who we are and how we interact with the world"²⁹. It cannot be repeated sufficiently, we are made of clay (Psalm 102) but redeemed by Jesus Christ's blood. Unending theological debates, administrative, and more especially financial squabbles lead to disorientation among our Salesian communities. In this connection, it is crucial to listen to and act upon what Sandra Schneiders says: "Communities struggle over Eucharist, inclusive language, innovative forms of prayer, times and places of prayer, common retreats, and even art and music. Nothing pleased most people even some of the time. Desperate for spiritual nourishment, many found themselves in a virtual desert no matter where they turned and what they tried"³⁰. Changes of theology there were in abundance. "The 'death of God' controversies in 1950's, the liberation and process theologies arising in the 1960's, the feminist theological challenges of the 1970's, the ecological and inter-religious problematics of the 1980's and 1990's have kept professional theologians (including Salesians, added) struggling with a constantly lengthening agenda confronted through an epistemological and methodological kaleidoscope in which the pieces never assume the same position twice"³¹.

NOTES

1. Varkey, C.P., *Authority: Its Use and Abuse*, Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2001, p. 360.
2. Joseph, Kulathunkal, *A Pathway to God: Essays Leading Us to God In the Third Millennium*, Dimapur: Don Bosco Publications, 2000. P. 79.
3. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 4.
4. *Ratio: Formation of Salesians of Don Bosco: Principles and Norms*, Rome 2000, 67 & 68.
5. *Ratio*, 477.
6. Varkey, C.P. *Authority: Its Use and Abuse*, p. 53.
7. Stephen Kaufman. "Seeds of Peace", *Assam Tribune*, 26 April 2004, p.6.
8. J. Mannath, "Psychologists on Religion," *The New Leader*, 16-30 April 2004.
9. CIVCSA, 1980, *Ratio* 75, 76 & 77.
10. Thomas Menampampil, *Culture in the Context of Sharing the Gospel*, Mumbai: St Pauls, 2002, 102. Many of my readers may recall a confrere's interesting introduction to the holy Mass at a convent, "Today is the feast of saint 'feria'; let us pray to her."

11. J. Mannath, "Learning to Pray," *The New Leader*, 1-15 February 2004.
12. Benedict Groeschel, *Spiritual Passages: The Psychology of Spiritual Development*, New York: Crossroad, 1983, p. 51.
13. *Familiaris Consortio*, 37.
14. Pietro, Stella, *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosita cattolica*, trans. by John Drury, Don Bosco: Life and Work, New Rochelle, NY: Don Bosco Publications, 1985, p.31ff.
15. San Giovanni Bosco, *Memorie dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales dal 1815-1855*, edited by Eugenio Ceria, Turin, 1946. English translation, *The Memoirs of the Oratory 1815-1855*, New Rochelle: Don Bosco Publications, 1989, p. 79.
16. *The Memoirs of the Oratory*, p.67ff.
17. *The Memoirs of the Oratory*, p. 68.
18. *The Memoirs of the Oratory*, p. 68.
19. Joseph Kulathunkal, *A Pathway To God*, p. 82.
20. Carlo Weber. A, *Pastoral Psychology*, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1970, p. 1ff.
21. Carl G. Jung, *The Psychoanalytic Years*, Princeton: Princeton University, 1974, p. 113.
22. *Christifideles laici*, 50.
23. Joseph Kulathunkal, *A Pathway to God*, p.79.
24. Varkey, C.P., *Authority: Its Use and Abuse*, p.343.
25. *Vita Consecrata*, 88.
26. *Ratio*, 63, 64 & 65.
27. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 44.
28. *Directives of Formation in Religious Life*, 39.
29. William R, Beaudin, "Maturing Toward Wholeness," in *Human Development*, vol. 13, No. 1, Spring 1992, p. 42.
30. I.H.M, Schneiders, Sandra M., *Finding the Treasure, Religious Life in New Millennium*, New York: Paulist Press, 2000, p.173.
31. Ibid 147, quoted by Thomas Menampampil, *Culture in the Context of Sharing the Gospel*, p. 108.

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Chapter 9

SALESIAN INVOLVEMENT IN HUMAN DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES (With Special Reference to AIDA)

Jerry Thomas Pathikulangara SDB

Introduction

The Salesians have a history of involvement in Northeast India. We are rightly proud of our accomplishments of the past decades. We have created a brand name for ourselves especially through our schools. “Don Bosco” became a household brand name in the region that saw us through many tough situations. Schools, boardings and parishes remained the main settings of our mission. We rightly prided in the way we were reaching out through these settings.

It must be acknowledged that social and human development as it is understood today is rather new to the Salesians in this part of the country. We are perhaps taking the first faltering steps into this very vast arena of social development. How prepared are the Salesians as a group for this adventure is a question that is very pertinent at this juncture.

1. The foundations of social and human development interventions by the religious

We believe that the creative Spirit of God is active in the world, transforming it every moment. The human race has made tremendous progress down the centuries in every field of its endeavour - science and technology, economics, politics, social sciences, arts and

literature [...] Every movement towards progress is a participatory furtherance of the creative work of God. "The deepest source of all human creativity flows from participation in divine creativity".¹

But as history progressed and as human culture evolved, these creative energies that have their roots in the divine are being transformed into energies of destruction. So we have the weapons of war and destruction, economic exploitation, political manipulation, social and cultural degradation, all done smoothly with the aid of the tools of progress.

In many cases God has been kept away from this process, his very existence and presence is denied openly by one section that swears by science and technology. On the other hand we have another phenomenon that acknowledges God and his presence in the progress of humanity. But this God is a God of convenience, an idol that has to be venerated and kept pleased. This phenomenon forgets the prophetic side of the divine, which demands justice and peace together with progress. So we have had even massive wars fought to protect God's interests and at the same time perpetuated deep hurts and wrongs in history.

In this context of denial of the divine energies at play in creation on the one hand and the acceptance of a convenient non-demanding divine on the other, people who feel called by God and are committed to him have a significant role to play. We need to bring God back to the progress of creation. We are spurred on by the energy that we receive from our faith in the living God. We need "to link faith energies with energies of justice and peace in service of the living God and social transformation".²

Unfortunately in the Church two parallel movements emerged in response to the dynamics in the society. One the Justice and Peace movement, that laid stress on the prophetic role of the Church and the second, the prayer movement that stressed on the spontaneity of the religious energies, but often without social engagement. These two movements need to meet to play their complementary roles, through openness to the creative transformation of creation and openness to the spiritual roots of humanity's creative energies. It is not only spiritual energies that have divine source, but social energies too emanate from the same divine.

A spiritually rooted and guided social engagement is the need at the present juncture. We are called upon to build a 'civilisation of

love' through communities networked in solidarity. There is no one who can do it better than people who claim to be specially called by God to transform creation. (And Salesians never tire of recalling how specially and dramatically God has intervened in the history of the congregation!) Social engagement is not an option, it is an imperative for those committed to God.

2. The Salesian brand of social engagement

In the light of the understanding we have of our own mission and role as a religious society, institutionalised and very streamlined services like schools and boardings went under the broad title "social development". Parishes focused on works of evangelization and preaching the word and in alleviating the sufferings of the "poor" people. The poor were the focus without doubt in all our undertakings. "Helping the poor" was our brand of social development. The poor could always count on us, whether it was for education, health care, assistance in employment, spiritual solace, and a large spectrum of services.

While not denying the need for such services in the region, it is important to note that it was 'we' who were responsible. The people at large remained grateful recipients of the services we offered. (And they had better be grateful!) It was 'we' who knew the solutions to their problems and they could always count on us. They could expect us to care for them. They did not have to think, we thought for them. They did not have to plan, we did it for them. They did not have to worry about the future, we were their future. We analysed their situations, identified their needs and prescribed solutions, all from the greater knowledge and ambitious wisdom we had, and of course in keeping with our mission and charism and maintaining religious discipline. This perhaps sums up the history of social development process by the Salesians for quite a number of years.

3. The transition in Salesian social development process

AIDA was established with the purpose of organising the development works of the province. But the exigencies of province building kept AIDA a project office busy with institution building. It remained a one man enterprise, with sporadic effort at organising people.

It was not until after 10 years of AIDA's existence that thoughts of change began to blow. The evaluation of AIDA 1995 reinforced its mandate to be the social development agency of the province. The movement towards the people began with the evaluation. Efforts

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were made to create awareness among the Salesians too of the need to look beyond the institutions at people and their needs.

This paper will focus mostly on the development programmes undertaken by AIDA, which is the designated body for initiating and strengthening social development processes in the Salesian province of Dimapur.

AIDA today has shown that Salesians can meaningfully get involved in the life of the people.

4. Concept and process of social development

Social development as is understood today is not merely an end to be reached; it is also the process of reaching there. As an end social development is communities living dignified lives. AIDA spells out this end in its vision as “a multicultural, equitable society in the North Eastern states of India where peace and justice prevail and the environment is safeguarded”. This end is achieved through a process in which every section of the community participates actively, becomes aware of own resources, strengths and drawbacks, and assumes responsibility for progress. The people learn to utilise their own resources, while looking for resources available elsewhere. They come together to embark on the journey to progress. Leadership is acknowledged and built, needs are identified and met, problems are specified and solved, cultural and traditional practices are re-evaluated, mistakes become lessons, successes become models, ...

This model is based on partnership and collaboration, of give and take and constant learning. People and their experience remain at the centre. The change agent facilitates the process of change, not from a position of power, but in a spirit of collaboration, openness and with lots of patience.

The life of the community is seen as a complex and dynamic reality. Their problems and needs are not seen in isolation, but as an interconnected whole, with under currents that are not easily visible. Planning and intervention is comprehensive and not in convenient bits and pieces. Sustainable economic and social progress is the goal.

5. Social development in practice

In keeping with its mission of integral development of the weaker and marginalised sections of society, a number of initiatives are started at the initiative of AIDA in the province.

Salesian involvement in human developmental activities

The first measure was to make AIDA itself and the Salesians capable of engaging meaningfully with the communities. Staff development and awareness building among the Salesians themselves and initial contact with the people marked the first phase of transition to community based approach. With greater competence and more professionalism social involvement and development began to take definite shape in select villages.

The beginnings were slow and tentative that is characteristic of drastically changed approaches. AIDA had to make itself capable of doing what it was setting out to do. Staff recruitment and staff development was the focus in the first years of the new phase. At the same time village awareness programmes were also launched in a number of centres, where there was greater openness from the part of the Salesians themselves towards such interventions. These awareness programmes and direct contact with the village people gave the new staff the much needed exposure and hands on experience. It was followed up with regular reflection and evaluation, to glean out the learnings. Once the capacities of the staff were built and enhanced, AIDA felt confident enough to take up more comprehensive and integrated programmes.

Today AIDA and through it the Salesians have a certain credibility among the public as a body that is committed to its overall progress.

AIDA is collaborating directly with over 18708 families consisting of over 115300 people spread over 370 villages in Upper Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur.

The Self Help Group (SHG) was adopted as the tool for development of the villages by AIDA right from the beginning. SHG ensures the flow of synergy in collaborative action, flexibility in programmes and involvement according to the capacity of the people, and generates pride and confidence in people who were otherwise considered “poor” and “helpless” and had to be helped. It gives voice to the aspirations of the people and shows ways and also harnesses social support to achieve those aspirations. It gives the people certain amount of economic freedom and sense of well being and power. SHGs ensure that the village becomes better because of their presence and activity.

Today the 375 SHGs formed in collaboration with AIDA have savings worth over Rs.2800000.00. It is interesting to note that so much money is generated by villagers who are normally considered

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poor. It is at times difficult to believe that so much money could be generated from our “undeveloped” villages. A number of enterprises have been started by the village folks themselves with the resources and support provided by the SHGs. Banks are coming forward to assist these enterprising villagers - something most bankers would have considered not viable a few years ago.

Trainings of various sorts that throw open the doors of opportunities to the people are organised. Land based trainings in agriculture and livestock, non land based skills in weaving, knitting, tailoring, etc., training in indigenous herb based remedies for common illnesses that take heavy toll on the people, are some of the regular trainings that are organised.

Linking up people's groups with financial institutions, government departments and village based administrative units gives the people access to resources they did not know existed, and in any case had hardly any access.

Women and youth are key players in the enterprises of AIDA. These two groups are the most vulnerable groups in the society - economically, socially, politically and emotionally. They are susceptible to exploitation, manipulation, violence and abuse. Empowering these groups is key to social progress.

AIDA has the mandate to co-ordinate the development activities of the Salesians in the province. It has the role to motivate, train and assist the Salesians to engage meaningfully in the life of communities in the region. But the question to be asked is, has it remained a beautiful dream?

6. Impact of the programme so far

In addition to the achievements noted above, a major outcome of the growth of the SHGs, Community Based Organisations (CBO) is the reduction in the role of the traditional moneylenders and the reduction in the lending rates, which has fallen from 10% to 2% in Maram area and from 15% and 10% to around 5% in Palin area. A group in Margherita zone has also begun with only 1% as their internal lending rate. SHGs' internal lending rate of 2% per month has increased by 92.3% by the end of this period.

Inculcation of thrift and savings habits is a welcome major change. Savings does not come naturally to any of the groups we work with. A total fund of Rs. 2,786,055 means a savings of Rs 819 for each

member of the SHGs, on an average. Groups in Palin had begun their savings by Rs. 5/- and raised it gradually to 50/- and to even Rs.100 per month. The groups in the villages have become self-sustaining institutions.

Other noticeable achievements seen are that many older groups especially women who were ignorant have come to know the functions of the government, are aware of their rights and have fought for it, they have come to realise that coming together 'they are strong'. A lot of change in the attitude of the village women is seen. Women are beginning to take active participation in village decision-making body. They are beginning to develop self-confidence to approach banks and departmental offices, which are meant for their development. Woman who earlier only depended on man, are now able to plan their future, and self employ themselves. In Maram women leaders have emerged from the groups. They are also beginning to realise the need of educating the girl child.

Formation of SHGs has enabled the members to be united and confident and thus able to address social issues in the communities. In Palin zone women now are taking up issues like child marriages, wife beating and alcoholism. They are also fighting for their rights like proper functioning of government institutions like primary schools, primary health centres, etc., in the villages. These outcomes have been most remarkable in Palin and Harmutty zones where traditionally the women did not have a significant role or voice in society. Practices of child marriage and bride price have reduced especially among the SHG members. In most communities we see women standing up to speak out their mind at meetings and being heard by the decision makers. In many cases, women have secured significant roles in decision making processes at the village and panchayat level. SHG members are regularly getting elected to these bodies.

There is a slow but steady improvement in the quality of life of the members: less food shortage because of the vegetable gardens and multi-cropping and other income generating activities; less illnesses through awareness, increased skills in herbal and traditional medicine and sharing of knowledge and skills during meetings, and availability of immediate credit at very low interest rates to members who are affected by natural disaster or sicknesses or other emergencies.

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The need for education for themselves and for their children, health and sanitation are all now keenly felt needs the level of motivation for these is much higher than earlier. The programme has generated enthusiasm for change, collective saving, unity and collective action. There is greater awareness of economic and political rights.³

It must be said that AIDA and through it the province has moved much closer to the people and their life in these last few years.

7. Other ventures

There are other human and social development ventures that are taken up in the province.

Don Bosco Social Welfare Centre, Tamenglong has been instrumental in a process of change in the thinking and attitudes of people about their situation and problems and envisioning a more positive future. Galvanising the people initially around the issue of food shortage in the rainy months, the centre has facilitated over the last few years a sea change in the way people tackle their problems and their willingness to invest themselves for their own progress. A series of parish and village level awareness building programmes, trainings, social and resource analysis have helped people see the possibilities for progress in their villages. The village development committees comprising every section of the people is an important link in the process of change. The district administration and other NGOs of the district have been roped in to take this process further.

Another venture that is being talked about in the province today is the work done with the Misings, which is unique in many ways:

1. It focuses on one tribe wherever it is found
2. It takes into account the overall situation of the tribe
3. It has adopted an integral multi-pronged approach
4. It draws in the various segments of the community
5. The community members have a large say in what is being done and they are involved in the process of decision making
6. It is Salesian in its approach, builds up leadership from among the “down and out” youth and prepares them to play a proactive role in their communities
7. Lay partnership is very visible- much of the programme and process is owned by the community.⁴

8. Some concerns

We do have very committed and motivated personnel, trained over a long period of time. The security of religious life offers us the freedom to be available to the people and to engage in constructive dialogue with them about their life situations. And yet, do we at times take a very limited view of reality and refuse to go beyond what is familiar and comfortable?

Venturing into the undefined and unstructured, where we do not have total control over all the processes seem to be something that we abhor. Social development is one such area.

Letting go of total and absolute controls is imperative in meaningful social involvement. The sense of religious (divine) mandate, moral superiority, the categorisation of human realities into black and white with little room for the grey areas, "we-know-better" attitude, acknowledged social standing, economic security, desire to win people over to faith, glorified history, the desire to be successful and to leave a legacy behind, make us dictate to the people and not engage them in dialogue. Many of the parameters need to be changed if we want to bring about lasting and sustainable changes. We have no right to take the life of communities on mortgage, because we are in a hurry to make them reach where we want them to reach. In our hurry to get results sometimes what we seem to say is 'I need to get this done - let people be damned'.

Social development does not start from a position of power of money and information and access to resources of the change agent. It starts from a position of compassion and concern for the people, in whose favour this power has to be utilised. Otherwise, social involvement becomes a form of violence, of subjugation and degradation of human dignity. How many of us are ready to relinquish the power that even an empowering process like social development gives us?

The preparedness of Salesians for working with people along the principles of social development leaves much to be desired. In our formation we are 'trained' to work with youth (?) in various settings school, youth centre, parishes. We pay lot of attention on our settings of work than on the work itself. But we are seldom trained to look at the society at large where the young people live and work. We have a tendency to isolate them from their moorings. As a result we have young people who do well but for themselves. We are proud of many of our past pupils in various administrative posts, even when we know

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they cheat on the public. Deep reflection on society and its dynamics and the capacity to see beyond the obvious is hardly present.

We do reach out to people, we do lot of good. However, needed 'doing good' in particular situations, is not enough we need to make people think for their own good. Rendering them services do not always motivate the people to take responsibility for themselves. So often we hear Salesians mourning that 'in spite of all that we do, people do not seem to improve their life style and attitudes'. The question is while doing all the good we can, do we challenge people to introspection and reflection on their way of life, social and economic situation, cultural practices, attitudes and behaviours.

We can be quite sectarian in our services especially in the rural areas 'we need to care for our Catholics'. While in itself it is a noble thought and necessary in practice, we also need to recognise that human needs and problems are universal. And in close knit communities that are tradition bound, discrimination on the basis of religion can disrupt harmony and cohesiveness. With the number of disruptive agencies and trends in the region today, can we further divide our communities in the name of God and religion? The members of a community have similar human concerns irrespective of their religious affiliations. Can we be truly 'catholic' in our services and outreach programmes?

A number of community development projects in which the beneficiaries are entire communities are approved by donor agencies. At times make us cut corners too close in these projects and programmes even to the extent of diluting the interventions and sabotaging the results. This is done with no malice, but with the intention of reaching out to many others in need. But how justified are we in this? We cannot deny that there are occasions when we get money for wonderfully written programmes for meeting the genuine needs of the people and then use it for whatever we think fit. Not that money is misused, but it is not used for what is meant for. Can we justify ourselves? Sometimes there are more than one donation received for a single intervention and then? Such a situation prevents us from being transparent even with our own confreres in the same community. There is lot of hush hush secretive dealings, when a project is approved.

We do not have a common policy for the development activities in the province. Though AIDA is the designated body to streamline the

process of social development, how much is it allowed to do? What is the role it plays? What are the norms for a project to be recommended and the minimum standards to maintained in its execution once it is approved? Where are the Salesians prepared and trained for social work? A number of programmes become the personal fiefdom of individuals, though we swear by the community. Certain transparency in the execution of a number of independent individual/community programmes ought to be maintained, not as a means of control and limiting, but as a source of learning for everyone.

The preparedness of Salesians to engage in serious introspection of the validity and comprehensiveness of their works is to be assessed, especially in the light of rapid changes that are taking place on the ground in the lives of people and also of religious communities/congregations.

We have a history of working in very structured institutions and settings and our formation and preparation too is geared to institution based functioning. The most sought after institutions that we have are the schools. How far our institutions have taken the whole community and its needs into consideration is a question that we need to ask. Very often we boast that a place has improved (developed) after we have set up our institutions. People buy land settle down near the institutions, the road services improve, shops spring up. These are signs of development, no doubt. But we do not ask if the life of the people who were there before we came has qualitatively improved or not? Most often, the new houses belong to those who come from other parts to take advantage of the facility of the school; it is not something we actively plan and participate in. More often that not, the locals are subject to grievous injustice in the process. We need to find ways in which our institutions do not merely seek to excel as institutions, but can identify with the community and play greater heed to the needs of the entire community and become proactive agents of progress and development.

We do have a tendency to limiting evangelization and youth to what is institutionally convenient, without seriously analysing what the people and the locality need. So we live in a make-believe world of being champions of youth work, and also development. We are used to one way of doing things and we are comfortable with it. Very often the comfortable becomes the important it erases the burden of growth and change. The net result unfortunately is stagnation and soon fossilisation.

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I do not think I will be presumptuous if I were to say that our formation directories do not speak of formation to social involvement and engagement. Serious reflections on social issues and situations do not become part of our animation programmes. When our young Salesians go out to the villages as part of "Sunday apostolate", the focus is on what we can give to the people and most often it is limited to games, songs, dances, instruction and catechism. The thought seldom crosses the mind that there could be something that could be learned from the people; that interaction with the people on the issues that concern them itself is a formative process. Nor do we create the space and the time to reflect upon the experiences that one gains from such 'outings'. Is it possible that during the years of formation Salesians get exposed to organisations working in the social development field, (beginning with AIDA and DBYES perhaps) so that their vision is broadened, their compassion focused and commitment strengthened? (without of course the fear of "losing vocations" which seems to be the most serious concern of the formation process!) I think it would help a lot in the maturing of vocations, and perhaps weed out those who are motivated by the apparently 'cosy' time that the religious are having. It would also give the young Salesians some challenging mission to look forward to, apart from being rectors, principals and headmasters, and perhaps even parish priests.

Social involvement calls for a life of constant dialogue among groups of people with varied opinions all of which are right! status, education, interests and goals. It is an art of learning to balance the various dynamics that are at play in a community. It requires the capacity to express one's views without threatening and to actively listen to others without feeling threatened. That requires training and practice. How much of it does take place in our religious communities, where very often what the superior (at various levels of hierarchy) is always right? Where do our young Salesians learn the skills needed for such an engagement? May be we need to take a critical look at the dynamics in our own communities.

In the midst of all the problems that are going on in society, we often took pride in the fact that our institutions were safe. For us the barometer of success and security was the safety of our institutions. But it seldom crossed our minds to look at the situation of the people whom our institutions are serving their safety, security and well being. Their concerns hardly ever became our concerns. The

injustices that they were subject to hardly ever became an issue for us, except as conversation subjects. I think we forgot to reach out beyond the security of our walls when scores were killed or villages were burned, as long as we could keep our works going as we planned them. The institutions that we so highly cherish and our security brought little succour to the ordinary person who was struggling against great odds. Till perhaps our own sense of security was shattered rather cruelly, we hardly looked at the harsh realities that the people have to put up with.. Still, the lessons (if we have learned them) are hardly translated into action in our settings in the province. Why? Fear to move out? Not knowing what we need to do? Or sheer callousness?

Conclusion

Salesians have a long history in the Northeast. As I said earlier, *we have a brand name*. But have we exploited the power of that name in favour of the ordinary people of this region? The pressing issues of injustice, poverty, political and economic manipulation and corruption have not found a place in our plans and works. May be we have too much at stake to venture out. May be we have learned to insulate ourselves and ease our consciences by praying for the situation to improve. May be we are part of the very system we are trying to change.

We are asked to continue what the Son of Man came to do: 'to give life and life in its fullness'. Today the many communities in our region are deprived of the possibility of a full and abundant life through the social, economic, and political situations that prevail here. Social development in this context becomes very much part of evangelization in its full sense.

Ours is a mandate to create a civilisation of love driven by the creative energies of the divine spirit. No one can do it better than us religious people. It involves taking great risks. Are we up to the task? We better be, lest we be written off by the one who called us and by those for whom we are called. That is a risk we cannot afford to take.

NOTES

1. Joe Holland & Peter Henriot, *Social Analysis Linking Faith and Justice*, New York: Orbis Books, 1985, p. Xiii.

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2. Joe Holland & Peter Henriot, *Social Analysis Linking Faith and Justice*, p.xiv.
3. From AIDA report for the year 2003-2004.
4. Some of the other works like intensive schools, literacy centres, life skills training, HIV/AIDS education, I am sure will find mention in the paper on youth and hence need not find mention here.

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Chapter 10

MEDIA MINISTRY IN THE PROVINCE OF DIMAPUR

Tarcisius Toppo SDB

Introduction

Communication in and by the Church is essentially communication of the Good News of Jesus Christ.¹ Since communication is at the heart of the Church, it is not surprising then, that communication in a variety of forms, has been part of the church's ministry from the beginning. There has been a constant search for relevant expression of faith in the Church. In each succeeding generation, God's people have used the media of their culture to reveal God's love. Over the centuries various media have developed word and ritual, visual arts, print, photography and film, radio and television. Whatever communication techniques became available, the Church eventually found a way to use them. I believe, the purpose of the seminar is to reflect on the past and take stock of the present and prepare for a more effective launch in the future especially in the field of communication. The field is indeed vast. Speaking of the province of Dimapur, and context of our work it is possible that some may opine that it is too early to speak about modern communication technologies. However, we need to realise that the context of our ministry is daily changing and the media bring about that change, to a great extent. This in turn brings on us the responsibility to search for relevance. Communication technologies² are in fact making headway in our country itself and no doubt in Northeast India. They are indeed shaping many minds and lives.

With new information and communication technologies at our doorsteps, the world is indeed entering into the *age of less* store-less shopping, ticket-less air travel, casino-less gambling, campus-less education, check-less banking, floor-less stock trading, and travel-less meetings, to name just a few. The surge of *do-it-yourselfism* has been an ongoing revolution in information technology. But the phenomenon appears diffused today as everything is slowly being automated and put on line.³ This may sound utopian for some of us but not for people in the West, Europe and the metropolitan cities of our country.⁴ It really looks like a dream that can never be realised for India but only time will tell when it will be a reality for India. We may not live to see that day but be sure it will be here. Who thought that Internet and mobile phones would be here so fast in the hands of the people? What next?

1. Church's attitude and involvement in social communication

Though the Church is the realisation of God's self-communication in time and is in her essence communication⁵ the attitude of the Church towards media wasn't that positive in the beginning. The Church was very suspicious of media at first and tried every means to censor and control them. The attitude was indeed negative. Slowly the Church realised media as something indispensable for the Church and her ministry and tried to use them at any cost. But she realised that it wasn't the best attitude towards media. She began to emphasise on critical understanding and encouraging the faithful to use the media discriminately and for compassionate service.⁶ In this connection *Vigilanti Cura* of Pope Pius XI (June 29, 1936), may be considered the basic document of the Church with a positive approach to film, where the Pope not only warns about the dangers but also invites all to be critical viewers of films. In fact, it expresses the concern for the moral issues involved in a medium, which had greater influence than the press. This was followed by another encyclical letter by Pope Pius XII, *Miranda Prorsus*, on September 8, 1957, which further unfolded Church's view on the electronic media, viz., film, radio and television. The Pope was fully aware of the positive as well as the negative impacts when he said: "We are aware that each of these three arts of the motion pictures, radio and television, in fostering the development of mind and spirit, sets its own special problems to be solved in the field not only of the arts, but of technology and economics."⁷

Inter Mirifica of December 4, 1963, is the first ecumenical council document of the Church on social communication. With the council decree a new terminology was created in the expression of 'social communications'. The preparatory commission felt that expressions like 'diffusion techniques' or 'audio-visual media' or even mass media or mass communications would not express sufficiently the concerns, needs and perspectives of the Church. Communication should not be restricted to mere technical means of transmission but rather should be concerned about communication as a process between and among humans. Thus the expression proposed was: the 'instruments of social communication' which would point to the communication of and in human society. This definitely does go beyond the mass media as press, radio, TV or film.⁸ It seems to be clear from this terminology that 'social communication' as the communication of and in human society, includes beyond the mere (modern) technical means, all other forms of human communication as expressed in societies and cultures. That is why the document says:

Man's genius has, with God's help, produced marvelous technical inventions from creation, especially in our times. The Church, our mother, is particularly interested in those which directly touch man's spirit and which have opened up new avenues of easy communication of all kinds of news, of ideas and orientations. Chief among them are those means of communication which of their nature can reach and influence not merely single individuals but the very masses and even the whole of human society. These are the press, the cinema, radio, television and others of a like nature.⁹

The Church considers it as her birthright to use and own any of these media which are necessary or useful for the formation of Christians and for pastoral activity. Pastors of souls have the task of instructing and directing the faithful how to use these media in a way that will ensure their own salvation and perfection and that of all mankind.¹⁰ They should be particularly zealous in this field, since it is closely linked to their task of preaching the Gospel.¹¹ They should be trained to meet the needs and acquire competence needed to use these media for the apostolate.¹² What followed this document was a comprehensive pastoral instruction, *Communio et Progressio*, on January 21, 1971. It is considered the *magna carta* of Christian communication. The approach is very positive as well as professional. It gives us the foundation and guidelines on different aspects of Christian communication.

Pope John Paul II in his encyclical letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, calls the media 'the first Areopagus of the modern age', and declared that "it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message into the 'new culture' created by modern communications."¹³ Pope Paul VI had already noted in his Apostolic Exhortation that "the Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilise these means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect. It is through them that she proclaims 'from the housetops' the message of which she is the depository."¹⁴ Since the Church exists within human cultures, it both shapes and is shaped by those cultures. In other words, culture shapes the human voice that answers the voice of Christ. The pastoral instruction on social communication, *Aetatis Novae*, of February 22, 1992, which reflected on the pastoral implications of revolutionary technological changes, again emphasised that the new era is a new culture with a new language, new psychology, and new techniques.¹⁵ And as Angela Zukowsky says: "These changes are having a deep impact on learning and the ways of learning and challenging and changing the very leadership and administrative and teaching skills. Religious education, catechesis, which are the very means of implanting the Gospel deeply are facing new learning and interactive environments as never before."¹⁶

The Church has always tried to keep pace with time. With growing popularity of latest interactive media viz. the Internet, the Church brought out two documents: *The Church and Internet*, February 22, 2002, and *Ethics and Internet*, February 22, 2002. The Church's interest in the Internet is a particular expression of her longstanding interest in the media of social communication. The modern media of social communications are not only 'gifts of God'¹⁷ and 'marvellous technical inventions'¹⁸ but are also cultural factors that play a role in our story and the story of the lives of the people whom we serve, contributing greatly to the enlargement and enrichment of men's minds and to the propagation and consolidation of the kingdom of God.¹⁹

Mindful of Christ's command that she should preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth,²⁰ she never ceases to ask again and again how she can still image and echo God in the new cultures that emerge as time goes. In this, 'media-saturated'²¹ or 'mass-mediated'²²

environment, the existing information is being always given new forms and frameworks.²³ This process is transforming the lives of the people and changing the scenario of religious beliefs, faith and religion itself. As it is said 'yesterday's cutting-edge factories get outmoded and massive investment is poured into making sure that the industry is 'retooled' to meet today's requirement. If they're not refitted, they soon go out of business.' Since the proclamation of the Gospel is a sine qua non aspect of the Church's mission, so too finding new models and ways becomes a sine qua non requisite for the Church and communicators today.

2. Don Bosco's involvement and attitude to social communication

We are familiar with the oft quoted comment on Don Bosco that he was ahead of his times in the use of mass media for the spread of the Gospel and good literature. Don Bosco made full use of the media as a means of achieving his educational aims. He knew fully well the good as well as evil effects of media. Don Bosco had a predilection for the printed and published word as a work of propaganda. Together with the press he also made use of the theatre, academical presentations and music. He used the press not as an industry but as an apostolate. With this in mind he ventured to write schools texts, prayer books, formative manuals, and books for recreation and the stage. He too started for the young the magazine *Amico della Gioventù* (Friend of the Young).²⁴

Of particular significance in this regard is Don Bosco's circular sent to the houses on the feast of St. Joseph 1885, just before he left for France. In it he dealt with the importance of spreading good literature. He wrote: "one of the most effective means of sustaining the kingdom of Christ in so many souls, and one of the principal aims of our Congregation. I beg and implore you not to neglect this most important aspect of our mission. This was one of the main tasks given to me by God, and you know how I felt bound to throw myself indefatigably into this apostolate, despite my many other commitments. Rest assured, my dear sons, that if you are diligent in this apostolate, the Lord will shower his choicest blessings on you and on your boys."²⁵

3. Social communications and the Salesian mission

For the entire world 1957 marked the beginning of the revolution in information processing, the year Russia launched the Sputnik which introduced the space age and the era of world-wide communication by the use of satellites. It was this time that change of

mentalities, systems and the horizons of history started its stride. But it was only on December 4, 1963 that the Church officially pronounced, *Inter Mirifica*, its document on social communication. Directives were laid down for the entire Church.

Following the directives of the Church the Salesian Congregation too concentrated on renewal of guidelines and policies on social communication in 1965 (GC 19). That was the year when the Congregation concentrated on a consideration of the renewal it was called upon to make a pronouncement for the first time on social communication and the mass media. The GC19 (1965), which was convoked by Fr. Renato Ziggitti as Rector Major and continued under the presidency of his successor Fr. Luigi Ricceri, provides a fundamental point of reference for assessing the importance the Congregation has always attached to the 'instruments' of social communication: the term 'means' (the mass media) was adopted by later General Chapters in place of 'instruments' as being more appropriate, because it applies also to internal human activity, while 'instruments' indicates rather the external mechanism used in relationships and dealings with others.²⁶ In fact Article 43 of our Constitution states:

We work in the social communication sector. This is a significant field of activity that constitutes one of the apostolic priorities of the Salesian mission. Our Founder had an instinctive grasp of the value of this means of mass education, which creates culture and spreads patterns of life; he showed great originality in the apostolic undertakings which he initiated to defend and sustain the faith of the people. Following his example we utilise as God's gift the great possibilities which social communication offers us for the education and evangelisation.

Our *Ratio* lays great emphasis on the formation of the Salesians to social communication. Talking about the intellectual formation, the human sciences and the sciences of education it says:

The increasingly widespread and powerful impact of social communication on almost all aspects of life, sectors of activity and relationships in society calls for a formation of the Salesian in the field of communication, a formation that will enable to be acquainted with the instruments, their languages and their use, and acquire a critical sense and methodological and educative capacity for communicating the message more effectively.²⁷

The era in which we are living can rightly be called the age of social communication because of the great influence it is exerting on the transformation process operating in society. Developments in the field of technology are exerting a deep conditioning effect on humanity by the mere fact that they are not neutral but rather mould men and women, changing their style of life and behaviour, as well as their criteria of judgement and values. We are deluged by a flood of information and are often conditioned by it, and therefore it becomes important to be able to distinguish between truth and falsehood and to educate others to do likewise. Times as well as means have changed and the impact is much stronger than before. Getting involved in the media, Fr. Egidio Vigano would say, is totally in keeping with the Salesian consecration and apostolate.²⁸ He speaks about the 'new presence' of the Salesian when he speaks about the 'Challenge of the Media' he says: "Hence I think it useful to invite you to remember the importance we must give to the mass media in our life and mission."²⁹ This was further emphasised by Juan Vecchi when he stated: "social communication fills the whole world and determines the form of human coexistence. It is of close interest therefore to the vocation of the Salesian as a disciple of Christ and, in a still more pressing manner, as one who works with the mentality of an educator in the field of advancement and evangelisation."³⁰

4. BOSCOM-INDIA and social communication

The Salesian Provincial Conference of India (SPCI)³¹ established Boscom-India, a national body of delegates for Social Communication of the Indian provinces in August 1993. The purpose is to pool resources and ideas and chalk out plans and projects in the national level. One of the important ventures that was materialised was the preparation of *Shepherds for an Information Age*, a compendium of lesson plans to equip Salesians and all those entrusted with the task of shepherding their flock with the knowledge and techniques for an effective ministry in our ever changing media-saturated world. It says:

Salesians as Church leaders have to be introduced to the wide spectrum of communication possibilities: from the theory of communication to the practical use of communication techniques; from basic skills of body language to the intricacies of signs and symbols; from interpersonal to group and mass communication; from a global diachronic study of communication to the interpretative use of communication strategies for a spatio-temporal context; from a skilful use of alternative media to the

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power and possibilities of mainstream media; from critical reflection on mass media to the discerning use of media resources in education; from the philosophical principles underlying communication to their theological and spiritual interconnections; from the pedagogical and didactic use of communication to their creative and innovative exigencies; from subaltern and missiological approaches to the use of computers and Internet³²

5. CBCI and communication

In this connection it is good to note the 26th General Body Meeting of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) at Trichur, Kerala, in 2004 which took up the theme 'Church and Social Communication'. It was indeed timely taking into consideration the great strides that the country is making in the field of information technology. The final statement of general body meeting noted that the media are exercising a great influence on the minds of the people and creating public opinion.³³ While appreciating these developments it recommended that a pastoral plan for Social Communications should become an integral part of the mission of the Church³⁴ in keeping with the developments and that all leaders of community, bishops, priests, religious and lay people, should get adequate training in communication so that they can effectively discharge their duties for evangelisation and defence of the genuine interests of the Church and society.³⁵

6. Social communication and the province of Dimapur

The Provincial Directory and Formation Directory of our province dealing with communication begins by quoting article 43 of our Constitutions which says that communication is a significant field of activity which constitutes one of the apostolic priorities of the Salesian mission and that we should try to diffuse Gospel values through the print media, radio and television as well as through the traditional media.³⁶

The directory recommends that media education should become part of our school curriculum and Salesian formation programme. This will enable the youth and the young Salesians to understand the language of the media, to make critical use of the media and to participate in the production of value-based media products.³⁷ The province is to strengthen its communicative mission by continuing to train Salesians and lay collaborators for media apostolate. These in turn should help other Salesians and their collaborators to make use of the media for evangelisation, catechesis, education and youth

work. In order to be more effective in its mission the province should establish centres for publication and production for the diffusion of books, periodicals, audio-visual aids and other media materials³⁸, and also make effort to provide a full-timer for media apostolate.³⁹

6.1 Ministry of social communication in the province

It all started in the year 1978 when Fr. Thomas Vattoth⁴⁰ was sent for his studies to CREC-AVEX (Centre for Research and Social Communication) in Lyons, France, a formation and research centre for catechetics and audiovisuals. The centre brings future leaders from various parts of the world to be educated in the media for evangelisation and catechesis. Fr. Vattoth had his training under the guidance of Fr. Pierre Babin, OMI, the founding father of the centre. After his training in Lyons for three months he moved to Turin to work with Bro. Notario and Bro. Spri, two Salesian brothers. After his return in 1979 he launched his work in social communication. It was at this time (1979-1980) he too got involved with UNDA/OCIC, which was in its infancy. Since he was the only person qualified he was the first member from the Northeast. It was during his time that the constitution of the organisation was drawn up.

In 1980 he discussed his plans with Bishop Abraham Alangimattathil to build the Christian Publication Centre (CPC) which could serve as a publication house and audio visual centre. The building, which was started in 1979, was completed in 1980. The first Catholic audiocassette with hymns was brought out by the centre entitled 'Trust in the Lord', in English. With his team he began giving radio programmes at Kohima radio station, thus breaking new ground in the field of communication. Till then the Baptists were the regular people who gave radio programmes. Fr. Vattoth made sure he did this on a regular basis for Christmas, Easter and also on Sundays.

In 1980s he was made the secretary of the North Eastern Bishops' Conference which had Archbishop Hubert D'Rosario as the president. This gave him greater opportunity to animate the bishops in the field of social communication. It was this body that decided that Catholic Publication Centre, Kohima should serve as the regional centre for social communication for the whole of Northeast till a new centre was built.

In 1984, he made the recording and photography studio in the Catholic Publication Centre and the centre had the privileged presence of Mother Theresa at its inauguration. This gave yet another impetus to the work. The centre organised regular slide and sound

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programmes on the tribes of Nagaland and Manipur for the Government officials who used to frequent the centre for the shows and enjoy the programmes to their hearts content.

In 1981-1982, Fr. Peter Paul, after his training at CREC-AVEX (Centre for Research and Social Communication) in Lyons, France, joined Fr. Thomas Vattoth as his close collaborator. This collaboration helped in brining out a number of audio cassettes.

In 1982-1983 Video was just beginning in the Northeast. The first video and TV editing programme was with the Catholic Publication Centre. Together with this the centre too had the audio cassette duplicating machine, which could duplicate four cassettes at the same time. The coming of video enhanced the work. Fathers used to shoot videos about the villages and prepare programmes.

In 1984-1985 the Northeastern Bishops' Conference applied to Misereor for a full-fledged Communication Centre for the whole of Northeast. It was unanimously decided for Kohima. This would serve as a media centre and a reference point in Catholic media for all till the dioceses were able to set up their own centre. But the individual bishops had their agenda of setting up centres in their own dioceses. Thus help was granted to all the dioceses to set up Communication centres. This made the regional centre a dream unrealised. But by now practically all the dioceses had their own personnel and centres.

During his time slide programmes used for Nagaland Catechetical series on faith formation was done. A documentation centre of photography of all the tribes of Northeast was realised to some extent.

In 1986, after the departure of B.O. Anthony who was looking after the press at CPC, it remained closed for over four years. Fr. Vattoth who was parish priest and in charge of the communication centre was transferred in 1990. Fr. Tom Karthikapalli⁴¹ was in Christ King parish for four years. Then only three persons Fr. Vattoth, Fr. Peter Paul and Fr. Tom had some qualification in communication and Bishop Abraham was desperately looking for someone to look after the communication centre and to restart the press. Finding no one else he requested Fr. Tom for help. The latter had no experience of running a press. But seeing the anguish of the bishop, he willingly took up the work. The machines had been lying unused for four years and some of them had been damaged. Fortunately, he got two boys from Kerala who had been working in a press to come and help him. With their help he too learned the basics of composing, printing and purchase and sale of the materials.

In the four years that followed as the person in charge of the press the fourth edition of the hymn book, *All You Hills*, without the music, was printed, translated and printed in Angami, the third and fourth books of the *Imitation of Christ*, published a book answering the *Tricky questions Protestants usually ask and accuse Catholics about*, printed and published a book on the *Use of Herbal medicines*. In addition, several school and college magazines too were printed. But the main task had been printing programmes for the various Church meetings, both Catholic and Baptist. It was at this time that he managed to print two of his dramas, *Justice* and *Dance of Fortune*, which have been acted in many of our formation houses.

But the audio-visual department could not be utilised fully. First of all the tape recorder purchased in 1971 was mono and by 1990 the market was flooded with stereo tapes and there was the fear that no one would buy tapes produced on that tape recorder. Fr. Tom requested Bishop Abraham to update the machines, but the bishop's reply was: "we have already spent a lot of money on those machines, use them and do what you can with them." Besides the instruments being outdated, the recording studio was also quite unhygienic. It was during this time that a video camera was brought which was used to cover important Church functions, like feasts and ordinations. But having no editing machine, the quality was very ordinary. Practically nothing worthwhile was produced as audio-visual. Besides that, lack of personnel and lack of finance hampered the progress.

Until now Salesians were engaged in media ministry mainly on behalf of the diocese of Kohima and the diocese of Northeast India. Involvement of the Salesians in the media apostolate independently of the dioceses began only in the 1990s. In July 1993, Fr. Jonas Kerketta SDB⁴² was sent to UPS, Rome, for licentiate in media and communications, which he completed in October 1996. Soon after his return to the province in November 1996 he was appointed to Salesian College as teacher and in-charge of the youth ministry of the institution. It was at this time that he was appointed province delegate for Social Communications, taking over from Fr. M.D. Varghese, who had occupied the post for a relatively short time since he was appointed PA to the bishop of Dibrugarh. It was during this time that he ventured out conducting Media Awareness Programmes (MAP) and journalism courses for the pre-novices, novices, students of Philosophy and homiletics for deacons at Sacred Heart College, Shillong. Besides these, he went around the schools and colleges in

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the province conducting media awareness programmes and journalism courses. Most of these programmes he conducted single handedly.

He was closely associated with BOSCOM-India since 1997 and has actively collaborated in its ventures. He attended all the national level general body meeting of UNDA/OCIC (now re-christened SIGNIS) from 1998 to 2002. Since 1997 Fr. Jonas has been contributing articles to some national and regional papers like *The Catholic Herald*, *Shillong Times*, *Nagaland Post*, *Nagaland Page*, *Eastern Mirror*, *The Sangai Express* etc., and to news agencies like SAR News and UCA News. From 1997 to 2003 he was the editor of *Dimapur Links*, the newsletter of the province of Dimapur. He was also a visiting lecturer at St. Anthony's College, Shillong in the year 1998 and 1999. It was in 1999 that his stint at audio-cassette production began with *Sunawa Vachan*⁴³ and since then the number of his production has been on the increase.⁴⁴

6.2 Impact of mass media in the region

In the last twenty years the world has witnessed a rapid spread of communication technologies across the globe as never before. Their entry in every region of the world and every sector of life and human activity is indeed amazing. In many instances they have simplified human activity. The Northeastern region too has witnessed this entry of media in a very strong way especially in the last ten years. Cable TVs, Star TVs, Internet Cafes, personal computers, etc. are widely common at present. Though, to the people living in the remote areas these developments may seem insignificant nevertheless they are coming in a very big way in the metropolitan cities and the towns. It is not possible to delineate the exact effect; it is however possible to come to certain conclusions by at least looking at the externals as pointed out by J. Ryan and W. M. Wentworth:

While the exact effects of the mass media are not yet clear, we know that the mass media attempt to influence what we consume, what we talk about, what humour we like, how we dress our bodies and furnish our homes, how we spend our time and money, and what themes enter into the private quarters of our life. Some would argue that even our basic beliefs, attitudes, and values are influenced by the mass media. Mass Media images can provide information about our place in society. Are we rich or poor, behind the times or fashionable, eating right or digging our graves without teeth, informed or ignorant, conservative or

liberal? The mass media may play a part in constructing our sense of who we are and our relative standing in society.⁴⁵

Living in a media saturated world, it is obvious that media penetrate deeply into the most private and personal areas of our lives while appealing to huge audiences. Below we attempt to point out some areas where the impact has been most felt and evident. The following analysis is done on the basis of the questionnaire distributed among the confreres of the province. It is only to get a feeling of where we are and the environment that surrounds us.

6.2.1 Religion and culture

Religion is not an isolated entity. It exists within a culture and it always needs the support of the culture into which it is inserted. It especially needs the cultural support of the secular environment.⁴⁶ But India as a whole and Northeast India in particular is a mosaic of cultures. These cultures are slowly feeling the impact of media and losing their original vitality. The widespread electronic information and communication is changing societies, cultures and the lives of many. It is bringing about new ethnic consciousness in the people of the region. The modern media are defining ideas and mentalities of the people and as a result cultures of the region are undergoing change. At least 36 percent of the respondents opined that our region is losing the traditional cultures due to the abundance of Western materials and culture through media. This trend is evident from the increase of violence in the region, move towards hedonism, individualism and materialism that is entering into various communities, tribes and clans. There is a general feeling that, to a great extent, media are influencing even their political life and economic behaviour.

The electronic media is slowly becoming the new pervasive god entering the homes of many and surrounding us like an ocean, with its power to entertain, inform and inspire.⁴⁷ Statistics show that the amount of time we use for media ranks third after sleep and work. At least 24 percent of the respondents felt that media is making much impact on religion and an equal percentage feel that it is making an impact to some extent. Around 39 percent felt that media are negatively affecting the religious values and practices of the people of the region to some extent and only twelve percent feel that their impact on religious values and practices are very little. This is very

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much evident from the slackening of religious fervour of many in the region. Unconsciously media is occupying a major place and time in our own homes and lives as stated by Gilbert Choondal:

Electronic media is the new God, with its all-pervasive presence. Millions listen to the same programmes, hum the same commercial jingles, share with characters in TV serials their trials and tribulations, their misfortunes and their joys. What is happening in many of our homes and religious houses is that the television and computers are the new 'avatars' at whose altar people worship.⁴⁸

Some years ago the Church was the power-house of everything. The pastors were considered the most knowledgeable people and people approached them to solve all their problems. But it is not the case today. It is said that the Church as a window on media and society, has turned to media as a window on the Church and society.⁴⁹ I may be very pessimistic in saying the Church is more and more side-tracked today and many are turning a deaf ear to its advises and opinions.

6.2.2 Family and relationships

Man is born to belong to a family, which is the first social unit, where he experiences human relationships that form the foundation of love. It is in the context of family that one's physical, emotional, human, psychological and spiritual aspects are shaped. It is the first school where one learns one's culture, values and traditions. But the information and communication is striking the very foundation of the family structure. Speaking of the situation of Asia F. J. Eilers points out that the new media, are threatening traditional values, especially the sacredness of marriage and the stability of the family and promoting violence, hedonism, unbridled individualism and materialism.⁵⁰ Similar feelings were voiced by at least 33 percent of the confreres. In fact they are affecting much the family relationships which can be evidenced from the growing prevalence of promiscuity, divorce, premarital sex, dating, etc. due to the influence of media in our cultures which were unheard of before. Many feel that there is degradation of morals in the contemporary society.

New technologies, such as television, computer and video games are replacing the sharing of daily life experiences and stories. Individualism is creeping in many families and communities. The breakdown of families caused by infidelity, superficial relationship, divorce, distress, and evils like alcoholism and drugs are becoming more common than ever.

6.2.3 Knowledge and education

People today have access to a vast amount of knowledge about the world: hourly or more frequent news bulletins, reports from every corner of the world, cities and towns. There is no doubt that the new media have radically altered the scale, speed of circulation, and nature of knowledge in society.⁵¹ There is mushrooming of the various types and number of papers and magazines in the Northeast and in our own region. It is also affecting news and information, online newspapers and online publications are catching up. Many of the papers, magazines and associations and organisations have their own websites.

The new technologies are also heralding a new era of education, demanding a major restructuring of curricula, pedagogy, practices, goals and greater participation.⁵² Computer, Internet, multimedia are becoming popular. Many of our educational institutions have already introduced computer education as part of their curricula. Many of the schools and colleges have already Overhead Projectors, LCD projectors and multimedia presentations. These are all a struggle to keep pace with the development and times. Many felt that much of educational pursuits of the students and our educational system itself are guided by the media. At least 26 per cent felt that learning today is too bookish and non-experiential, far removed from reality.

6.2.4 Youth, children and their behaviour

Media are the fabric of the modern society. There is no one who is untouched by the seductiveness of the media - children, grownups, young and old. Though their impact is felt differently on each of these categories of people⁵³, they are very strongly felt by the youth and the children because they are easily exposed to media than other sections of the society. They are subject to ever increasing pressures from the socialising forces in society. Thus almost every aspect of their lives is experiencing radical transformation.⁵⁴ As K.S. Berger says, a person is not only influenced by factors within the individual but also by forces outside of the individual, his physical surroundings and social interactions.⁵⁵ And what could be the external factors if not the whole culture formed by the new media, to which especially the youth are exposed as the main consumers as well as victims. The youth indeed are the main consumers as well as victims of media as expressed by a great majority. They become easy victims because of their uncritical viewing and consumption.

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There is also growing sensationalism and violence in the media particularly in cable televisions and Internet. Lot of seductive and suggestive scenes, pornography, sex and obscenity in films, videos, televisions, etc. are presented which are adversely affecting the social behaviour of the young and the children.⁵⁶ They being the main consumers, they are obviously the targets of the marketing strategies today.

6.3. Difficulties faced in the field of social communication

Difficulties are at the same time challenges to be faced. Below I try to enumerate some of the major difficulties that are faced as gathered from the questionnaire that were sent out.

6.3.1 Lack of awareness and interest among the salesians

We all have our paradigms and resist change. These usually define us, and feel assaulted when they are threatened. But none can resist the emerging paradigms that are being introduced by the communication technologies and changing the evangelising and catechetical environment and even our managerial activities. Leaders of communities and parish priests, priests in different ministries are already feeling the change of environment and the mentality and attitude of the people towards church, pastors etc. But if we want to change the world, the change has to begin with oneself. Not realising fully their impact they are prone to think of media activities and ministry as a colossal waste. But this lack of awareness and interest in these changes can often make us pay great prices. This may be due to our unwillingness and inflexibility to change from old to the new systems and ideas. The young generation does not so much appreciate conservatives and orthodox people.

6.3.2 Lack of infrastructure for social communication

Though many may oppose structures but no one can deny the fact that we need them in order to function well. It is already twenty-two years (1982-2004) since the province is in its existence and within three years or so it will be celebrating the silver jubilee of its foundation; but so far we neither find an office nor a point of reference for media matters and materials. And yet, it is an important aspect of our apostolate. Lack of infrastructure has also killed many initiatives and creativity of the confreres and new ventures of the province.

6.3.3 Lack of trained personnel

The field is really vast as well as very professional. The media world is progressing at a tremendous speed. It is enough to visit the electronic shops to hear about the daily/weekly/monthly/yearly changes and advancement. There are really few who are qualified or have some idea about the field. Updating and keeping oneself abreast of the developments is necessary not only for media persons but for all. The lack of awareness of the seriousness of the negative influence of media has also reduced the urgency and importance of setting aside some people for this ministry alone. Given the size of the province and the multicultural set up in which it is situated, a person entrusted with too many responsibilities may do justice to none. Besides, the confreres as well as the province as a whole haven't given the needed support, encouragement and help. There is some sort of fear in launching out in this kind of work.

6.3.4 Lack of finance

Lack of finance has obstructed the growth of the media ministry in the province. We may have enough knowledge and ideas but to materialise them we need financial support. Its lack has also hindered accessibility to modern media techniques as well as brought down our contribution to the region as felt by many of the respondents. Since there is no well set up communication centre we haven't made much impact in the region in this field. Since it is an expensive apostolate, it has always been sacrificed for something else.

6.3.5 Lack of systematic and co-ordinated work

It was opined by many of the respondents that there is no specified, systematic and organised plan in the field of social communication. The works are not co-ordinated well. The province has not drawn up any plan for the entire province. This is also responsible for our ineffectiveness in this field. We have made some contribution, no doubt, but they are not in proportion to our strength and resources. Allocation of personnel and funds has been minimum. Most of the achievements that we can boast of are due to individual interests and initiatives. They try to knock every door possible to support their ventures.

6.3.6 Multiplicity of cultures and languages

Northeast India is a mosaic of cultures, religions and tribes. Missionary work has suffered much due to the multiplicity of

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cultures, customs, religions and languages. These differences in languages and cultures not only bring about difficulties in our normal communication with the people but also communication of the Gospel. Considering the smallness of the audience of particular language groups many have not ventured out for any good productions. Many of the tribes too, do not have a written language and confreres have made great sacrifices in learning the language and giving them a written language, thus paving the way for the development of literature in the languages.

6.3.7 Lack of media education in schools and colleges

Our ministry is primarily to the young. Through our education we very much mould the minds and hearts of the youngsters in our educational institutions. Most of the time without our realisation the media are doing the job that should have been done by us. The titillating presence of the media among the young is having more impact than our education and presence. The educational institutions that we have do not offer any education to counteract these influences. There is tendency of the heads of the institutions to close an eye on the influence of media on their wards. Media education in the schools and colleges seems to be a waste of time and energy, having no relevance for the wards in their academic pursuits. Most of the energy is directed to getting good results in the Board Examinations and University Examinations.

6.3.8 Lack of good media materials

The Church in the Northeast is yet to take stock of its involvement in the media ministry. This ministry is thought as the monopoly of the St. Paul's sisters, Fathers and Brothers. With just a few centres in the Northeast, and that too in the main towns, they are not able to satisfy the public thirst for good materials, especially the students. Recently they have begun the mobile shopping, trying to cater to, especially the religious or Church run schools. Apart from this people really lack good media materials. Besides the materials available to them may be the production of some other parts of India, having very little relevance to the people here. This is true not only in the line of communication but also evangelisation and faith formation.

6.3.9 Easy availability of cheap media materials

The media scenario has changed considerably in the Northeast. The transport and communication system has developed much. Publication houses, audio, video and CD parlours have increased.

The latest development is that of Internet Café. Most of the youngsters, at least in the towns, and not in rural areas, have also enough time and money. They have an easy access to pornographic CDs, films, magazines and other entertainments in the region. Apparently these materials seem unavailable to the common people but these youngsters know exactly where to get them.

7. Emerging tasks and opportunities

It is our common experience that people operate today with a completely different worldview than people a few years back. It is the case of people as well as pastors, trainers and the trainees. We all wonder why? Though we all experience the same world, we all see it through our own glasses coloured by our dominant worldviews, cultures etc. The real and greater challenge for all of us may not be finding new lands and peoples for evangelisation and catechesis but to be able to see with new eyes and enter into the new cultures. It is true that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and tomorrow. But our understanding and interpretation of Jesus must be in terms of the language and symbols, which make sense to us today.⁵⁷

As John Paul II, referring to the modern media as the first Areopagus of the modern age, declared: "it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message into the 'new culture' created by modern communications."⁵⁸ Indeed the challenge is to put the everlasting Gospel into words, which will make sense to the minds and hearts of people today. We are not bringing about an *either or situation*, the old media and the new media. It is a question of *both and situation*. While adopting the new methods and means, we do not intend in any way to belittle the traditional and old methods. The Church exists to communicate the Good News of salvation to all peoples of times and places. In fact the entire mission of the Church is concentrated and manifested in her evangelising activity.

In fulfilling this mission, the Church is conscious that in addition to person-to-person evangelisation and other traditional means of transmitting the message, she should also make use of the means of social communication placed at her disposal by technology. For, as Pope Paul VI says, "The Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilise these powerful means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect."⁵⁹ He saw them as the modern and effective version of the pulpit to communicate the message of the Gospel. The

modern media offer new ways of confronting people with the message with the message of the Gospel.⁶⁰

7.1 Reading the signs of the times

There is a shift in the way we learn and work. We need to put new wine into new wineskins⁶¹ if our communicating faith is to be sustained in the future. If the Church wishes to be effective in her mission of proclaiming the Good News there is no other way but to read the signs of the times. This was expressed in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, which clearly stated that 'reading the signs of the times' is a task of 'the whole people of God'.⁶² In other words, it is a process of discernment by which the Church pays serious attention to 'events, the needs, and the longings' of our time so that we may be able to discover "genuine signs of the presence or of the purpose of God".⁶³ The same was reaffirmed in the Pastoral Instruction on Social Communications, *Aetatis Novae*, which said:

As the Spirit helped the prophets of old to see the divine plan in the signs of their times, so today the Spirit helps the Church to interpret the signs of our times and carry out its prophetic tasks, among which the study, evaluation, and right use of communications technology and the media of social communications are now fundamental.⁶⁴

In the world of media effectiveness is achieved because they read the signs of the times to mediate meaning. They seek out and detect those values and assumptions, which appear to be acceptable in the culture.⁶⁵ This is very true of the advertising industry, which has a great force in influencing minds and hearts.⁶⁶ The communicators of the faith cannot claim that they are somehow immune from this culture. The Church as well as the society find themselves inserted and surrounded by the new information and communication environment, which is constantly changing, complex, fast, and uncertain.

7.2 Develop a more positive attitude towards media

Most of the time we don't mince words in criticising media and its evil effects. We attribute all the evils in the society to media. But that is one side of the story. We have never stopped to think about the good effects of the media. Media are neither good nor bad. It is the user who makes them good or bad. Media competence also means that we be

aware of the influence of media, both positive and negative, on both individuals and masses. This comes from the realisation and urgency that we ourselves are affected very much by this culture. It is one thing to acquire the techniques of handling the instruments skilfully. But being aware and being open to the new culture that is emerging is quite a different thing. Attending some seminars, workshops, animation programmes on mass media and communications, can also enhance our knowledge of media.

7.3 Be aware of the new learning and teaching styles

It is said that people's learning styles are as distinctive as fingerprints.⁶⁷ Psychologists and educators insist that we take note of the different learning and cognitive styles. It is unethical therefore, to reach and teach everyone in the same way, unmindful of the diversities that already exist and that are brought about. An enriched environment for one is not necessarily enriched for another. No two persons learn in an identical way. There are new methodologies for effective evangelisation and learning.⁶⁸ We often hear complaints from priests, religious and teachers that the audience, the faithful, the students aren't able to grasp what they preach or teach. The reasons are obvious. Neither have they tried out any other method of conveying the message or to teach other than oral preaching.

Today screens are at the very heart of people's homes and learning environments. Most of the respondents of the questionnaire mentioned that television is easily available to the people. The new media are really influencing and shifting how people think, process information and behave. Neither they are neutral to the media nor are the media neutral to them. Nowadays no one likes to be dictated. In some cases the students are as knowledgeable as the teacher. We should be blind in thinking that all that we say during the homily is taken blindly even by the simple and ignorant. Today the move is to have a more democratic-dialogical and life-experience approach in both learning and evangelisation.⁶⁹ The move today is towards the use of a mixture of learning styles throughout life, usually flexing and adapting styles to fit various contexts and to meet a variety of demands in life.⁷⁰

7.4 Media competence

In a culture dominated by the media one cannot overlook media competence on the part of the pastor besides his/her intra-personal or interpersonal competence and other competencies. A professional

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presence of the Church in the sphere of communication is the need of the hour in the region. In order to integrate well the message with the means one needs to be a professional in both. That is why media competence is correctly defined as, the ability to treat the media with self-determinism, creativity and with social responsibility.⁷¹ For this emphasis has to be laid on the early stages of formation itself. So that slowly they are well prepared both theoretically as well as practically, so as to be able to handle situations.

7.5 Media education in the different stages of formation

Media competence can be easily achieved by insisting training in theory as well as practice in the various stages of formation - pre-novitiate, novitiate, post-novitiate, etc. The manual *Shepherd for an Information Age* should be strictly followed. This should not be carried out with an attitude of just fulfilling an obligation. It is certainly going to give a taste for the media to young Salesians. It is a good preparation for their immediate ministry, the practical training, where they come in contact with children and youngsters who are so much in touch with the latest media.

7.6 Media awareness programmes in Salesian institutions

Education is the only way to bring about development and progress in the lives of the people as well as in the society. Today everyone is aware of the influence that the media has on the people especially on the young minds. They are the main consumers of the media as well as their easy victims. One of the effective ways of counteracting the evil influence on them is by making them to be critical viewers as well as consumers of the media. This can be achieved with regular Media Awareness Programmes (MAP) organised for them. This will not only make them critical but also empower them to contribute positively to the influence of media. Conscientising the people about the evil effects of media enables them to stand on their own feet to fight their onslaught.

7.7 Media education in school and college curricula

Students can understand media's role and impact provided they are given an opportunity to learn, be aware of media effects, analyse the media culture, and evaluate the impact on the children, youth and family. These things can be done through regular classes and seminars. At the same time, students must be given an opportunity to view films, videos, use the Internet and interact with media personnel. This will help them to critically assess, evaluate and also

use the modern means of communication. Besides, it could produce young and potential media persons, journalists in our schools, colleges and other set ups.

The colleges that we have should think seriously in offering short diploma courses or degree courses to students in the field of mass media and communications as is done in St. Anthony's college, Shillong. This will allow more opportunities for the fresh and growing minds to be critical and to contribute positively to media. This will certainly result in producing good media persons in the future for the region.

7.8 Training of trainers

One of the ways of following up the media programmes conducted in our schools and colleges is to train some teachers/ lay leaders. To be effective in this ministry some persons have to be not only trained but also appointed to look after their area of formation as is done with the scouts, guides or youth leaders in our schools, colleges and parishes. At the province level the commission for social communication can take up this training of the trainers.

7.9 Need of a media and animation centre

Many may think it is a waste of money to put up structures. But no one can deny the fact that nothing can be achieved without the minimum of structures and facilities. They act as a point of reference. A good and well-furnished media centre, with the needed equipments and instruments, as a point of reference for good media materials, is important in the province. The centre can act as a production house, distribution centre and animation centre in the print media and the electronic media. For this, of course, long-term planning, investment and prepared personnel are required. This will also enhance the possibility of training Salesians as well as laity to get professionally involved in the existing media of the region. This will naturally bring about a good media culture.

7.10 Developmental media

Media can no doubt be used for creating awareness among the people. Through our ministry of social communication the need to highlight the social life situations of the people, like poverty, unemployment, injustice, drug abuse, child labour, moral issues, religious issues, humanness, social justice, corruption, evil influence of media in the area, especially on the traditions and cultures, is urgent. Conscientisation will bring about not only personal

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development but also the development of the society at large. This will help them to 'see, judge and act'. This can be achieved by the proper use of the modern as well as the traditional media. For this, good and value-based materials will pave the way for greater effectiveness. Dissemination of good media materials should have development as its goal.

7.1 Emphasis on the rural and alternative media

We have already mentioned earlier that we are in no way belittling the traditional, rural media when we try to emphasise the modern media. It will be only a suicidal attempt trying to throw out the rural and the traditional media. There are a lot of good elements in the rural/folk media that can be made use of. They are simple and easily understood by the common people. In this, however, the most important principle to be kept in mind is that of 'relevance' and 'effectiveness,' which will further vary from place to place, culture to culture, time to time. Media materials should be suited to the people.

Conclusion

The dawn of this new millennium is indeed an occasion of great joy and deep hope. This is a moment of grace, a time in history when Salesians are called upon to recognise the rich opportunities that are ours for the service of Christ and his Church and the Congregation. Gifted by God, we are all called to respond to the current challenges. This study, though incomplete and superficial, can be an eye opener to our search for relevance. It can be a real 'arouser' for further study and reflection.

While making use of the traditional methods of communicating the Gospel, we cannot forget the new forms for the presentation of ideas and new locus for religious thought which offer both the chance to make the Gospel resonate with the lives of contemporary peoples. At the same time, while emphasising the modern media, which open up new opportunities for the Church of today, we do not in any way underestimate or belittle the traditional or the old media.

Effectiveness of communication in pastoral ministry does not depend on the use of modern or traditional media but on being relevant and appropriate in their use which further will be controlled by factors like, time, person, place, circumstances, etc. At the same time it is difficult to imagine the Church moving into the 21st century yet not taking into consideration the interpersonal and technological communication skills required to engage in dialogue with

contemporary culture. Our main interest is a search for relevance in keeping with the time and not arrive at a tyrannical approach of 'either/or' but 'both/and' which is more realistic and holistic. Striving for one model, one medium, one paradigm of communication throughout the world, for all time and for all peoples would certainly lead to an impoverishment of the Gospel message itself. The Gospel message is too rich to be contained within one paradigm, one model or one medium. Its richness thus calls for a variety of models and media in the Church.

NOTES

1. Cfr. Pontifical Council for the Means of Social Communication, *Aetatis Novae*, 9, in F. J. Eilers, *Church and Social Communication: Basic Documents*, Manila, Logos Publications, 1997, 126.
2. It is important to note that the Gutenberg era - the written and printed word - which began about a hundred years back in the Northeast has far advanced now. Cfr. G. Plathottam, "Contribution of Christianity to Language and Literature" In J. Puthenpurackal, *Impact of Christianity on North East India*, Shillong, Vendrame Institute Publications, 1996, 334. As all of us are aware major breakthroughs have been made in the field of communication technologies in the recent years. Communication today is quick and reliable. In the recent years television and radio have entered many homes of the region and making an impact in the minds and lives of the people. Just as communication technologies have been responsible in bringing changes in many parts of the world social, political, economic, it is slowly bringing changes in our region. For example, glasnost and perestroika in USSR, the fall of communism in many parts of the world, the defeat of dictatorship and autocracy and the movement towards establishing democracy are instances of change of mentality of people. New awareness of their ethnic identity has come. We may attribute all these to education but **media have their own role to play.**
3. Cfr. C. T. Romm, *Virtual Politicking: Playing Politics in Electronically Linked Organizations*, New Jersey, Hampton Press, 1999, 221-222
4. Cfr. B. Gates, "Information and our Interactive Future", in M. D. Ermann M. B. Williams (eds.), *Computers, Ethics, and Society*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997, 115.

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5. Cfr. F. J. Eilers, *Communicating in Community*, Logos Publications, Manila, 1994, 195.
6. Cfr. Ibid., 197-198.
7. Pope Pius XII, Encyclical Letter, *Miranda Prorsus*, 22, in F. J. Eilers, *Church and Social Communication: Basic Documents*, 2nd Edition, Logos Publications, Manila, 1997.
8. Cfr. F. J. Eilers, *Church and Social Communication: Basic Documents*, 2nd Edition, Logos Publications, Manila, 1997, 57-58.
9. Vatican Council II, *Inter Mirifica*, 1, in F. J. Eilers, *Church and Social Communication: Basic Documents*, 2nd Edition, Logos Publications, Manila, 1997
10. Cfr. Ibid., 3.
11. Cfr. Ibid., 13
12. Cfr. Ibid., 15.
13. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, 37, Washington DC, United States Catholic Conference, 1998.
14. Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 45, in E. Kevane, *Teaching the Catholic Faith Today: Twentieth Century Catechetical Documents of the Holy See*, Boston, St. Paul Editions, 1982, 172.
15. Cfr. *Aetatis Novae*, 11.
16. Cfr. A. A. Zukowski, *New Learning Paradigms for Catholic Education*, in "Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice" 1 (1997) 1, September, 55.
17. *Miranda Prorsus*, 1.
18. Cfr. *Inter Mirifica*, 1.
19. Cfr. Ibid., 2
20. Cfr. Mt 28:19.
21. Cfr. W. Carr, *Ministry and the Media*, London, SPCK, 1990, 58.
22. Cfr. D. Andriacco, *Screen Saved: Peril and Promise of Media in Ministry*, Cincinnati, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2000, 7.
23. Cfr. P. Babin M. Iannone, *The New Era in Religious Communication*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1991, 12.
24. Cfr. Department for Social Communication, *Policy Guidelines for Salesian Social Communication*, Rome, Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, 1986, 9.
25. Ibid., 9.
26. Cfr., Ibid., 7.

27. *Ratio fundamentalis Institutiones Et Studiorum, Formation of Salesians of Don Bosco: Principles and Norms*, 3rd Edition, Rome, Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, , 2000, 109
28. Cfr. BOSCOM-INDIA, *Shepherds for an Information Age*, Mumbai, Tej Prasarini, 2000, xi.
29. Department for Social Communication, *Policy Guidelines for Salesian Social Communication*, 16.
30. BOSCOM-INDIA, *Shepherds for an Information Age*, Mumbai, 380.
31. Now it is called Salesian Provincial Conference of South Asia (SPCSA)
32. Ibid., Xi-xii.
33. Cfr. The Final Statement of the 26th General Body Meeting, of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), Trichur, January 7 14, 2004, 1.
34. Ibid., 4.
35. Ibid., 6.
36. Salesian Province of St. Francis De Sales, *Provincial Directory and Formation Directory*, Dimapur, Don Bosco Provincial House, 1999, 14 15.
37. Cfr. Ibid., 15.
38. Cfr. Ibid., 15.
39. Cfr. Ibid., 16.
40. Fr. Thomas Vattoth SDB, is a veteran in the field of communications. He is presently at Catholic Church, Minthong, Arunachal Pradesh, and is pioneering the work at Longding. The following information was received from an interview which the author of this article had with him. He was the first to be formally qualified in the field of social communication and the first to initiate media activities in Northeast India, the undivided province of Guwahati and later on in the province of Dimapur.
41. Fr. Tom Karthikapallil SDB, is well known figure in the media ministry of the province of Dimapur. He did his communication studies in England and was actively involved in the media ministry for a number of years. His plays have been acted in many of our institutions. He is presently at Bible School, Tinsukia, Assam. The following information was received from him about his activities at Catholic Publication Centre, Kohima as the person in charge of communications.
42. Fr. Jonas Kerketta SDB is presently the Vice-Provincial of the province of Dimapur. Until recently he was also the delegate of

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social communication for the province. He held the office for almost eight years. It is due to his hard work and active involvement in media activities that the ministry of social communication has taken some shape in the province. He has brought out a number of audio cassettes, and collaborated in the production of some tele-films. He is a regular contributor to the local papers in the Northeast as well as the SAR News, and UCA News.

43. For a detailed catalogue of his productions in the audio-visual field kindly refer to the Appendix at the back of the paper.
44. Since 2004 Fr. Tarcisius Toppo is the province delegate for Social Communications. He completed his licentiate in media and communications from the Salesian University, Rome, in 2003. (Editors)
45. J. Ryan W. M. Wentworth, *Media and Society: The Production of Culture in the Mass Media*, Boston, Allyn and Bacon, 1999.
46. Cfr. E. Cullinan, *Faith and Its Future in Ireland*, in "The Furrow" (July/August, 2001), 398.
47. Cfr. P. Duffy, *Word of Life in Media and Gospel*, Homebush, St. Paul Publications, 1991, 13 -14.
48. G. Choondal, *Internet Another Forum for Ecclesial Praxis: A Glance into its Assets and Defects that Affect our Lives*, in "Kristu Jyoti" 18 (2002) 1, 112.
49. Cfr. P. A. Soukup (ed.), *Media, Culture and Catholicism*, Kansas City, Sheed & Ward, 1996, xi.
50. Cfr. F. J. Eilers, *Social Communication in Ecclesia in Asia and Recent FABC Document*, in F. J. Eilers (Ed.), *Church and Social Communication in Asia: Documents, Analysis, Experiences*, 106.
51. Cfr. J. Corner, *Critical Ideas in Television Studies*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1999, 108-110. It must be pointed out that today our knowledge of public events and public figures and personalities, politics, sports, recreation, entertainment is much better but at the same time we should not forget the fact that all these are mostly mediated, by the communication media. In discussing about knowledge in television the author points out the three types of 'badness' misselection, misrepresentation, misknowing - that may be found in the whole television industry and which can be responsible in distorting the knowledge that it imparts.
52. Cfr. D. Kellner, *New Media and New Literacies: Reconstructing Education for the New Millennium*, in Lievrouw Livingstone, *The Handbook of New Media*, 90-91.

53. Here we note the different studies done on the effects of the media especially studies done on 'Uses and Gratifications' (Katz, Blumer), which was based on central psychological concept *need* as the starting point. The theory claims that people actively use the mass media to *gratify* specific human *needs*. Cfr. J. Lull, *Media, Communication, Culture: A Global Approach*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2000, 101-102.
54. Cfr. *Towards A New Way of Being Church in Malaysia*, in *Peninsular Malaysia Pastoral Convention II* (30th August 2nd September 1996), Johor, Majodi Centre, 199, 34.
55. Cfr. K.S. Berger, *The Developing Person Through the Life Span*, New York, Worth Publishers, 1998, 3-7.
56. Cfr. Hiebert Gibbons, *Exploring Mass Media for a Changing World*, 312313.
57. Cfr. H. Montefiore, *Communicating the Gospel in a Scientific Age*, Edinburgh, The Saint Andrew Press, 1988, 1-2. The author agrees with Rudolf Bultmann, who says the Gospel needs to be demythologized because it is encapsulated in the first century imagery as it is no longer relevant today, men and women living in the scientific age. But the author is of the opinion that what is required is not demythologization but remythologization, for, every society exists on the mythologies. But it must be done in such a way that it retains the essentials of the Gospel while discarding the first century wrappings and substituting contemporary packing. Cfr. also R. T. Brooks, *Communicating Conviction*, London, Epworth Press, 1983, 54.
58. *Redemptoris Missio*, 37; Cfr. also *The Church and Internet*, 4. .
59. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 45.
60. Pontifical Commission for the Means Of Social Communication, *Communio et Progressio*, 128, in Eilers, *Church and Social Communication: Basic Documents*, 102.
61. Cfr. Mt. 9:17.
62. Cfr. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church *Gaudium et Spes*, 44, in A. Flannery, *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Vol. 1, New York, Costello Publishing Company, 1996, 946.
63. Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, 11.
64. *Aetatis Novae*, 22.
65. Cfr. R. P. Waznak, *Preaching the Gospel in a Video Culture*, in Soukup, *Media, Culture and Catholicism*, 140.
66. Cfr. J. Bluck, *Christian Communication Reconsidered*, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1989, 53.

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67. Cfr. D. L. Bainer J. W. Peck, *Effective Teaching and Multicultural Religious Education*, in B. Wilkerson (Ed.), *Multicultural Religious Education*, Birmingham, Religious Education Press, 1997, 295.
68. Cfr. A. Zukowski, "The New Frontier: Integrating Media and Technology in Ministry" in *A Professional Study Paper for Religious Educators*, Allen RCL, 2002, 4-5.
69. Cfr. L. B. Lewis R. H. Cram "Curriculum and Multicultural Religious Education", in B. Wilkerson, *Multicultural Religious Education*, Birmingham, Religious Education Press, 1997, 324.
70. Cfr. A. Zukowski, *The New Frontier*, 5.
71. Cfr. T. Gunnel, "Counteracting the Gap: Strategies for Teaching Media Competence", in N. W. Jankowski O. Prehn, *Community Media in the Information Age: Perspectives and Prospects*, New Jersey, Hampton Press, 2002, 333.

Chapter 11

THE IMPACT OF SALESIAN SCHOOLS OF THE PROVINCE OF DIMAPUR

Joseph Thettayil SDB

Introduction

In this paper, a study of the various educational institutions of the Salesian province of Dimapur has been made in order to evaluate their impact on the youth as well as on the society at large. It seeks to present a bird's eye view of the work done in the four States of Upper Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland in the field of education through schools.¹

Educational institutions are lifeline of any society. Education in the present day context is perhaps the single most important means for individuals to improve personal endowments, build capability levels, overcome constraints, and in the process enlarge their available set of opportunities and choices for a sustained improvement.

By schools it is meant formal institutions in which students are offered formal and systematic instructions within the framework of a syllabi approved by competent authorities.

By education it is understood, above all, the formation given to individuals by means of scholastic instruction. Webster defines 'education' as the process of educating or teaching. 'Educate' is further defined as 'to develop the knowledge, skill, or character of' someone. Thus, from this definition, we might assume that the purpose of education is to develop the knowledge, skill and the character of

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students.² The educational institutions like schools are the best means to achieve this purpose. True education is directed towards the formation of the human person in view of his final end and the good of that society to which he belongs and in the duties, of which he will, as an adult, have a share.³

1. Importance of schools

The school has a special importance among all the instruments of education.⁴ It is designed not only to develop with special care the intellectual faculties but also to form the ability to judge rightly, to hand on the cultural legacy of previous generations, to foster a sense of values and to prepare for professional life. Between pupils of different talents and backgrounds it promotes friendly relations and fosters a spirit of mutual understanding. It establishes, as it were, a centre whose work and progress must be shared together by families, teachers and associations of various types that foster cultural, civic and religious life for the good of the civil society and the entire human community.

2. Purpose of catholic schools

The influence of the Church in the field of education can hardly be exaggerated. Probably, the catholic schools pursue cultural goals and the human formation of youth more than any other school. But its proper function is to create for the school community a special atmosphere animated by the spirit of the Gospel. It seeks to promote efficaciously the good of the earthly city and prepare students for service in the spread of the Kingdom of God, so that by leading an exemplary apostolic life they become, as it were, a saving leaven in the human community.

3. Salesian education

The Salesian concept of education is derived from the Christian concept of life which, based on the incarnation, strives to effect a meaningful relationship between natural and supernatural values. Consequently, the ultimate goal of Salesian education is the eternal salvation of students. To achieve this, the immediate goal of Salesian education is to make every effort that professional studies be serious and fruitful.

The Salesian method is to bring students to love and respect their God-given gifts and talents in such a way that they will endeavor to develop them. To achieve this, the educator must respect the dignity,

freedom and uniqueness of each student. This permits a freedom and creativity in students, yet always within the framework of order and reason. Their good-will should be cultivated in such a way that love and respect follow. In this way, they will come to obey not in blind submission, but through gentle persuasion. This will result in an open and sincere person, generous with both his/her talents and personal goods, a youth with lively faith and a spirit of unselfishness, dedicated to his/her family and country.

Salesian educators should be convinced that they are engaged in a true apostolate, which is an authentic contribution to building a better society. Salesian educators, both religious and lay, bound by charity to one another and to their students, and penetrated by an apostolic spirit, give witness to Christ, the unique Teacher by their lives as well as by their teaching, and are directors and leaders in the journey of the People of God toward the kingdom of their Father.

Salesian educators must be solicitous for their students with all their heart and soul. They must try to help students by their prayers for each of them and their kindnesses toward them, especially those with weaknesses and defects. They should strive for the basic Salesian spirit of holiness expressed by St. Francis de Sales as 'humility toward God and gentleness toward our neighbour'. Salesian humility is not to be identified with self-abasement; rather it is a thankful acknowledgment to Almighty God for our gifts and talents. Salesian gentleness is not to be equated with weakness or softness of character. A truly gentle person will stand firm on issues of importance. In dealing with others, the Salesian motto *suaviter et fortiter* ('gently and firmly') must be operative.

Salesian educators are exhorted to exemplify the saying of St. Francis de Sales in *medio stat virtus* ('virtue stands in the middle'). They will not be unduly harsh toward their students nor dangerously indulgent. Salesian educators are expected to be polite, enthusiastic, discerning, trusting in God and loyal to their teaching apostolate, to be persevering. Salesian educators must weave the principles into their work and harmonize them with whatever is sound in modern educational trends. This is not always an easy task, but they should be convinced that authentic Salesian thought and action will give lifelong positive direction to students and continue to give Salesian education its truly distinctive character.

4. Salesian schools of Dimapur province

At the starting of Dimapur province in 1982, there were three full-fledged high schools. The three high schools were in Imphal (Manipur), Dibrugarh (Assam) and Kohima (Nagaland), the oldest being that of Don Bosco Dibrugarh. There were ten primary schools, four in Assam, four in Nagaland and two in Manipur. As per the statistics of 2003, there are five higher secondary schools, twenty high schools and ten primary schools in our province. According to the same statistics 27,881 students are being catered to in all these thirty-five schools. The total catholics who were enrolled in the same year were 6,155. Christians of other denominations amounted to 10,615 and the non-Christians were 11,111.

4.1 Don Bosco school, Dibrugarh

Don Bosco school, Dibrugarh was started in the year 1954, in the present Bishop's House Dibrugarh, as a Hindi medium residential school. Later it was turned into an Assamese medium school. In the 1960s the English medium was started from class V upwards. In 1969 the school was shifted to its present site. In the new site the English medium primary school was started. The Assamese medium was continued but from class V to X with one section only. In 1978 the Assamese medium was closed as only eight students turned up for the admission test. Now Don Bosco Dibrugarh has two sections of English medium up to Class IV, and from Class VI to Class X three sections of English medium, the third being the aspirants. In the 1960 and 1970s there were two messes for boarders, one for those who could pay and the other heavily subsidized, for the catholic boys who were mainly from the tea gardens. As the two systems were an irritant both for the students and the public, from the year 1980 onwards the 'higher mess' was abolished and only the 'poor boys mess' was kept. In 1981 when the aspirants were transferred from Maligaon to Don Bosco Dibrugarh this too got closed down.⁵

The school has contributed greatly towards building up leaders not only of the locality of Dibrugarh, but catered to a great extent to the students of Manipur and Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. Due to the lack of high schools in all these states, a number of boys both from Manipur as well as Nagaland were sent to Dibrugarh. Today Dibrugarh Don Bosco can boast of being one of the pioneering institutions of the province in the field of education.

4.1.1 Bosco Memorial Evening School (BMES) Dibrugarh⁶

In the late 1980s, as the Salesians were getting ready to celebrate the centenary of the death of Don Bosco (1888-1988), it was the desire of the Don Bosco school community at Dibrugarh to make a lasting memorial to his educational principles. No statue can bring to life Don Bosco's love for the poor and the marginalised so powerfully as a work for the poor. Hence they decided not to put up a statue in the school campus but to make a living memorial.

The official Assam-region celebrations of Don Bosco's death centenary had not yet been planned or taken up. Still, they had set their eyes on a living monument to perpetuate Don Bosco's memory.

Even before they got the official permission from the superiors, they had set 31 January, 1988 as date for the inauguration of Bosco Memorial Evening School (BMES). The objections from the confreres of the house and the province could easily be understood the usual 'no money' argument in any 'project-less' initiative (they knew nothing of projects at that time!). With their 'leave-that-to-me' assurance, the permission was granted by the then Provincial of Dimapur province, Rev. Fr. Mathew Pulingathil. A viable proposal of collecting money from the public and from the sale of books was shown. It worked. Till that year, Don Bosco school books were being sold by Readers' Emporium. The school used to get Rs. 2000/ from them as a 'donation'. When they found it difficult to part even with that paltry sum, the Salesians took the opportunity. In the first year their inexperienced, hard-earned profit was Rs. 25,000.00. This could go to the BMES, the headmaster argued.

The next proposal was to request parents of the day school for help. As the students completed their admission process, the school authorities gave a letter to each of the parent, telling them: "Your son is privileged to study in an internationally reputed English medium school. In our campus, we have a free school for poor children. Please contribute Rs. 100/ for their education". Everyone of the 110 students of the new nursery class brought in their help. That made another Rs. 11,000.00. With Rs. 36,000.00 in hand, and with only one teacher to be paid for in the first year, the 'no money' problem was solved. In later years, the Salesians continued a long process of applications to the central government for funds for their venture. After almost six months of mutual interaction the correspondence was terminated from the Government's side.

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On 31 January 1988, in the afternoon, the Saleaiaans were to have the entertainment with items from local institutions, and the solemn inauguration of the BMES. They had already contacted students through the tea garden secretary. When the appointed time came, not even one student was present. They sent a messenger to the 'byways' and garden streets to bring in one student, any student. Don Bosco knew their predicament. The first student arrived. They brought him up to the stage, and gave him a slate and a pencil. The inauguration was complete. The BMES was the gate of the Saleaiaans to the tea-garden community surrounding the school.

The official Assam-region celebrations were held at Don Bosco school, Dibrugarh, from 21-24 April 1988, with the help of the past pupils. 36 schools took part in the three-day cultural extravaganza. It was then that they realised the power that they enjoyed with the strong support of the past and present pupils. The Saleaiaans could now move on to more daring ventures with their assistance. BMES too became a part and parcel of Don Bosco Dibrugarh.

The intention of the Salesians at that time was to have the classes in the evening from 3.00 p.m - 6.30 p.m. They were even accompanying the students back to their homes. The classes were to be held in the Assamese medium, absolutely free. There were lots of complaints from the local people because Don Bosco school Dibrugarh had wound up its Assamese section. The BMES would answer that question and more. The All Assam Students Union (ASU), who came in later to question the Saleaiaans on the issue, could not but appreciate the new venture.

The Saleaiaans had planned to let the school go up to Class VII. Then they would help the boys and girls to find an appropriate school for higher education, and even pay for their expenses and see to their onward progress.

The building that was lying empty in the evenings was now bubbling with life poor life. The Salesians got local doctors to do health check ups. The 'Mercy Home' Sisters were extremely kind. The school organised picnics and cultural programmes. They organised teacher training sessions. BMES should not be less in any way than the day school.

The public chipped in. The Rotary Club of Dibrugarh, through their Australian Unit, gave to the school a generator. Some guardians sent blankets (who knows why!), a shop in the town paid for the

school uniform (Kurta-Pyjama for all), and another shop paid for the rubber chappals.

The first teacher was Miss Pronoti Bhuyan. She was a dedicated teacher, always willing to learn. One mistake the Salesians thought they had committed was that of appointing an unemployed person as the teacher. Later, they thought it was necessary to have a teacher of high educational qualifications, and well paid, to whom students would instinctively look up. That would have given more inspiration to the students, and more reputation to the BMES.

Every year, the classrooms would be overflowing with young faces during the first month. But experience had taught the school authorities that the initial enthusiasm would wane. After the second month, 25% of the students had left. But they had enough and more to run a school, many more than the local Assamese medium schools.

The public, the parents and the day scholars were all supportive of the new BMES. They all helped in whatever way they could. The past pupils were even more enthusiastic. The students of today's BMES may not know anything about Don Bosco, the person. But they stand as the living monuments to a giant of empowerment through education.

4.2 Don Bosco school, Imphal

Don Bosco school Imphal was established in 1957. The school sent its first batch of students for the State HSLC Examination in the year 1965. Since then, the school has sent 2486 boys for the HSLC examination and 2321 were successful. The school has had tremendous impact not only on the locality, and the whole of Imphal but also the entire State as well the neighbouring States. The school can also boast of matriculating men of great standing from Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, besides the sons of the soil.

Don Bosco Imphal, unlike the other schools of Northeast, can boast of the numerous high-ranking officials of the State as well as of the neighbouring States it has produced. Several politicians and bureaucrats, administrative officers and defence personnel, professors and so on have passed through Don Bosco Imphal.

4.3 Don Bosco school, Kohima

Don Bosco school, Kohima, was started in 1971. The classes were from five onwards, as the primary section was left with the Christ King parish. Speaking at the silver jubilee celebration of the school,

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Rev. Fr. Ittiyachan Manjil remarked, "It did not take much time for us to realize that the progress of Nagaland would be through the education of her young people, the kind of integral education that Don Bosco stood for [...] With the limited means available at that time, we started small schools in Nagaland, one of which is Don Bosco Kohima".⁷ The school was upgraded in science stream to higher secondary in 1995. The contribution which the school has made towards the people of Nagaland is tremendous and lasting. Today, we can meet many of its past pupils in most of the offices of the State.

4.4 Primary and middle schools

There existed ten primary schools at the time of the formation of the province in 1982. Most of these schools were acting as feeder schools.

4.5 Growth and Expansion

The growth of schools after the creation of the new province has been significant. Slowly and steadily most of the schools were upgraded and made into full-fledged high schools. Upgradation of high schools to higher secondary too was another important venture. Don Bosco high school, Kohima was the first high school to be upgraded into higher secondary, that too in science stream. As of now, we have a total of five higher secondary schools in the province: 2 in Manipur and 3 in Nagaland. Assam has the sole privilege of having a junior college at Doom Dooma. There are twenty high schools and ten primary schools in the province.

5. Contribution of the schools

The invaluable contributions of the Salesian schools to the development of Northeast India can hardly be exaggerated. Even the pre-primary school at Minthong, Arunachal Pradesh, can boast of the positive transformations it has brought about in the life style, habits, culture, economy, social and political status of the people of the area. Through the Salesian schools, the people of the region enjoy the 'best education' available in the country. They are deeply impressed by the efficient and smooth running of the schools right from the start. The transparent and corruption free functioning of the school authorities have created a lasting impression in the minds of the public and earned respect for the institutions.

5.1 An educated laity

The Salesian schools have no doubt contributed towards the formation of an educated laity in the Northeast. The systematic and planned efforts of our institutions have produced many lay leaders who can stand up for what is right and just. We have a number of first class officers of all walks of life who are capable of bringing about lasting changes in society.

5.2 Academic excellence

Our schools have brought about academic excellence in the region. Ranks and honours, excellence in studies and academic performance have been the hall marks of most of our schools. Nevertheless education to social consciousness, social responsibility, social justice, civic consciousness, community endeavours, etc have not received sufficient attention in our schools. Perhaps this is an area where the Salesians need to pay greater attention.

5.3 Integral formation

The schools have contributed greatly towards the integral formation of the human person, which of course, is the purpose of education. The staff in most of the schools are aware of their responsibility to form strong and responsible individuals, who are capable of making free and correct choices, thus preparing young people to open themselves more and more to reality, and to form in themselves a clear idea of the meaning of life.⁸

5.4 Personal contact with the students

Salesian family spirit has been a hallmark of most of our schools. Personal contacts and easy interaction between teachers and students are positive factors of our schools. This direct and personal contact has not been just a methodology by which the teachers help in the formation of the students. It is a means by which teachers learn what they need to know about the students in order to guide them with a certain degree of competence.

5.5 Specialisation

Our schools have contributed, in some measure, towards specialisation in certain sectors like, medical doctors, engineers, etc. However, there is needs for greater diversification.

5.6 Safeguarding tribal values.

Perhaps, more than all other schools of the region, the Salesian schools have made a great contribution in safeguarding the tribal values and cultures through their multifarious activities and initiatives. Great effort is being made by our schools in order to inculcate in the youngsters the importance and value of their cultures and traditions.

5.7 Abolition of social evils

Social evils are never alien to any society. Social evils and irrelevant traditions not only hamper the growth of societies but also can exterminate them altogether. Education has helped people to do away with many evils that were prevalent in the tribal society.

5.8 School as an instrument of evangelisation

All the schools of our region have been, in some way or other, means of evangelisation, either directly or indirectly. The Salesians have had access to the villages through the children of the schools and the boardings. Even hostile groups have been befriended with the help of our schools and hostels.

5.9 Modernisation

The presence of good English medium schools in the region has greatly enabled the people 'to open their eyes'. This has enabled them to have wider contacts with other places, peoples and cultures, especially while doing further studies outside the region. Contact with the 'outside world' has contributed towards modernisation and development.

5.10 Neighbourhood apostolate

Today many of our schools have opened the doors of the school to the poor and the needy of the locality. The evening schools, youth centres and oratories have contributed to a great extend to the neighbourhood apostolate.

5.11 Schools and inspiration for apostolate

Many people have been inspired by the apostolic zeal and dedication of the Salesians to their works. Several past pupils have opened their own schools and have started to run them in the Salesian style.

5. 12 Vocations to priesthood and religious life

The Salesian schools have been a source of inspiration for many to follow Christ in priestly and religious life. We have a remarkable number of young people of our institutions who have responded to the call of God in giving themselves to Christ in priestly or religious way of life.

6. Relevance of the schools

The Salesians have been the pioneers in the field of education in Northeast India. The Salesian schools are still relevant and necessary for the people of the region. Since the people of the region are quite poor, the vast majority of them cannot go out of the region for a better education. Hence the Salesian schools can contribute greatly towards the genuine needs of the people for education and human development.

7. A critical evaluation

It is no exaggeration to say that the schools of the province of Dimapur are making a very valuable contribution towards the development of the peoples and cultures of the region. They are undoubtedly agents of social transformation and human progress. The name of Don Bosco is a synonym for schools and quality education.

However, we cannot rest on the laurels of yesteryears. Today better and more efficient groups, individuals and trusts have established themselves in the region with educational institutions with good infra structure and well-trained teachers. The Salesian schools also need to be well maintained, and should provide healthy environment for learning and study.

There is need to upgrade more high schools to higher secondary schools. The group that needs our help and guidance most are certainly those of the plus 2 level students. Unfortunately, we have just five higher secondary schools in the province and the number of students whom they can accommodate is not big.

The inconsistent policies of the province and the 'individual institutions' have paid heavy toll on some of our institutions. There are no clear-cut policies in the province with regard to each of the schools. With the change of the principal/headmaster, the policies too change. The sufferers are the staff, students and the public.

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The paucity of committed and well-qualified Salesians to look after our schools is a matter of concern. Often the placement of the personnel seems to be rather faulty. More than seeing to the interests of the institution, the interests of individual persons seems to be the criteria in matters concerning transfers and appointments. This is a matter which requires careful study and necessary action.

Conclusion

A well-planned and well-graduated educational system has always been the pillar of development and progress of any society. The progress, peace and prosperity of Northeast will depend greatly on the smooth and effective running of the schools of the region, particularly the Salesian schools. Let everyone therefore equip themselves with qualities of mind and heart to make education effective and fruitful.

NOTES

1. It must be stated at the outset that, this study is not exhaustive, and may contain some inaccuracies, which I am willing to rectify, if pointed out.
2. Callaway, R. (1979) Teachers' Beliefs Concerning Values and the Functions and Purposes of Schooling, Eric Document Reproduction Service No. ED 177 110
3. *Gravissimum Educationis*. The Declaration on Christian Education. Documents of the Second Vatican Council. No. 1
4. Cfr. Pius XI's encyclical letter, *Divini Illius Magistri*, 1, p. 76; Pius XII's allocution to Bavarian Association of Catholic Teachers, Dec. 31, 1956: *Discourses and Radio Messages*, vol. 18, p. 746.
5. This information about the history of Don Bosco school Dibrugarh was given by Fr. T.O. Sebastian in writing to the convenor of the research seminar 2004 since some inaccuracies were discovered in the material presented by the author of the paper. Fr. Sebastian had also intervened during the seminar in order to correct the inaccuracy. Fr. Sebastian is a confrere who has worked at Don Bosco school Dibrugarh for several years. (Convenor)
6. During the research seminar 2004 it was observed that while discussing Don Bosco school Dibrugarh, the Bosco Memorial Evening School was not dealt with. Hence the convenor of the seminar requested Fr.K.A. Thomas, who was mainly responsible for the establishing the evening school, to give in writing a brief account of the origin of the evening school. (Convenor)
7. 1971-1996 *On a Trail of Excellence, Don Bosco Kohima Silver Jubilee*, p.18.
8. Cfr. *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith. Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education* (1982).

Chapter 12

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN THE PROVINCE OF DIMAPUR

Benny Karinattu SDB

Introduction

Our apostolic activity in the Northeastern States of Manipur, Nagaland, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh is expressed in a variety of ways. The region is peculiar in the sense that its general backwardness, ethnic, geographic and cultural diversity, economic and political differences coupled with armed militancy, have created in the region untold difficulties, both for meeting the actual needs of the people and in reaching out to them through apostolic activities. The singularity of the region as a whole and the diverse challenges existing in the region have also affected the Salesian works. In this paper I wish to examine the present condition of the Non-Formal Education (NFE) or the Alternative and Innovative Education (AIE)¹ in the province and evaluate its impact from the perspective of Salesian charism.

The Alternative and Innovative Education or Non-Formal Education has a place in our Salesian apostolate.² For many decades formal education has been doing a lot of good to the young people of the region. But today its euphoria and glamour has diminished considerably. Many have become prey to the shortcomings of our present system of formal education. It is this dark reality coupled with the demands of the region that has made the province venture into the apostolate of Alternative and Innovative Education or Non-Formal Education. At present the province has three non-formal training

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centres: Golaghat (Assam), Maram (Manipur) and Dimapur (Nagaland). A fourth one is contemplated at Tinsukia (Assam).

1. Formal education

Education literally means drawing out from the student what one knows and enabling one to acquire higher knowledge. Once upon a time education was given in the house of the *guru* or teacher. The teacher was the sole authority and what he imparted at his discretion was good and beneficial to the student. However, as time went by, education became distant from the student. Subjects to be learned became the sole consideration and the learner had no other choice than learning at times useless and non-relevant materials. Thus many became unfit for the society. Education became a business and many found ways to shirk their responsibility in shaping the young minds of the students.

Before 1976 education was the exclusive responsibility of the States. The central government was only concerned with certain areas like co-ordination and determination of standard in technical and higher education. In 1976 through the 42nd Constitutional amendment, education was incorporated in the Concurrent List and became a joint responsibility of both the Centre and the States. But formal education failed to produce the desired good. Thus, in order to counter balance formal education non-formal education was introduced.

2. Non-formal education

Formal education is imparted to students in an arranged and pre-designed set up with regular inputs of knowledge on the subject to which one has been enrolled. Here the syllabi take precedence over the learner. But non-formal education goes beyond simply imparting information. It builds on the wealth of life-experience of the students. It helps them to see new ideas in the context of what they already know or believe. Their life situation and the problems they confront in their daily lives motivate them to develop and use locally appropriate solutions. Non-Formal Education has been called 'Alternative and Innovative Education' because it is different from the formal education. It is an innovative way of instructing the learner in new things.

2.1 Non-formal education in India

The scheme of non-formal education was introduced in 1979-1980 to target school children in the age group of 6-14 years who had

remained outside the formal system of schooling. A total of 2,33,946 centres were run through State governments / Union Territories and another 58, 618 through 816 voluntary agencies.³ In the course of time in order to make the scheme a viable alternative to formal education, it has been revised as "Education Guarantee Scheme and Alternative and Innovative Education (EGS & AIE respectively)."⁴

2.2 Technical education

Small States like Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura stand on a footing altogether different from the rest of the bigger States of India especially in respect to economic development and viability. The Northeastern canvas is vast, variegated and complex. Technical education is a crucial component of human resource development with great potential for adding value to products and services, and thus contributing to the national economy. The five year plans of India have laid great emphasis on the development of technical education. In the past five decades, there has been a phenomenal expansion of technical education sector in the country. However, the growth in the sector has not been so conspicuous in Dimapur province. The reasons are quite obvious: they are:

1. Lack of infrastructure.
2. Lack of technological and non-formal temper in the region.
3. The fear of creating displacement of existing skilled manpower.
4. Lacuna of industries to absorb the qualified trainees.
5. The region is basically agro-centred.
6. Lack of personnel.

Though there are few industries in the region they are more liabilities to the State governments than help. Initially the need for a technical school was not felt. But today the story is different.

2.3 Importance of non-formal education

In a non-formal setting the learners are young adults and adults and it is an accepted fact that grownups learn faster than others. The importance of non-formal education can be summarised as follows:

1. To cover the entire gamut of social, economic and administrative realities.
2. It leads a person to behavioural change.

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3. It affects positively on their self-confidence and status in the community.
4. They are raised to financial self-sufficiency.
5. Regular earnings through out the year, asset accumulation and consumption smoothing.
6. Fewer years of training and more productive years.
7. Reduces unemployment in the region.
8. Many young adults can be directed to productive and constructive life style.

Nevertheless the growth of non-formal education is rather slow particularly in Northeast India. Some of the reasons for it are the following:

1. Tradition bound cultivation and decreasing yield.
2. Population growth.
3. Low per capita income.
4. Absence of industries.
5. Huge but mostly unskilled manpower.
6. Alarming unemployment problem.
7. Transport bottlenecks.
8. Lack of infrastructure.
9. Extreme immobility of labour and capital.
10. Contemptuous treatment of manual labour.
11. Violence and insecurity.
12. Absence of appropriate social climate for economic progress of Northeast.⁵

3. Teachings of the Church on non-formal education

Though there is no explicit deliberation on non-formal education, there are a number of statements on this form of education in the documents of the Church.

In *Ad Norman decreti*, article 1 states: "It is the Church's fundamental concern to proclaim and to promote the faith among contemporary men and women, who live in a society subject to profound socio-cultural change".⁶

The article 64 of *Church in the Modern World* says: "Economic activity is to be carried out in accordance with techniques and methods belonging to the moral order, so that God's design for man may be fulfilled".⁷

We have often heard the saying that 'the glory of God is man fully alive'. It means that the development of the total person, spiritual, emotional, psychological, intellectual, economic, social and cultural aspects is the focal point of education. It is in this sense that non-formal education is relevant and necessary. The mission of the Church is addressed to all, not only to those who can afford formal education, but also to those who are less fortunate.

4. Salesians and non-formal education

The Salesian style of education is implied in article 67 of the *Church in the Modern World* which states: "Workers should have the opportunity to develop their talents and their personalities in the very exercise of their work".⁸ The article 42 of the Salesian Constitutions, basing itself on the art 67 of the *Church in the Modern World*, points out the manner in which the personalities of workers can be moulded and enhanced. It says: "We carry out our mission chiefly in such works and activities so as to make possible the human and Christian education of the young, such as oratories and youth centres, schools and technical institutes".⁹ But article 29 goes a step further when it says: "Our priority commitment to young people who are poor fits in well with pastoral involvement among people in general".¹⁰ We draw inspiration and example from Don Bosco who had formulated for himself alternative and innovative education to attract young people and keep them good and holy. Hence for the Salesians engaged in non-formal education, Don Bosco is the model.

Since non-formal education aims at the total transformation of an individual, initiatives in keeping with the nature of the Salesian charism, are to be encouraged. In the Constitutions we read: "Making the concern of Don Bosco our own, we go to them to prepare them to take their place with dignity in society and in the church and to alert them to the role they must play in the Christian transformation of social life".¹¹ Thus, our centres of non-formal education should become homes that welcome the young, schools that prepare them for life and playgrounds where friends meet and enjoy themselves.

5. Non-formal education in the province

Twenty-two years have passed since province of Dimapur was carved out of the province of Guwahati. Since then the province has grown in many fields. In 1982 the province had 25 houses and 152 confreres.¹² Now it has 40 houses and 221 confreres.

Prompted by the charism of the congregation and the socio-economic situation of the region, and to empower both the literate and the illiterate youth of Northeast, the province has ventured into establishing three Non-Formal Education centres: Non-Formal Vocational Training (NFVT) at Golaghat, Assam; Bosco Vocational Training Institute (BVTI) at Maram, Manipur, and Don Bosco Vocational Training Centre (DBVTC) at Dimapur, Nagaland.

First evangelisation has always been a priority of the province of Dimapur. Of course the province is blessed with a number of high schools and higher secondary schools. But they were established primarily as means to enter into certain communities in order to establish the Church.

To enter into the lives of young adults, the formal schools and colleges alone will not suffice. Hence a greater need for non-formal and technical school is being felt in the province. But due to various reasons like, lack of personnel, infrastructure, finance and technical and non-formal temper, the growth has been slow.

5.1 Non-Formal Vocational Training, Golaghat

Golaghat is one of the oldest missions of the province of Dimapur. It was started on 4 August 1941 by Fr. Peter Jean Neyens. At Golaghat we find the oldest non-formal centre of the province. The Don Bosco Non-formal Training Centre was started on 1 May 1995 with the view to help the school dropouts of the area, especially those from the tea gardens.¹³ Fr. Joy Sebastian was the first director of the centre assisted by Bro. James Orappankal and Bro. Romanus Tirkey.

5.1.1 Courses offered

When the centre began in 1995 it offered training in wiring, driving, motor mechanics, carpentry and electricity. Currently, under the supervision of Bro. Benarius Toppo the following trades are offered, namely, electricity, welding, carpentry, plumbing and masonry. Bro. Romnus Tirkey supervises the driving and the motor mechanics sections of the centre. The table below shows the number of students who have received training in various trades at the institute from 1995 to 2004.

No.	Year	Driv	Electri 1 Year	Weld. 1 Year	Mb Mech 6 Months	Carpent. 6 months	Plumb. 3 months	Mason 6 months	Total
1	1995	20	11	----	17	3	----	----	51
2	1996	37	5	----	7	3	----	----	52
3	1997	50	4	----	--	----	----	----	54
4	1998	46	6	----	29	----	----	----	81
5	1999	35	6	----	---	----	----	----	41
6	2000	43	5	----	12	----	----	----	60
7	2001	40	--	----	13	----	----	----	53
8	2002	36	6	6	4	6	6	6	70
9	2003	46	6	6	9	6	6	6	85
10	2004	15	6	6	6	6	6	6	51
Total		368	55	18	97	24	18	18	598

Number of students who got trained at Golaghat NFE¹⁴

So far a total of 598 students have received training at the centre. However, the data of some years are not available. Most of the students who have received training are already employed. The data presented above reveal that there are many who are interested in driving and motor mechanics. Hence more attention could be given to these sectors. The table below would indicate that the students who got trained at the centre are mainly Class X or below Class X. But the vast majority of the students fall under the category of educational qualification as “not known”. Among these, there may be some who have never crossed the courtyard of a school for education.

No	Year	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	Plus II	B A	M A	Not Known	Total
1	1995		1		1	3	7	10	3	8				9	42
2	1996	2		2		3	6	10	8	8		2		10	51
3	1997	1	2	5	3	4	3	8	11	6		9		3	55
4	1998	1			2	6	6	5	9	20		2		1	52
5	1999	1	2		5	3	4	6	5	11	1	3	3	5	49
6	2000		1		5	2	4	6	1	20	4	3		2	48
7	2001	1		1	3	2	6	5	7	11	1	2		1	40
8	2002		2	1	2	4	4	10	7	5				31	66
9	2003	1	1	1	2	2	6	10	8	10				35	76
10	2004	1	1	1	3		2	1	4	3				36	52
Total		8	10	11	26	29	48	71	63	102	6	21	3	133	531

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The educational qualification of the students at Golaghat NFE¹⁶

Many of the students, even before the training is over, are booked for employment. The people of the neighbourhood are happy because many youngsters have now jobs and they are assured of a better future.

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The province has set apart two confreres to look after the non-formal educational centre at Golaghat. Though the workload is heavy a lot of good is being done. Occasionally courses are conducted in which priests, brothers and sisters also take part. Some of these courses are of short duration.

The centre receives some financial help from the province. The students do show interest in their trades. Most of the students are from very poor families. The trainees are obedient, interested in their trade and committed to learning. Parents have expressed their satisfaction about the way in which many of their sons have been transformed, after being at the centre.

The vision of the centre is very general. It wishes to help as many young people as possible without any distinction of religion or caste or ethnic origin.

5.1.2 Difficulties faced by the centre

1. The centre is too far from the town
2. Lacks sufficient financial support from the province
3. Lack of properly trained instructors
4. Lack of sufficient equipment and infrastructure
5. No facilities for the training of girls.
6. Plan (rumour!) of closing down the centre by the province

The sector has succeeded in doing a lot of works in the neighbourhood.

The courses are both theoretical and practical. The centre welcomes anyone who comes to learn. Often many of them come with recommendation letters from their parish priests. The boys who are at the centre themselves advertise and get their friends to learn various trades. At the centre they receive not only training in a trade but also help to grow up as religious minded persons and honest citizens.

5.2. Bosco Vocational Training Institute, Maram

This is the second non-formal training centre in the province of Dimapur. It was started along with the college at Maram in the year 2002. Fr. Jose Palely is the director and Bro. James Orappankal is the assistant director of the centre.

5.2.1 Courses offered

The centre offers training in carpentry, welding, handloom, weaving and fashion design. Though the centre was established in the year 2002, some of the trades got started only in 2003.

Year	Carpentry	Welding	Weaving	Fashion Design
2003	3	3	6	4
2004	4	1	5	-
Total	7	4	11	4

The number of students who got trained at the centre

Those who complete the training in weaving at BVTI are given a weaving machine on loan, and carpenters are given a set of tools. The students who come for the training are happy to learn and are encouraged to live a better life. They show a lot of interest in learning their trade.

5.2.2 Difficulties faced by the centre

1. Language becomes a barrier, because most of the students are from the villages, belonging to various communities that speak different dialects.
2. The candidates who come to the centre are not always properly motivated. Most of them are school dropouts.
3. During the course of their training some are tempted by other opportunities and they often leave without completing the course.
4. The drinking habits of some students get them into trouble
5. Since most of the students are school dropouts, maintaining discipline is difficult.
6. Transportation of raw material is a problem.
7. The new centre suffers from lack of properly qualified instructors.
8. Many of the institutions in the province have not made enough publicity to get more trainees for the centre.
9. The courses offered by the centre have not been recognised by the government.
10. Lack of regular power supply slows down the learning process

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11. Lack of facilities for girls to learn trades.
12. BVTI needs to be separated from the college to ensure better development.

5.3 Don Bosco Vocational Training Centre, Dimapur

Don Bosco Vocational Training Centre at Dimapur, Nagaland is the youngest of the non-formal education centre in the province of Dimapur. It was started in 2003.

The aim of DBVTC is to provide quality vocational training so as to enable the youth to get employed or self-employed and thereby serve the country and their fellow men. The institute is also keen to provide moral and value education for life.¹⁷ The method of education followed is the system perfected by Don Bosco. It is based on reason, religion and loving-kindness. It looks for the formation of the young in love of God and neighbour.¹⁸ The centre offers residential training programme to the students.

5.3.1 Courses offered

The various courses offered at the institute are: driving, welding, carpentry, motor mechanics, 2 and 3 wheelers repair, chain link manufacture, food processing, vermiculture, rural entrepreneurship, brick making, organic farming, mushroom cultivation, fishery, poultry, piggery and duckery. Since the centre is new, not many have been admitted.

Sl. No	Year	Carpentry	Welding	Driving
1	2004	6	4	6

The number of students who got trained at the centre

Sl. No	Trade	Total	Adivasis	Nagas	Nepalis	Sisters
1	Carpentry	6	1	5		
2	Welding	4		4		
3	Driving	6		3	2	1
Total		16	1	12	2	1

The number of the students who belong to different communities

Most of the trainees are boys of whom 75% belong to the Naga tribes, 6.25% to Adivasi community, 12.5% to Nepali community and 6.25% to religious community. This shows that the local people and the tribals are benefiting from the programmes offered by the centre. The present trainees are all Christians, except the Nepalis. Most of them come from poor socio-economic background and are school dropouts.

The work receives a lot of encouragement from the neighbourhood. The trainees are willing to learn and they pick up the trade quickly. There is a big rush for driving and motor mechanics. They obey the authorities of the institution. The neighbourhood has seen it as a good project. Some individuals of the area have promised help in order to make the centre a place of leaning and training.

5.3.2 Difficulties faced by the centre

1. Since the students have been doing nothing for a long time they are not so enthusiastic to learn.
2. The students are not interested in manual labour. They look for easy government jobs.
3. Some students do not come back after the holidays.
4. Some people (from the neighbourhood or drug addicts of the locality or both) steal the building materials.

6. Methods and practices of adult learning principles

Methods and practices of adult learning principles needs to be taken seriously in non-formal education. Some of the salient points are the following:

1. Respect between the learner and the teacher
2. Affirmation of the learner's participation
3. Relevance of the knowledge, experience and real-life needs of the learner
4. An equal dialogue between teacher and learner
5. Engagement of the learner using discussion, small group and learning from peers
6. Immediacy of the new learning
7. Incorporation of tools that support visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning
8. Activities that allow learners to think and feel, as well as do
9. A safe environment for the learning to take place.
10. Regularly making it possible for them to produce something and see for themselves the fruit of their hard work
11. Encouraging personal learning and creativity.

7. Some suggestions for the future

With regard to the non-formal education in the province, some of the problems that need to be addressed with urgency are the following.

1. Qualification of personnel for non-formal education.
2. Regular meetings and study to understand the problems of the young people in our non-formal education centres.
3. Enhancing the directors with greater power to build up the centres.
4. Reaching out with financial help, whenever required.
5. Need for a cell or persons to monitor the work that is going on at various centres.
6. Making effort to realise the targets of these centres.
7. Regular evaluation of the performance of the centres.
8. Periodic updating of the skill of the instructors, directors and all others who are directly involved in non-formal education.
9. Getting also clerics trained for the important apostolate of non-formal education.
10. Encouraging Salesian houses in recruiting candidates for the non-formal centres.
11. Encouraging illiterate and the unemployed to get trained in these institutions.
12. Considering the centres as community ventures.
13. Follow up of the utilisation of the finance of the centres.
14. Drawing up targets with a vision in order to achieve the maximum benefit out of the centres.
15. The province needs to understand better the importance of Non-Formal Education in the region.

Conclusion

It is true to say that the province of Dimapur is still a novice in the apostolate of non-formal education. The slow growth of this work speaks aloud its agony and existential problems. Just as plants in the nursery are cared for, the NFE centres in the province also need to be

fostered and directed along the right path so that they may become agents that can transform the society for a better tomorrow.

NOTES

1. The terms 'non-formal education' and 'alternative and innovative education' are used interchangeably. Both mean the same thing.
2. The Article 41 of the Constitutions of the Salesians states: "Our apostolic activity is carried out in a variety of ways, which depend in the first place upon the actual needs of those for whom we are working".
3. Cfr. *India 2002*, Research, Reference and Training Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Government of India, 2002, p. 82.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Cfr. S C Joshi, *Manipur The Jewel of India*, New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House, 2002, pp. 151 - 152
6. *General Catechetical Directory*, SCC, Ad Norman Decreti, 11 April, 1971, Art. 1.
7. *Church in the Modern World*, Art 64.8.
Ibid., Art 67.
9. Constitutions, Art. 42.
10. Constitutions, Art. 29.
11. Constitutions, Art. 27.
12. Cfr. Joby Mattappally (ed.), *A Chronicled History of the Houses of the Province of St. Francis de Sales*, Dimapur, p. 2.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
14. Cfr. Register of Don Bosco Golaghat.
15. The difference between the above table and this table is due to the fact that some students had taken multiple trades at the same time.
16. Cfr. Register of Don Bosco Golaghat.
17. Cfr. Handout of the Institute of Don Bosco Vocational Training Centre at Dimapur.
18. Cfr. *Ibid.*

Chapter 13

CONTRIBUTION OF SALESIANS TO HIGHER EDUCATION¹

Sebastian Aelavanthara SDB

Introduction

Engagement in the apostolate of higher education is a recent phenomenon in the province of Dimapur. In a matter of eight years (1995-2003) the province has established five colleges in four different States of the region: Salesian College of Higher Education, Dimpaur (1995), Don Bosco College, Maram (2000), Don Bosco Junior College, Doom Dooma (2000), Don Bosco College, Itanagar (2002) and Salesian College of Teacher Education (B.Ed college), Dimapur (2003). However, the college hostels in the province have a longer history than the Colleges. In this paper, I would like to discuss the mind of the Salesian Congregation on higher education, followed by a brief survey of the various colleges and hostels of the province, their major activities, and what the confreres of the province think about them.²

1. Salesians and higher education

The former Rector Major of the Salesians, Juan Vecchi, in his letter of October-December 1997 entitled "For You I Study" deals with an important theme: 'Satisfactory preparation of the confreres and the quality of our educative work'. He calls for our need 'to recover the love for cultural commitment and the consequent capacity for study'. Quoting GC.23, 225 the call of the Rector Major is that spiritual renewal, pastoral activity, cultural preparation and

educative competence cannot be separated one from another, if the Salesian is to be inserted in the youth context with the ability to dialogue and make effective suggestions.

In our *Constitutions* we read: "Our vocation is graced by a special gift of God: predilection for the young: 'That you are young is enough to make me love you very much'".³ This love is an expression of pastoral charity and gives meaning to our whole life. For their welfare we give generously of our time, talents and health: "For you I study, for you I work, for you I live".⁴ Therefore our predilection for the young leads us to our apostolate of higher education. Fr. Vecchi states that 'study' has not come by chance into Don Bosco's expression. 'Don Bosco's idea of the educator and the priest always combines loving-kindness with the ability to enlighten, teach and guide. Study, not to be reduced to just 'studies', is, therefore, for Don Bosco an indispensable part of our donation to the young, of our fatherly concern to understand them and communicate to them faith, knowledge and the experience of life. 'For you I study' recalls the patient effort of elaborating an 'original educative system' from pre-existing material, his own intuitions, the contributions of contemporaries and original syntheses. Don Bosco was inspired by his first dream by which he began his learning in the school of the Good Shepherd and Mary the Teacher. Eventually, charity and competence, study and work, activity and reflection were blended together by the grace of unity for the good of the young. Once Don Bosco wrote to a confrere: 'study and piety will make you a true Salesian'. Work and prayer study and prayer go hand in hand. Without study, without wisdom and competence, it will be difficult to carry out our educative pastoral service.

Speaking on the role of Salesians in educative and pastoral communities, Fr. Vecchi calls for spiritual formation, cultural vision and professional preparation of confreres. Salesians need a better theoretical and practical knowledge of the problems of the young and of education, but they will also have to develop the ability to interact with adults, beyond simple friendship, on problems of life and faith, of communication and guidance, of the authoritative proposal of educational objectives and processes. This will also require a more convinced living of the Salesian spirit, a reflex and organic knowledge of the Preventive System and a greater awareness of their own identity. To become and remain capable of animating a broad educative environment. Of accompanying with other educators

processes of maturing and growth, of guiding individuals, of interacting in the social context, imply that qualifications must be kept always up to date and that time be set aside for rethinking proposals and methods. The Rector Major is further concerned that we may get too entangled in organising structures and arranging means, neglecting the communal rethinking and deeper consideration of the message, and of translating it into forms adequate to the understanding of those for whom we are working⁶

Fr. Vecchi refers to the increased requirement for qualified personnel and says that while the so called traditional fields of work (oratories, schools, parishes, etc.) needs the ability to think and reflect, in addition to intelligent enterprise, because of the cultural change and complexity of the questions which each member and community has to face, we see that the growth of certain kinds of work increases precisely the demand for properly prepared personnel. When we compare the requests with those available we find the latter are always too few, even in simple numbers and leaving aside considerations of age, health and commitments which cannot be abandoned.' On Preparation of the confreres he says: "The State of our resources, the implications of our commitments and general growth in the world ask everywhere of our confreres and communities further progress in cultural preparation and spiritual strength. The perspective therefore is to consolidate, dedicating a special period to the re-qualification of our personnel, and in particular those in directive positions, sending the greatest possible number of confreres for specialised training, and improving initial formation on the basis of the experience we have already gained".⁷

While writing on the need for formation Fr. Ricceri writes: "Connected with this need for formation there is the other not less important one of qualification of the individual confrere for the various tasks to which obedience calls him. Today society will not accept into its structures utility men, men without cultural, technical or professional training. People, and the Church first of all, consider us authentic specialists in pedagogy and the apostolate. We must, to the limit of our capacity, live up to this reputation. A bit of practice is no longer sufficient. From now on every manifestation of our activity calls for qualified personnel. It is not a question of collecting degrees or specialising for its own sake, and much less of encouraging selfish or ambitious desires to study for one's own satisfaction but with a

sterile application to the apostolate”.⁸ He also spoke of qualification not as a luxury but an evident necessity.

Earlier Fr. Egidio Vigano had already reformulated the formative process as presented in the *Ratio*. Our study programmes have been updated in all the branches of theology and knowledge. It calls for qualification of the confreres for the present day pastoral work and social communication.

Salesian is one who responds to the ever new demands arising from the situation of the young and the poor. Through personal and community initiatives we nurture our Salesian spiritual life, ensure our theological and pastoral updating, and develop our professional competence and pastoral creativity.⁹ The *Regulations* refer to intellectual formation: “Our Salesian mission orientates and characterises at all levels the intellectual formation of the members in a way that is original and unique. Therefore the programme of studies must preserve a balance between serious and scientific reflection and the religious and apostolic dimensions of our way of life. Those branches of study shall be cultivated with special care which deal with education and pastoral work for youth, catechesis and social communication”.¹⁰

Speaking about ongoing formation we are reminded that each one should cultivate the habit of reading and study of those branches of knowledge proper to his mission.¹¹ About qualification of confreres we read: “Let every confrere study with his superiors the field of further qualification best suited to his abilities and to the needs of the province, giving preference to whatever concerns our mission”.¹²

Fr. Vecchi exhorts the provinces to make a plan for the qualification of confreres. He suggests the following:

1. Making a complete list of qualifications.
2. Identifying the areas in which cultural and professional competence seems more urgently needed according to the particular contexts, the state of the personnel, and the pastoral and educative situation of the Congregation in present and future perspectives.
3. Qualifying the greatest possible number of confreres for the various fields and dimensions of the Salesian mission, especially for those considered more significant at the present day.
4. Assigning qualified confreres to specific tasks within the project of the province and the Congregation. It sometimes

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happens that confreres qualified in a particular field find no outlet for their talents except by opening a new and specific field of work or becoming inserted in projects outside the Congregation.

5. Insisting that qualified confreres stay in the sector of their particular competence. Especially in study centres there must be consistence and continuity in the teaching staff and team, so as to create a tradition of formative reflection and pedagogy.

At the end of GC 25 the present Rector Major Fr. Pascual Chavez and the 231 Capitulars made an appeal to save the young people of the world: "We Salesians have inherited from Don Bosco the commitment to give our lives for the development and the education of the young. It is essential to invest great resources to this end. On more than one occasion Don Bosco in asking for money from wealthy people to educate his poor boys used strong words: either we open our wallets willingly today to help these young people or one day they will come to take your money with knife at your throat and a gun in their hands. We are on the side of the young because like Don Bosco, we have confidence in them, in their willingness to learn, to study, to escape from poverty, to take their future into their hands; but we see that they are often unable to do so because too many adults are guilty of ignoring them; when it comes to investing in them [...] We are on the side of the young because we believe in the worth of the individual, in the possibility of a different kind of world, and above all in the great value of working for education [...] Educating young people is the only way to prepare a better future for the whole world [...] We want to respond to economic globalisation with a globalisation of an educational character that will give heart and hope to all young people in the world".¹³

The Rector Major, Fr. Chavez, at the Pontifical audience assured the Holy Father of the Salesian commitment to be "diligent educators and skilled spiritual guides. With them 'called to be the heralds of the morning' we want to discover, ever new, the true Light, that which enlightens everyone".¹⁴

2. Higher education in the province

2.1 Salesian College of Higher Education Dimapur

Salesian College as a house of post-novitiate formation of the Salesians of Don Bosco came into being in 1982 by the decree of the

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canonical erection of the house signed by Rev.Fr. Egidio Viganò, the then Rector Major of the Salesians of Don Bosco. However, the community of Salesian College of post-novitiate formation was officially inaugurated on 25 May 1982.

The work of affiliating Salesian College to the Nagaland University began in 1993. At the request of the then provincial Fr. Vaghese Palathingal the process was initiated and followed up by Fr. Jose Kuruvachira, the then Dean of Studies of Salesian College. The permission from the part of the Government to open Salesian College was given on 26 June 1995 and the actual affiliation of the college to the university was granted on 4 December 1995.

The new college received the permission to offer courses in B.A General and B.A. with English and Philosophy as Majors. Currently the college offers majors in Philosophy, English and History, with English, Philosophy, History, Political Science, Sociology and Education as elective subjects. Salesian College also offers a three-year course in Philosophy and allied subjects. According to the statistics of 2003 the college had 157 students: 55 seminarians, 45 SDBs, 23 sisters and 34 day scholars. Teaching staff: 11; 8 religious and 3 lay persons. From 1982 to 2003 a total of 785 students have passed out from the college.

The Salesian College library has over 30,000 volumes and several journals. The library is open to other students of the neighbourhood. The computer centre, began in 2002, has 13 computers and offers various courses to students.

Some comments and suggestions from the confreres:

1. There is a certain ambiguity in confreres as to whether the college is for the students of Philosophy mainly and for others with restrictions.
2. How long this can continue as the University demands that we increase the intake.
3. Possibility of vocational courses.
4. Good teachers demand good salaries. NU demands UGC scale be introduced. This is not possible with few students admitted.
5. Accreditation team will require these criteria fulfilled.

2.3 Don Bosco Junior College, Doom Dooma

The Don Bosco Junior College Doomdooma was begun on 1 August 2000. The main purpose of the college is to provide higher

education to the catholic students from Doom Dooma and the surrounding parishes. At present classes are held in two classrooms adjusted in the existing hostel building. The principal's office is in the residential quarters of the Salesians. The most important requirement of the college is proper infrastructure as per the requirement of Assam Higher Secondary Education Council.

A comprehensive project proposal consisting of animation programmes, educational programmes, economic empowerment programmes and a multi-purpose hall has been presented to an agency. Efforts are made to get assistance from "Project Udayak", a Govt. agency for the construction of the approach road and culvert. Tea garden companies and individuals have been approached for assistance to construct the college.

Result of First year 2000-2001: appeared 16; passed: 14.

Results of Final Year 2001-2002: appeared: 14; passed: 9

Result of First Year 2001-2002: appeared : 33; passed: 28

Enrolment in 2003: Male 34, Female : 11; Total 45. Catholics 24 (53%)

There is every possibility of increase in enrolment of students in the coming years as several English medium schools in the area have begun to send their students for matric examinations. At present the college has more than 50% catholic students and every effort is made to admit our catholic students of the area. There are 4 teachers and 1 non-teaching staff.

2.4 Don Bosco College, Maram

Don Bosco College Maram started functioning from 23 July 2000. There are 5 Salesians (4 priests & 1 Salesian brother) on the staff. In the past four years the college has made rapid progress. There is a graduate college with Higher Secondary Arts and Commerce sections. The college has 503 students (315 boys; 188 girls) of whom 205 are catholics. The lay staff consists of 19 males and 4 females (total 23) of whom 10 are Catholics. The college has the following departments: Sociology, History, Political Science, English, Commerce and Computer Science (additional subject).

The college aims to make a harmonious blend of faith and culture; to build men and women of right principles, to strive after excellence, to be selfless in the service of people and promote social justice and to make learning more relevant, practical and life oriented.

The college also has a Vocational Training Institute that provides job-oriented courses in carpentry, welding, masonry, low-cost constructions (stabilised mud block making), typing, handloom, and agro-related and food/fruit processing courses.

The college conducts programmes on personality development, entrepreneurship training, sound values and life-skills. The community college conducts programmes for village youth, such as, mushroom cultivation, vermin compost programme, duckery, noodle and meat production, fashion designing, poultry, swine and cattle rearing, etc.

The IGNOU study centre offers courses in BA & B.Com, Certificate courses in Computing, Bachelor of Tourism, Diploma in Tourism, etc.

The Human Resource Development Centre (HRD) is a training centre that has plans to conduct workshops, seminars, symposia, coaching classes, competitions and residential training programmes. Training programmes include Bee keeping, Orchid farming, grow vegetable programme, lamination and screen printing, Computer training programme with the installation of V-Sat link, Instant typing tutor programme, Desk Top Publication (DTP), career guidance, etc. 154 students are registered for regular courses at the computer centre and 25 students are registered for career guidance programme and they are given career oriented exams and interview practice.

The college has two hostels, one for girls run by the FCC sisters with 42 inmates and the other for boys run by the SDBs with 91 students.

During the winter holidays 2003 the students of the college went to various centres of the district presenting Gospel values in songs and dance, enhancing the apostolic dimension of the college.

2.5 Don Bosco College, Itanagar

Don Bosco College Itanagar began on 6 August 2002. The first batch consisted of 33 students: 22 boys and 11 girls belonging to the various tribes of the region. There are 5 lecturers. The students are grouped into 4 clubs for co-curricular activities. There is a hostel for boys.

2.6 Salesian College of Teacher Education (B.Ed College), Dimapur

It has been a long cherished dream of the province of Dimapur to start a B.Ed. college in the province in order to train future educators. The idea was discussed way back in 1993-1995 when Fr. Varghese Palathingal was the provincial of Dimapur province. In fact, the matter of establishing a B.Ed. college already figured in the formal applications made to the Government of Nagaland and the Nagaland University in 1994 and 1995 by Fr. Jose Kuruvachira, the then Dean of Studies of Salesian College. However, in the past years the main concern was to give a firm foundation to the newly established Salesian College of Higher Education.

In the year 2000 the question of starting a B.Ed college was considered once again by the province and Fr. Cyprian Kallikaden, the then Principal of Salesian College of Higher Education, was requested by the province to follow up the matter. The University of Nagaland granted permission to start the B.Ed college on 16 December 2002, and the authorisation from the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), Regional Committee, Bhubaneswar, Orissa, was given on 28 January 2003. The last phase of the work of getting the B.Ed college approved was followed up by Fr. Augustine Kuzhikannam. The B.Ed classes began on 1 March 2003. The first principal of the B.Ed college was Sr. Gertrude (Marykutty), SABS, an experienced B.Ed principal from South India. The first batch (2003) consisted of 62 students (35 Female and 27 Male): 23 religious sisters, 10 SDBs, 4 priests and 25 others. The teaching staff comprised of 7: three ladies and four gents. For the second batch of 2004 a total of 100 students are enrolled.

3. College hostels

3.1 Ravalico College Hostel, Imphal

Established in 1985, Ravalico college hostel, Imphal is meant to cater to the needs of catholic students studying in the various colleges of Imphal. A good number of boys have passed through the hostel in the past 19 years of its existence. There is a Salesian warden looking after the institution. However, due to the disturbed political situation and the lamentable state of affairs in the education scenario the number of hostellers had dropped to 13 in 2003. In 2004 the number increased to 72 of which the majority are Catholics.

3.2 Don Bosco Hostel at Science College, Kohima

Began in 1989, Don Bosco Hostel Science College is a Govt. recognised hostel. It has to its credit several doctors and engineers. There are 26 seats in the hostel and a Salesian is the warden. The atmosphere of study is excellent and the students are highly motivated achievers. The students have performed very well in the Joint Entrance Examinations (JEE) held every year. In the past six years (from June 1988 to May 2003) 72 students appeared the JEE and 41 (Catholics 18) passed successfully: for MBBS 32; for Civil Engg: 6; for Computer science 1; for Com.T and Inf 1; for El. & Communication 1. In 2004 there are 23 Catholic students.

3.3 Bishop Marengo Hostel, Dibrugarh

Bishop Marengo Hostel Dibrugarh, was begun in 1999 for the catholic post-matric students of the Dibrugarh diocese. At present there are 26 students looked after by a Salesian. The purpose of the hostel is to help the catholic boys with proper accommodation and a suitable environment for study, piety and help them acquire leadership qualities. The hostel charges minimum fees to meet its running expenses. Each room can accommodate 4 boys with an attached kitchen for self-cooking.

Since the students attend different colleges of the town there is a need for flexibility in timetable, holidays, etc. Occasional seminars and career guidance sessions are held to build them into leaders. They are given foundation in Catholic faith through Bible study, recollections and religious instruction.

4. Comments from Salesians

I had sent out letters to 75 Salesians asking for their comments and suggestions on the apostolate of higher education. The following are the points raised by them.

4.1 General comments

There is a feeling among many confreres that we Salesians are not meant for higher education. As a province we are yet to take higher education seriously.

Though we have five colleges we should keep in mind that they are scattered in four different States. Hence compared with the real need, the service we offer to each State through our colleges is minimal.

We Salesians being the leading religious congregation of the Northeast, have a moral duty to provide avenues for people to get higher education. How many students can really afford to go out of Northeast for higher education? Hence our task is to provide these facilities in the region itself.

We Salesians are known for running some schools and parishes and run around making a lot of noise. This impression should change. Perhaps the province needs a paradigm shift with regard to higher education. We need to invest in a big way in higher education, both in personnel and finance, lest we may be left behind as an irrelevant congregation in a fast changing and advancing world.

We lack qualified Salesians to run the existing colleges. We first open an institution and then search for personnel. This tendency should change. Therefore, there is a real need to train and qualify more confreres.

We need to think in terms of higher education in sectors others have not tried, like, specialisation in psychology, journalism, leadership, spiritual direction, career guidance: IAS, IFS, IPS etc.

Do we have proper service rules for our colleges?

Inter-college level provincial co-ordination is needed.

Bring our specific vision plans of our colleges.

Good hostels are essential for the formation of good leaders.

The facilities in our colleges are quite minimal.

4.2 On Salesian College of Higher Education, Dimapur

1. The primary purpose of the college is the philosophical formation of Salesians and seminarians from the various dioceses of Northeast India. This should be respected and maintained in all policies of expansion of the college.
2. How much can the college open its doors to the general public?
3. As an institute of Philosophy it is doing well. But the combination of B.A with Philosophy does not seem to do justice to either of them.
4. A well-grounded philosophical training is much to be achieved.
5. The college needs to meet the requirements of the University as regards to the number of students. How long can the college go on as it is?

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6. On the whole the results of the BA examinations have been good, some topping the list.
7. The college imparts sound religious values through Bible classes.
8. The interaction between the brothers and the religious sisters has been very healthy.
9. The environment is conducive to learning and growth.
10. The college needs to insert itself more into the socio-cultural reality of the locality through such means as, celebration of the local festivals, presentation of papers, etc.
11. The college should take part in the social activities in the town.
12. The scope of the college at present is very limited as it caters primarily to religious personnel. However it is also contributing to quality education in the University.
13. The visit to the neighbouring villages (Sunday oratories) and the leadership programmes have great formative value.
14. The college seems to go through an identity crisis after its affiliation to the Nagaland University. The original vision of Salesian college as a house of post-novitiate formation and as a centre for University studies for young Salesians and diocesan seminarians is to be kept in mind.
15. The college should offer studies that will enhance the human and cultural formation of the Salesians and seminarians.
16. Care should be taken to appoint proper teachers to the college.
17. The college should have a centre for competitive examinations. Why not think of developing the college eventually into an autonomous college?
18. What about the possibility of the college setting up a Don Bosco centre for studies in Christianity and World religions? Such a centre could train many lay people in theology and allied subjects.

4.3 On Don Bosco Junior College, Doom Dooma

1. It is a big boost to higher education of the Catholic students of the area.
2. Doom Dooma needs a centre of higher education, and the opening of the college is a great step in that direction.

4.4 On Don Bosco College, Maram

1. The college is quite different from others. It is the most acknowledged institution in the State of Manipur.
2. There should be more Salesians in the teaching faculty.
3. The college is rendering a great service to the tribes of the area.
4. The college is a real catalyst for change in the region.
5. The college has a great task ahead to train good Christian leaders and bring about social transformation.
6. The job-oriented courses are excellent to help people economically.
7. The visit of the students to remote villages make them aware of social problems of the area.
8. Since the subjects offered by the college are many, the student enrolment is increasing.
9. The various outreach programmes to Arunachal Pradesh are praiseworthy.
10. The peace concert and rally organised by the college at Senapati is to be lauded.
11. There is need for greater unity and co-operation among the Salesians.
12. The lay staff is happy and there is a great collaboration among them.

4.5 On Don Bosco College, Itanagar

1. It can be an excellent centre for training good leaders for the Church and society in the State of Arunachal.
2. The college needs better feeder schools.

4.6 On Salesian College of Teacher Education, Dimapur

1. The college is serving the Church to a great extent as it trains many religious brothers, sisters and priests to be qualified educators.
2. The college should have more Salesians who are well qualified to be full-time teachers.
3. The students should have better interaction with the local people through social works and similar activities.
4. The presence of the college should serve the need of the locality.
5. The college is an excellent chance to train teachers of our schools in the Don Bosco way. Hence the college should

impart Salesian pedagogy and Salesian spirit in a systematic and regular manner.

6. The college needs more Salesian staff to give a better Salesian training to the students.
7. College should not be satisfied with providing just a B.Ed degree. It should device courses and programmes to animate the teachers of the schools of the Northeast. It should also engage in researches on the state of education in the Northeast and suggest solutions to the problems both to the education department of the government of Nagaland and the University of Nagaland.
8. It should think of publishing school textbooks, resource books and periodicals for the animation of teachers.
9. Teachers of the college should work in close collaboration with the Department of Education of the Nagaland University, which can be mutually beneficial.

Conclusion

As we have seen, reaching out to higher education is a very recent venture in our province. Yet it is time for us to sit together and make an assessment of our vision and plans for the future. We need to make a detailed vision plan for each of our institutions of higher education with specific plan of action. Encourage individual initiatives of confreres with a view to continue in the traditions and projects of the institution. While making a vision plan for the centre, each of us should have a specific motive in training a number of youngsters within a time frame (say 10 years). With this vision plan in mind work out a year plan as well with a specific target. What most youngsters need is someone to encourage and motivate them to achieve something specific in life.

NOTES

1. The original paper contained a section on "Catholic Church and Higher education". It is omitted in this volume. (Editors)
2. The opinions are based on the replies to 75 letters, which the author had sent out to a number of Salesians of the province. Unfortunately, those who responded were not many.
3. Constitutions, Art. 14.
4. Constitutions, Art. 14.

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5. Report of the Vicar general to GC 24, Rome, 1996, 293.
6. Report of the Vicar general to GC 24, Rome, 1996, 266.
7. Report of the Vicar general to GC 24, Rome, 1996, 294.
8. Acts of the Superior Council, 244, Jan. 1966, 4-5.
9. Constitutions, Art. 118.
10. Regulations, Art. 82.
11. Regulations, Art. 99.
12. Regulations, Art. 100.
13. Documents of 25th General Chapter, Rome, 2002, 140.
14. Documents of 25th General Chapter, Rome, 2002, 167.

Chapter 14

SALESIAN CONTRIBUTION TO THE INDIGENOUS CULTURES OF NORTHEAST INDIA

Thomas Kalapurackal, SDB

Introduction

Culture is something much hyped about, and may be little thought about by us Salesians.¹ As regards the doing, the society will be the best judges. When the eulogization ends, the milestones along the way will prove to history that we Salesians have walked along this way interacting with living traditions.

A casual reading of the title “Salesian Contribution to the Indigenous Cultures of the Northeast” might make it appear that we Salesians, with all our institutions, activities, and publications must have done a yeoman's service to the cultures of the Northeast. I shared my anxiety in the form of a questionnaire with twenty confreres of our province, and they too seemed convinced that Salesians have been actively involved in the growth of the cultures. The organisers of this seminar too must have initiated this discussion about culture, because there is a staunch belief that culture and the Northeast, culture and India, cannot be separated. And we, important players in this region's historical development, could not but have affected, both consciously and unconsciously, its cultures.

However, a deeper look at the turn of events, and the results that history has produced, will tell us to be a little more humble. The more

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I read about it, and the more time I spent at my desk, trying to organise my thoughts, the more puzzling the task of preparing the paper became. I share my confusion with you, rather than list the memoirs of Salesian glory. As such, mine is going to be more of a reflection paper and less of a seminar document. My gratitude goes to those confreres who shared their confusion with me by filling in the questionnaire.²

A discussion, and serious reflection, about indigenous cultures becomes particularly important because we are living through an age of accusations levelled against Christian Churches by Hindu factions. They know as much as we do, that the destiny of this region's peoples has been moulded by us in the past, and is still being moulded by us today.

To understand the topic, a few terms about culture need to be clarified at the outset.

1. What is culture?

“By culture we mean the character traits, values, traditions of a community through which the soul or the inner genius of a person expresses itself”, says Fr. Jose Chemparathy³

Some other Salesian confreres of the Dimapur province think of culture as:

- A way of living of a particular group of people
- A way of life of a group of people, their value system, belief system, traditions, etc.
- Everything in the life of a person that goes beyond what is indispensable for survival.
- One's expression of life style.
- The environment in which a person lives and grows: language, customs, traditions, dress, feelings, styles of communication.
- The mode of being a person as seen through his/her ethos of behaviour, dress, custom, belief, language.
- The sum of all factors of a society, like language, organisation, art, dress, food, thought patterns, etc.

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- Sum total of all that a person is. It is the essence of his identity: language, customs, faith, religion, beliefs, ethics, social behaviour, relationship, habits, etc. Culture is man.
- The essence of a society's way of being, working, outlook, manners, customs, habits and behaviour.
- The manner the people of a tribe live, worship, entertain and celebrate; something original, a way of life; conversation, dress, colour.
- All that people are and do. Culture is what makes people and the basis of their identity. A culture consists of defined creed, code and cult.
- The way of life of a people, intrinsic part; the nature.
- Complex reality that includes beliefs, attitudes, values and activities of persons as members of a society/group.
- Some specific way of behaviour, way of doing things expressed in song, dance, conversation, etc.
- Language, customs, traditions, folk-lore, etc. of a group of people.
- Language, music, food, dance, dress, character, manners.

I shall not attempt a compiling of these opinions into one scientific definition. Please remember that the above are gathered from the treasure chest of the learned understanding of our confreres, as all these definitions, except one, were written by the Provincial Chapter (2004) participants during their leisure time. Hence the definitions are not collected from libraries. We should be happy to learn that the opinions of scholars are not far removed from our common understanding as expressed in the above statements.

2. What do scholars say about culture?

“Culture can better be described than defined. It denotes a collection of beliefs, values, presumptions, commitments, and ideals expressed in a society through audio, visual and print media like literary and artistic forms, and embodied in their political, social and educational institutions. Thus culture is reflected in literature and music, dance and drama, architecture and paintings, religion and philosophy, social ethics and behaviour”.⁴ Further, culture is to be a

product of evolution not of revolution; and that cultural attitudes and outlook emerge in response to living conditions, personal habits, education and training, etc.

"Culture is a society's complex, integrated coping mechanism, consisting of learned, patterned concepts and behaviour, plus their underlying perspectives (worldview) and resulting artefacts (material culture)" says Charles H. Kraft⁵. According to him, a natural culture is one that is owned by a given society, usually speaking a single language, and that is passed on through that language to those born into the society.

"Culture is a plan consisting of a set of norms, standards, and associated notions and beliefs, for coping with the various demands of life, shared by a social group, learned by the individual from society, and organised into a dynamic system of control".⁶ Culture is above the individual, because an individual will cease to be. However, the society and its culture will live on.

Culture designates the peculiar manner of behaving of a particular community or social group, its typical way of thinking and judging, of feeling and of perceiving itself and others. It refers to a collective psychology. It refers to what a people "considers as the best and sum total of its thinking, living and expression".⁷

Thus we notice that there are two levels in this concept of culture: One is the inner make up of a group of people, consisting of the belief systems, worldviews, and psyche of the group. The other is the external expression of the worldviews and belief systems.

For me personally, culture is the way a group of people solves its problems. It gave answers to its own questions and found solutions to problems that crept up in the process of its historical development. These answers and solutions make up the culture of the people.

We have to differentiate the above scientific understanding of 'culture' from the random use of the word as found especially in books dealing with education. In the latter, the word would mean, a universal standard of behaviour, accepted and understood by most as the 'civilised' way of doing things. It denotes professionalism in one's life-style. The *Formation of Salesians of Don Bosco, Principles and Norms*, says: "It is necessary that the Salesians possess a culture, that is, a sum total of ideas, understanding and values that is broad, open and at the same time critical"⁸. Of course, it is talking about a specific

Salesian culture. It is not totally out of place, because any group of people that live together develops its own unique culture. In the same way, there are other cultures or sub-cultures: family culture (or subculture); community culture (or subculture); regional culture (or subculture); national culture and multinational culture. The G8 group of nations has its own unique features not shared by others not belonging to that group.

People may be defined as agricultural society (culture) or cattle herding society (culture); or a people may be described to have social characteristics (polygamous or monogamous cultures; joint families or nuclear families) or again, religious designations such as Muslim, tribal, animistic, Christian, Hindu, etc.

Now let us have a look at the various terms we commonly use, and also attempt to give a name to other concepts and attitudes that may be prevalent.

3. Positive concepts

3.1 Inculturation

This term refers to the process by which a particular Church expresses its faith and life in and through the local culture. Inculturation is relatively a new word, and is used in Church circles. The extraordinary synod of bishops held in 1985 states that inculturation means the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity in the various human cultures.

3.2 Accommodation and adaptation

These expressions envision a fully formed Christianity being transplanted in all its details to another environment, while admitting only peripheral or minor modifications. There is no question of the Church being enriched, in any substantial measure, through adaptation. It was a one-way traffic, in which the Church was the giver.⁹

3.3 Enculturation

This comes close to 'socialisation'. One learns the way a group of people lives, speaks and behaves, and begins to imitate the life-style, speech and behaviour, much in the same way as a child grows into an adult in any given community. There is a stage of attentive listening,

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observing, and internalisation. The second stage is the one of giving expression to the learning in the given circumstance.

3.4 Participation

We are told that 'when you are in Rome, be a Roman'. One learns to join the group's activity whenever he is in the midst of that group of people. No serious thought is given to one's actions. The visitor comes out of it entertained and satisfied at having 'been there'. Joining in an Adivasi dance or eating a fellowship meal would amount to participation.

3.5 Promotion of cultures

Making a study, consciously wearing a particular community's shawl, listening to music, collecting artefacts in a museum or speaking and writing about a group of people would be to promote cultures. The culture is taken as it is, and demonstrated, publicised and given importance to. It adds to the joy of the group to be given this special niche. No value is added to the culture, and no change is expected.

3.6 Preserving cultures

Many indigenous cultures in the Northeast are facing extinction. The Government as well as private organisations are vying with each other to preserve for the future the signs and symbols of ancient glory. Videos, music cassettes, libraries, museums and cultural centres are often the chosen media for preserving cultures. The surrounding situations may have changed, but the 'way of doing things' in a bygone era must continue untampered.

3.7 Using cultural expressions as medium

One can take cultural expressions from a group of people in order to make an appeal to that community, or to gain appreciation. Politicians going on a cultural fancy dress mania during election campaigns, and youth animators singing ethnic language songs would fall under this category.

3.8 Cultural translation

From the days of Robert De Nobili in India, through William Carey to the present day, translations have been a way of life with

Christians in India. In a country, which converses in a multitude of languages/dialects, and to where Christianity sought to make an inroad, translation was and is still considered an important tool. Books relating to subject matters, both religious and secular, have been translated both from foreign languages and from other Indian languages. In the process, words have been given new meanings, and new words have been coined, in addition to bringing in new concepts to the speakers of that language. Most of these works have been biblical texts, which admitted nothing but literal translation. There could be another shade to the word 'translation' which is to take any aspect of a culture and doing similar things in the new culture. For example, if in Africa people simplify the use of the shawl by making a hole in the middle and putting it through the head, one could think of doing the same when they come to Nagaland, with Naga shawls.

The above are ways in which one can engage in cultural activities, or also interact with cultures. In this process of interaction, one goes through what is known as 'cultural expressions,' which ordinarily are confused with 'culture' itself. Cultural expressions demonstrate on the outside the worldview and belief systems of a group of people. Both are not identical. The first among these expressions is language. It is the primary vehicle of culture. Every language is complex, adequate, adaptable, unique, and mirrors culture at every point with respect to time, place, age, gender and occasion. Every language embodies a whole set of unconscious worldview assumptions about the world and life in it, so people see and hear largely what their language makes them sensitive to and trains them to look for.

Art is another vehicle for culture. In art, the meanings of the forms are attached by those whose world, the given culture defines on the basis of shared agreements. Thus, whatever the art form, outsiders cannot be sure they understand the meaning until they understand what the insiders' agreements are. Culture of a group is expressed in its folklore, ritualistic practices (bordering on drama), dance, clothes, designs, music and myths. We can get to the heart of a culture by studying, collecting, learning these vehicles.

It is not uncommon, even among us Salesians, to find some negative concepts and attitudes with regard to cultures. People, even those in authority, consciously or unconsciously, are at times guilty of some of these negative concepts regarding culture.

4. Negative concepts / attitudes

4.1 Mono-culturalism

It is looking at reality (including other people's) from one point of view only. It is nearsightedness, taking only their own worldview into account, and judging all other customs and perspectives from the point of view of their own cultural values only, and preventing a person or group from appreciating or often even understanding points of view different from their own.¹⁰ Such persons are absolutistic. It is dangerous when people in power have this attitude. They assume that their views have been arrived at because they are superior, that their ancestors looked at all the possible ways of doing things, rejected all other ways as inferior, and chose their way as the best way, as if God gave their ancestors these customs. They consider other society's homes, clothing, tools, music, strange-sounding language and other supposedly inferior customs to be the result of a lack of intelligence, and look down on them.

4.2. Cultural romanticism

The term is self-explanatory. One can be so taken up with a culture so as not to see any defects. Aspects of a culture can take up one's thoughts, words and actions that he becomes blind to others. Often this attitude and the consequent action are not consciously chosen. Challenging of cultures does not occur when one has this attitude.

4.3. Cultural ridicule

There have been instances when aspects of particular cultures, or indigenous cultures in general have been subject to ridicule. Traditions and cultural practices are despised, and the people who belong to that culture are ridiculed. In short, culture is made an instrument of oppression.

4.4. Cultural stereo-typing

People belonging to one indigenous cultural group, or even outsiders have certain pre-conceived notions about another group of people. These pre-conceived notions or stereo-types have been handed down for generations. For example we hear statements such as these: "These people are cunning." "They are cheats." "They are lazy." The 'outsider' has never tried to go deeper and enquire whether the stereo-types are still valid, and often it is not possible for the

'insiders' to explain themselves. The latter do not have the 'voice' to do so.

4.5. Distortion of cultures

Often aspects of cultural practices and ritualistic observances are fused together to get a meaningless hotchpotch. An example will prove this point better than words. A priest comfortably seated on a high stool in a church where people are on the floor could be a conflict, because the principle was that in the presence of God one cannot sit on anything higher than the floor. Such distortions give the wrong message and can be insulting or at least scandalous to the members of the community. Self interested individuals or persons with vested interests from within the group too could be the agents of distortion.

4.6. Cultural neutrality

Like people who surf TV channels without caring to watch any, the indifferent are present in a scene, without emotionally entering into the situation. One continue to think, talk and behave in the way one has been brought up, and it makes no difference whatever other people do, or where one is. Neither being critical nor being appreciative, such people can be closed within the four walls of an institution. This could be the mentality of the richer classes.

If we think that all or some of the above attitudes or concepts, whether positive and negative, are contributions to culture, we Salesians in Northeast India can pat our backs. The positive attitudes and concepts mentioned above could be misleading when we begin to talk about contributions to cultures. We have all, at some time or other, interacted with cultures in one or the other of the above-mentioned positive concepts. However, if we Salesians think that we have gone through the doors of cultural expressions, to reach the heart of a people's culture, may be we have contributed to culture.

One question that we need to answer is: in the terms mentioned above, has the culture in question been affected in any way, changed for the better, or was it a 'we-they' attitude. Both the Salesians and local cultures existed side by side. Both grew into whatever directions each chose, and continued unaffected by the other. I asked a senior missionary whether we Salesians have contributed in any way to the culture of Northeast India. He said: 'hardly anything. I myself did it once,' and he cited examples of some ritualistic practices.

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Certain practices have continued down the ages, without serious reconsideration. Did we actually mean 'inculturation' when we adapted some ritualistic practices or re-built our chapels? Were the sandals put away to protect the chapel carpet more than as an Indian expression of reverence for the divine? By inculturation "the culture in question receives a new dynamism and on the other hand, fresh ways of understanding and living the Christian faith are opened up".¹¹

Can we contribute something / anything to culture? It is tantamount to asking whether we can contribute to someone's health (may be this is not the best of examples). We might give some food or vitamins. However, it will depend on the internal assimilating systems of the person whether that person enjoys better health because of the food we have contributed. Whatever food a TB patient consumes all goes waste, at least until the malaise is removed.

Yes, the malaise must be removed.

So when we talked about contributions to cultures, we actually did not make any contribution. Culture is dynamic. It grows because of exposure to external factors, to other cultures, to the media, and by the mere passage of time. "Understanding of Indian culture must take into account various kinds of influence on it ethnic, religious, linguistic and so on", says Dr. Saraswathi.

This is not to say that Salesians have not in any way contributed to culture in Northeast India. We have!

In this our only strategy, according to me, was and is by *challenging cultures*. After having understood well the rationale behind a culture's behavioral patterns, and after having evaluated well the possible positive and negative effects of that given pattern, the culture in question is challenged to adopt a new path. It is like taking a different turn at a crossroad, or like adding a corrective. The old is thrown out and the new is taken. This may be done consciously or unconsciously. The culture in question too may accept it consciously or unconsciously, and begin the process of transformation. Enlightened insiders of a group too could also be the challengers to their own group.

In challenging cultures, new concepts are added to the group's world-view, and to its value systems. And because new concepts are brought in, the way of life changes. It is a change from within. The new way of life is adopted because there is a new underlying principle for the action. The collective psychology that Julian Saldanha talks about is altered to some extent because of some external forces.

5. Salesian contribution to culture in the Northeast

We Salesians in India have contributed to culture by *challenging* cultures.¹² We have instilled values, changed the worldviews, and affected the belief systems of the people of Northeast India, and because of which the society's complex, integrated coping mechanism has changed. Salesians have proposed new value systems, and corrected the malaise. We believe that the change is for the better.

Apart from our media awareness courses and our social development activities in recent years, I can think of two important ways, in which we Salesians have challenged cultures, and thus contributed to culture. They are: *Evangelisation* and *Education*.¹³ Most confreres of our province, who answered the survey, feel that Salesians have contributed, but very little, to the local cultures. Our contributions were in the field of evangelisation and education, in addition to our involvement in the field of language and literature.

5.1 Evangelisation

"Evangelisation constitutes a fundamental challenge to culture".¹⁴ Symbols are essential to culture. Through our evangelisation work, we have been giving new symbolisms to the already existing cultures. These symbolisms are vehicles of meaning, and they create a link between two different experiences or sets of experiences and thus lead to new worldviews.¹⁵ Inculturation is all about a symbiosis of different symbol systems, and it gives rise to new meanings, and a new bridge between ideas and behaviour. In true inculturation, both the Church and the local culture are transformed. Religion must operate in and through a culture. It should come to terms with other cultures and with the forces of cultural change.¹⁶

There can be no evangelisation except with reference to clearly defined human groups who are linked to a cultural tradition. The Gospel cannot, therefore, be transmitted independently of their culture. Thus it is the human culture that is evangelised. And by evangelisation, or missionary interaction, there occurs a cultural interaction and a change of culture. In the process, something old dies and something new is born. This is true of all cultural interactions, including religious interaction.

According to Fr. Jose Chemparathy, missionaries must take into account the hopes and aspirations of the people expressed through

their culture. Hence evangelisation does not become an imposition of tradition and values but a process that facilitates the purification of the culture from within. This calls us for appreciating and reflecting on the tradition and customs of the group with whom we are working in order to search for its deeper identity, its main character traits, its strong point and weak points and its unrevealed potentialities evangelise the culture. Our duty is to bring about a harmonious synthesis between the tribal practices and the values of Christianity.¹⁷

What changes have taken place in the worldview of the local people because of the challenges we placed before it? Dr. Sebastian Karotemprel talks about a world-wide solidarity, assertion of tribal identity, tribal solidarity, integration, and political consciousness as some of the effects of our evangelisation work.¹⁸ It is true that Christianity has reinforced certain values, and corrected others. We can cite the example of the Naga communities.

Joseph Ngankhuchung in his talk in 1997 at Salesian College, Dimapur,¹⁹ presented the context of incarnation in Naga Christian communities before the Message arrived. He said that the Nagas lived in an animistic culture, with superstitious faith which institutionalized warfare, and in adherence to clan, tribe, village and with no individual identity. Headhunting was the order of the day (cultural issue), and had independent existence from village to village. Of course, he did not mention what happened after the "Message arrived". According to me, Christian missionaries in general, and Salesians in particular, have challenged certain beliefs of the Naga society.

Many authentic and Christian values such as honesty, simplicity, justice, democratic procedures, dignity of the individual, etc., were already present in the tribal society even before the advent of Christianity. But Christianity has not always been able to preserve and build on them. Under the impact of modernisation, some of these values have been lost.²⁰

According to Dr. Archana Baruah "it is clear that the impact of the Christian missionaries in the socio-cultural and historical context of the Northeastern region is felt in two ways. One is the way it has directly exercised their influence among the Christian tribals of the Northeast, the other is the indirect manner in which they have contributed positively for the benefit of the non-Christians, particularly among the Assamese society of the Brahmaputra valley.

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Christian missionaries have played their role successfully but they have to play it in a more meaningful manner in the years to come”.²¹

Lots of translation works were done in many of the languages of the Northeast, and this was an attempt at making the recipient culture the true and final locus of the proclamation, so that the Christianity we preached arrived without the presumption of cultural rejection. As one doctor in Jorhat mentioned: “if it is written in my language, it is mine.” Through translation, the people had a chance to accept a message that they understood to some extent. In Northeast India, Christianity became compatible with all cultures through the work of translation. It was resisted in its western garb, but not so in later years.

One of the achievements of St. Paul was that while he disentangled the Gospel from any exclusive cultural definition, he retained the particularity of culture as the necessary saddle for launching Christianity in the world.²² Whether our Salesian missionaries acted in the same way, or the message came with a baggage of foreign cultural practices, is again to be examined.

Expansion of Christianity had a direct effect on the emergence of renewal movements at the local level, as it happened with *Donyi Poloism* in Arunachal Pradesh. The sense of human dignity and equality has become norms in Northeast because of Christianity. We have taken up the causes of the downtrodden in many of our development works, and given a dignity to the individual. The ethnic communities of Northeast prefer Christianity to other traditional religions, because they feel, that in Christianity they will be considered equals. The caste system is a detested factor for them.

Salesian missionaries in Northeast India have accepted the value of the individual. Right from the start opportunities have been provided for local people to enter our religious order. This is in stark contrast to how the Portuguese Jesuit, Francisco Cabral, thought about the Japanese. He said: “If one does not cease and desist admitting Japanese into the Society of Jesus, that will be the reason for the collapse of the Society, nay! Of Christianity in Japan, and it will later hardly prove possible to find a remedy”.

Missionaries are becoming more conscious of the importance of cultural interaction. They pay more heed to the cultural values of the peoples under their care. “Churches in general are now endeavoring to assimilate cultural aspects into liturgical vestments, rituals,

sacraments, burial services, church architecture, theology etc.”, says David Syiemlieh.²³

Speaking about Arunachal Pradesh, the spread of Christianity was perceived as a threat to the indigenous culture. It appears that the tribal society is not averse to gradual and voluntary change; it only does not want to be washed away by sudden storms of change”.²⁴ This has been the accusation raised against Christian missionaries for quite a long time in the past.

We have still a long way to go in our challenging of cultures. It is to be doubted whether in our work, we have distinguished ourselves as men who “found the attractions of another (culture) irresistible, and as a consequence became promoters of the lore and wisdom of other people, [...] laid the foundations of indigenous revitalisation to which the Christian cause would be tied”.²⁵ Or whether, we can be compared to Paul in his self-critical stance towards own cultures. Paul's culture, as a message bearer, necessarily acquired a peripheral status once the step was taken to engage another culture seriously. Paul, the Jew, had to suffer the shattering of his deepest beliefs before he came through to a new conception of a missionary's work.

There are also those who feel that we have not been just in our life styles in the Northeast. “The advanced people (the Assamese) are awe-struck with the display of wealth especially as seen in the Catholic Church. The challenge before us is whether we can live and work without foreign money. In our life-style, in the institutions, churches and cathedrals which we build, can be Indian?”, says Fr. Narimattam Mathew.²⁶

For a long time, the communication of the message was unidirectional, with the missionary placing the Gospel as he knew it, before ethnic communities, and the ethnic communities accepting the message verbatim. Only much later did the Salesians, especially in the Khasi Hills, enter into the traditional religious beliefs of the people to understand its guiding principles and offer 'correctives' (i.e., challenge the culture).

We Salesians may have to *go ahead to the past* in our missionary endeavours, so that the work of challenging, and thus contributing to cultures becomes more real. We have to learn lessons for the future from history. Robert de Nobili held that Hindu India has something to teach him and all missionaries. He believed that Christianity had not come to uproot but to build upon, not to reject but to renew. He saw

Christianity as the flowering of all that was best in India, not the pretext for imposing a western culture on Indians. With his knowledge of Sanskrit and Tamil, De Nobili was able to respond to the searching critique to which Brahmin scholars submitted Christianity. He said, a strong Christian community must be reared on its own roots, and India must for that reason have its own clergy rooted in its traditions. The alternative was at best foreign stigma and at worst oblivion. The model for creating a trained Indian clergy existed in Madurai University, an ancient foundation of learning where Tiruvalluvar, rated as the greatest of Tamil Poets, worked some time.

Another lesson from history is that of William Carey who took the best that India had to offer and put it in a form that preserved it while exposing it to wider interest, or that of Max Muller who was convinced that Christians would emerge refreshed from their contact with other religions.

Because of our one sided presentations, Christians have occasionally clung tenaciously to Western cultural forms as an insurance for their separate identity.

5.2 Education

According to Charles H. Kraft, there are certain roles that our educational institutions play. One is, to build a continuity with the past. Education must become a process of enculturation, by which the new generation is trained for effective participation in the society.²⁷ Every society wants to link with the past, both formally and informally. People teach their children customs that are precious to them. Adults lead their youth into as close an approximation as possible to the way they do things. Some societies have even closed themselves to the outside world. In those societies, children are trained to function only within the confines of their own homogenous social enclosure. The adults of those societies desire no change. By avoiding all contact with outside forces, they hope to preserve and continue their specific cultural system.

A second role of education is to press beyond past. There are some societies, which emphasize change. For them change is progress. They think more negatively about their own traditions and tacitly permit their children to take to other options offered through schools

or otherwise. In many cultures of the Northeast, we have had examples of parents pushing their children to accept a new way of life, may be by accepting a new religion. This leads us to the third role that education plays: conversion to another culture.

Education gives people access to technology. But this transition to the technological age must be sufficiently slow. It's the rapidity and the fact that they have not had time to adjust to each successive stage that is really disturbing. In some of the interior villages of Arunachal Pradesh, for example, people have moved from 'walking to flying'. This creates a technological imbalance. The meaningfulness of life is lost. They lose control over their own lives, by moving rapidly from "the rural to the urban, from agriculture to industrialisation, from personal to impersonal, from supernaturalism to scientism, from family orientation to job orientation, from informal learning of subsistence skills to formal learning of technological skills".²⁸

With the onslaught of modernisation, the traditional tribal social order is breaking down, although ethnic assertion is raising its head. In fact, through their ethnic movements the tribals are trying to bring the problems of modernisation into their group. It is clear that ethnic organisation can best help people to articulate their views and since ethnicity is always assertive in its nature, it can best help people to unite together and express themselves. The whole situation may, thus, be looked at as the birth pangs of a new social order.²⁹

The education imparted by the Christian schools, no doubt, tended to look down on tribal customs, dress, music, etc., as inferior to Western customs and cultural expressions. Hence the educated youth tended to dissociate themselves from tribal cultural values and their expressions. They gradually acquired a western mentality and disdain for their ancestral cultural values. Much of what we Indians use and do are imitations of Western culture.³⁰

Christianity, along with modern education, has helped to break up the social fabric that held the tribal community together. There is now a strong feeling of losing one's identity, and therefore, the need to go back to one's roots. We do not have a common identity of our own to hold on to, thanks to modern civilization which has destroyed our cultural heritage without giving us time to assimilate and create another of our own. There is a continuous on-going tug-of-war between our traditional sense of community centeredness with its stress on personal relations and dependence on others, such as peer

groups, the elders, the clan, village, tribe, etc. on the one hand; and the demands of the present day competitive world with its accompanying insistence on impersonal individual growth and achievement on the other. Having to catch up and assimilate into modern culture, we find ourselves in a situation of total chaos and confusion with no sense of direction, whether to look to the restoration of the past or to put our feet forward and join the global village. When the elders themselves are confused and have no sense of direction, the confusion among the youth will be much greater.³¹

Having looked at the impact that education makes, it is apt that we Salesians engage in some serious introspection. Salesians and education are two sides of the same coin. The numerous educational institutions, from the lower primary to the college level, that we manage in Northeast cannot but have changed the way cultures look at themselves.

We have through our schools, offered Jesus, "in whom exists the perfection of all human values in principle as a model to the students [...]. Following Jesus, who during His short three-year public life, fed hungry multitudes, cured infirmities, pardoned sinners, decried injustice and oppression and marked out a path towards spiritual perfection, Catholic schools commit themselves with total dedication to the development of the whole person. Catholic schools are conceived and organized as places of humanization, i.e., the development of the person, building up man from within".³²

Monadeepa Chakravarty speaks about the effects of education in our Mission schools. All our Don Bosco Schools of Upper Assam are mentioned. She says: "Students from all walks of the society study in these schools [...] coming both from the elite and the prosaic section of the society [...] Some parents of the students of these schools are uneducated and some are illiterate. Some students are from interiors of Arunachal Pradesh. Yet the scholastic achievement of the students studying in the Catholic mission schools had been highly praise worthy".³³

Mrs.Chakravarty proves that parents prefer Catholic Schools for the typical characteristics of the Catholic schools, for example, the teaching of moral behaviour and maintenance of discipline and punctuality. The pupil-teacher relationship, success-oriented training, high teaching standards, making children self-confident, promoting high ambition in students and personal concern for

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children are characteristic of Catholic schools. Our Catholic schools promote values such as better study habits, level of aspiration, school environment, family environment, achievement motivation and self-concept. These are new values proposed to the cultures of the Northeast. Life in the Northeast has changed because of our involvement in education.

The work culture has changed because of our schools. Children who come to our schools do not return home with the same outlook about work. Whether the outlook is positive from a community's point of view, or from the viewpoint of a person who has to compete in the modern world are matters to be discussed.

The questions we need to ask about challenging cultures through our schools are: whether our institutions are imitations of the West, ("the slippery slope of imitation" Tagore), whether they impart too bookish a learning, whether the actual life conditions of the local people are taken into consideration, and whether our education helps students to reflect seriously on local cultures and its problems.

Our educational activities have influenced the life and culture of the Northeast. Most effects are positive, though some critics may tend to focus on the negative.

Conclusion

Salesians have been important players in the socio-cultural scenario of the Northeast. The region has taken giant strides, also because of us. However, whether any extra hue was added to this rich kaleidoscope of cultures needs to be evaluated. Because of our work of education and evangelisation, peoples of the Northeast have begun to walk along new paths. But may be we did not design the changes and influences on the cultures. That may be the challenge for us in the future. The unplanned series of interactions, without set goals, has subjected Salesians to both praise and blame for their endeavours. But we can say with pride, that we acted with total good will, and meant well.

NOTES

1. All the confreres to whom I sent out the questionnaire do have very clear opinions about culture. However, most of them

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- expressed that we Salesians have been doing very little in the area of 'culture'.
2. Questionnaire to 20 Salesians during the Provincial Chapter, on 12 May, 2004, at Salesian Provincial House, Dimapur.
 3. Jose Chemparathy, "Evangelisation in Arunachal Pradesh". (No further details are available. Editors)
 4. Charles H. Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian witness*, New York: Orbis Books, 1996.
 5. Charles H. Kraft. (No further details are available. Editors)
 6. Louis J. Luzbetak, *Church and Cultures*, New York: Orbis Books, 1988, p.156.
 7. Julian Saldanha, *Inculturation*, Mumbai: St. Paul's, 1997, p. 11.
 8. *Formation of Salesians of Don Bosco, Principles and Norms*, Rome: 2000.
 9. Julian Saldanha, *Inculturation*, p. 14
 10. Charles H. Kraft, p. 70.
 11. Julian Saldanha, *Inculturation*, 1997.
 12. In this discussion, I do not draw a clear line of distinction between the Salesians and other religious groups, or the Diocesan priests. For a long time Salesians were the only players in this field. Northeast India has borrowed much from our Salesian charisma.
 13. Some other ways of doing this is discussed in other papers e.g., media and publications. Even evangelization and education will be discussed elsewhere, but from a different angle.
 14. Aylward Shorter, *Toward A Theology Of Inculturation*, New York: Orbis Books, 1988.
 15. Aylward Shorter, p. 34.
 16. Aylward, Shorter p. 54.
 17. Jose Chemparathy, Evangelization in Arunachal Pradesh, Seminar 1997.
 18. Dr. Sebastian Karotemprel in *Impact of Christianity on North East India*.
 19. Ngankhuchung Joseph in his talk on *Evangelization among the Naga communities challenges and responses*, in 1997 at Salesian College, Dimapur.
 20. Aylward Shorter, p. 45.
 21. Archana Baruah, *Impact of Christianity on North East India*, J. Puthenpurakal (ed.), Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publications, 1996.
 22. Lamin Sanneh, *Translating The Message*, New York: Orbis Books, 1989, p. 34.
 23. David Syiemlieh, *A Brief History of the catholic Church in Nagaland*, 1990.
 24. Atul Chandra Talukdar, *Impact of Christianity on North East India*, J. Puthenpurakal (ed.), Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publications, 1996.

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25. Lamin Sanneh, p. 27.
26. Narimattam Mathew, *Evangelization among the Assamese, Challenges* (No further details are available. Editors)
27. Charles H. Kraft, p. 278.
28. Charles H. Kraft p. 178.
29. Mohammed Taher, "People of North East India", *IMR* June 1998.
30. Sebastian Karotemprel, *The Impact of Christianity on the Tribes of North East India*, p. 38.
31. V. Lucas Meyase, Kohima, *Problems of the North-East, Evangelization in the Province of Dimapur, Challenges and response*.
32. *A Manual for Teachers*, p. 12.
33. Monadeepa Chakravarty, *A Study of Certain Correlates of Scholastic Achievement in Catholic Mission Schools*, Department of Education, Dibrugarh University, 1998, p. 145.

Chapter 15

SALESIAN CONTRIBUTION TO THE INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE

R.K. Nicholas Guangdiat SDB

Introduction

The English writer Ben Johnson said: “Speech is the only benefit man hath to express his excellency of mind above other creatures”. The gift of speech to humankind is indeed a great boon. It is the means of creating ideas and expressing human personality in words, whether spoken or written. The spoken word creates, for it was the word of the Almighty, which created everything. “God said” and everything in the world came into being. The written word then confirms and transmits facts to generations to come.

In the present day we can notice a kind of linguistic nationalism. Each ethnic group seems to be seeking identity in its language. Language has become the tool to express its unique identity and heralds a call for recognition. Language has been seen as a mobilising symbol of nationality and this had led a group of people to nurture its language with pride and aspired for autonomy in some form or other.¹ In this present scenario, we as evangelisers cannot be silent spectators and feel complacent with our proficiency in English language. There is a call to get involved in the lives of the people in order to evangelise them with the Gospel values. The beginning for this, I feel, is the learning of the language, which is a window into the inner world of people.

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It is true that some zealous Salesians have undertaken the learning of a language or another and have contributed to the literature of those languages. They deserve to be admired and praised. Nevertheless, there is much to be done in this field. I have made an attempt to study the contributions made by the Salesians to the growth of indigenous languages and literature. I have included the contributions made by the Protestants as well as the Salvatorians and Salesians to the literature of Northeast India. This paper does not attempt to render an exhaustive deliberation on this topic but presents only a bird's eye view. I must admit that the work is limited in its scope and concentrates on the direct contributions made by the Salesians of the province of Dimapur.

1. Language

Human beings live in society. There is thus a constant communication and interaction between persons within the society as well as outside their circles. The medium of communication is language spoken and written. One may ask, "What is language?" We may answer this in the words of Edward Sapir, a renowned linguist who says: "Language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols." This implies that language is a means of communicating ideas, emotions and desires, a medium by which the speakers of a language communicate their thoughts and feelings to others and a vehicle by which they transmit the science, the Philosophy and the poetry of a culture.²

According to *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, language is "a system of conventional spoken or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, communicate."³ From what has been said, it is quite evident that language is a means to communicate within a particular culture. It is a means for the expression of thought, as Aristotle would say: "Speech is the representation of the experiences of the mind." The renowned linguist Henry Sweet states: "Language may be defined as the expression of thought by means of speech-sounds."

We may say that Language is "a systematic means of human communication, particularly by arrangement of vocal sounds conventionally representing concepts, feelings, objects, etc."⁴ It is unique to human beings and without it knowledge and control of the environment would be inconceivable.

From what had been said, it is clear that language is the tool for communicating as well as for receiving experiences. It is the basis on which the internal mental images are organized in the process called thinking.⁵ Hence, a knowledge of the language of the people with whom we interact will open the doors into their thought pattern, beliefs, fears and anxieties, aspirations and attitude towards life and their mode of reaction to life's experiences. Thus language interacts with every aspect of human life in society, and it can be understood only if it is considered in relation to society. It is the arbitrary formulation of expressions by a particular group of people to share their innermost feelings, their concept of life, outlook, worldviews, and aspirations.

The twentieth century had been curious to study the nature of human language. The upsurge in linguistic pursuits and researches have shown that anyone who is concerned with the intricacies of the human thought finds it necessary to be concerned with the intricacies of the symbolic system through which human thought makes itself manifest. That symbolic system is the language of the people.⁶

2. Literature

Language grows, develops, matures and takes on the written form. It should be understood that oral tradition precedes the written one. The invention of script gave opportunity for the people to record their past, thoughts and aspirations, cares and worries, often expressed through songs and folklore. These written compositions have given rise to literature. In the common parlance, 'literature' indicates almost anything that is written.

According to the *Encyclopaedia of Literature*, Literature is 'the body of written works produced in a particular language, country or age.' This includes writings in prose and verse, especially writings having excellence of form or expression and presenting ideas of permanent or universal interest.⁷

Literature is a form of human experience. It involves skilled, imaginative verbal performance on the one hand and writing on the other. Its subject matter is as wide as human experience itself. It includes myths, legends, and folktales, technical, scholarly and journalistic writings.⁸

3. Contributions of missionaries to the languages and literature of Northeast

The annals of the missionary works in the Northeast will account the introduction of literacy to the efforts of the earlier missionaries. It was the earnestness and enthusiasm of the Baptist Mission of Serampore under William Carey to give the first Khasi Bible *The Khashee New Testament* in Bengali script in 1831.⁹ Later on the Welsh Presbyterian Mission under Rev. Thomas Jones adopted the Roman script.¹⁰ There were many reactions to this changeover. The Khasis strongly resented this and even made an attempt to burn down the missionary school. The Jaintias felt it as an attack on their tradition.¹¹ However, the Roman script gradually entrenched itself. The same was true of the Garo language. It was the missionaries who gave the language a script, first the Bengali script and later the Roman script. E.G. Phillips developed the Garo language in the Roman script and published the New Testament *Niam Kitab* in the Roman script.¹² The Mizo language got the Roman script through Rev. S.W.Savidge and J.H.Lorraine of the Arthington Aborigine Mission Society in 1894.¹³ William Pettigrew did the same for the Tangkhul language and the Thadou-Kuki language. He gave to these people the Bible in their own language.¹⁴ The same tale will accompany the maturing and acquisition of script for the other indigenous languages in Northeast India.

The evangelisation of the Naga tribes was accompanied with efforts to educate and present the Gospel message in their own languages. E.W Clark introduced the Roman script for the Aos and by early 1877, his first little *Ao Naga Primer* with some hymns was ready. Then he undertook the translation of the Gospel of Mathew. His greatest contribution to the Ao language may be his *Ao Naga Dictionary* consisting of 977 pages, printed in 1911. Besides Clark there were also other missionaries like Longwell, Rivenburg, S.A Perrine, W.F Dowd who contributed greatly to the Ao language. The development of the Angami language owe its debt to Rivenburg, Tranquist and Supplee who supplied Hymn books, prayer books, speller and the translation of the Bible. W.E Witter learnt Lotha and published a catechism and grammar book.¹⁵

Much could be said and written to laud the contribution of the earlier missionaries to the growth and maturing of the indigenous languages and literature. It could be well concluded that many Christian missionaries are credited with bringing out the compilations of dictionaries, grammars, primers and spelling books in different

tribal languages. Such pioneering efforts of committing indigenous languages to writing through the translation of the Bible and other works have significantly helped in initiating programmes of literacy among many tribes.¹⁶

4. Contribution of the catholic church to the language and literature of Northeast

The whole missionary endeavour of the Church is to make the 'Church as the universal sacrament of salvation',¹⁷ and so it continues the mandate of Christ to preach to all nations. In doing so missionaries have always observed the need to master the languages to pass on the richness of the Word of God to people. We have witnessed that wherever the Gospel was preached efforts were made to foster, nurture and promote the languages of the people evangelized. Great varieties of literature like dictionaries, grammars, catechism books, biographies, storybooks, poems, readers and the translation of the Scriptures were created by the missionaries. Many prayer books and hymnbooks were compiled, and foundation for Christian literature was laid. The missionaries have made and continue to make a special contribution to linguistic researches and science. Hundreds of languages, especially those of the primitives, have become known through their efforts.¹⁸

In Northeast India, among the Catholic missionaries, the German Salvatorians were the first to make a substantial contribution to the growth and maturing of the Khasi language. Fr. Otto Hopfenmueller dedicated himself to the learning of Khasi and in a short period got the "Our Father" and the "Hail Mary" translated into Khasi. He was instrumental in getting the catechism book, the morning and evening prayers translated. Besides these, he also translated the mass prayers, the Schuster's Bible History, Life of Jesus and Mary.¹⁹

The Salvatorians had a small press at Laitkynsew, and from there a publication under the title *U Nongialam Catholic* (The Catholic Leader) appeared monthly. Fr. Gerhard Abele with his printing press published a part of scripture, catechism book, a prayer and songbook, calendar, etc. With Fr. Muenzohler taking over the press as director a regular monthly called *Ka Iing Kristan* (The Christian Family) was launched.²⁰

The arrival of the Salesians in 1922 revived the printing press of the Salvatorians. The Catholic monthly *Ka Iing Kristan* was restarted.

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Great personalities among the Salesians, who excelled in the publications of works in the indigenous languages were, Fr. J. Bacchiarello, Fr. G. Costa, Fr. Elias Hopewell, Mgr. E. Bars, Fr. Sylvanus Sngi, Archbishop T. Resto, Fr. Fantin and others.

Fr. J. Bacchiarello's *Ka Dienjat ki Longshwa* (Footprint of our Predecessors); Fr. G. Costa's *Ka Riti jong Ka Ri Laiphew Syiem* (1936-37); Mgr. E. Bars' English-Khasi Dictionary' Fr. Sylvanus Sngi's *Ka Dikshonari Grik Khasi jong ka Jutang Bathymmai* and *Ka Dikshonari Hibru Khasi bad Aramaik Khasi jong ka Jutang Barim*; the Khasi weekly *Ka Sur Shipara* (Voice of the Brethren), and his Commentaries of the Bible; Archbishop T. Resto's *Ki shipai U Blei*; Fr. Fantin's *Ka Lynti Bneng* and the *Ka Baibel Khasi Bathymmai* (1977) and writings of others, will stand as testimonies to the dedicated and sincere evangelistic motivation of the Salesian Missionaries.²¹

Among the Garos, Fr. Pianazzi published a prayer book called *Jisuna Rasong* in 1932. He also authored a series of Catechism books *Katholik Toromni Skianirang*, a three-volume history of the Catholic Church called *Isolni Songnokni Itihas* and a pastors' handbook (*Prochorokni Kitap*). Besides these, there was a journal *Sengbaa* (Dawn) by Fr. Pianazzi in 1933. Fr. A. Victor had also written several books in Garo. The *Skeichengani Kitap* of Fr. K.A Thomas also may be put on record.²²

In the Assam plains Fr. Leo Piasecki published the Hindi monthly called *Salesian Khabaren* (Salesian News). Fr. Anthony Del Col arranged the translation of Riciotti's *Life of Christ* in Assamese. Fr. Paviotti published grammar in Assamese. Fr. U.V. Jose has translated some parts of the Gospels into Rabha. Fr. Balavoine studied the Tiwa language and introduced the Roman script into Tiwa and wrote grammar, prayer book, missal, primer, Bible History, Hymn-book, Mass book and translated the New Testament. Fr. John Marie brought out a Karbi Catholic monthly called *Klirthang* (Shining Star). Fr. John Larrea was instrumental in preparing literature in the Lotha language. He supervised the printing of *A Katholik Longtsu Yi*.²³

From the above discussion, we can infer that the Salesian missionaries had made much contribution to the flowering and maturing of the indigenous languages in Northeast India. Great many publication centers have been opened to foster the growth and spread of indigenous literature as well as good readings.

5. Importance and need of learning languages

Article 7 of the Salesian Constitutions states: “Our vocation calls us to be deeply united with the world and its history. Open to the cultural values of the lands in which we work, we try to understand them and make them our own, so as to incarnate in them the message of the Gospel”.²⁴ In order to be open to the cultural values of the areas we work and incarnate the message of the Gospel in their culture, we need to know the languages of the people. The language of the heart will not suffice; the spoken language needs to be acquired to break the barriers of communication.

The history of a language is intimately bound up with the history of the people who speak it. The people and their language are so connected that to have a profound knowledge of a particular group of people, requires the knowledge of their language. Hence, an outside view and opinion of the people from hearsay will not suffice to indicate knowledge of the people, until the language of the people is mastered and spoken. The ethos, cultural outlook, aspirations and achievements of the people are expressed in oral tradition folk tales. Therefore, a well-grounded knowledge of their language is important in order to plump deep into their mind-set and worldview. Moreover, the people we work for, being more on the illiterate side, and with no written documents, will need a substantial and realistic contribution from our part to formulate a written language of their own.

The term 'mission' indicates “the work of preaching the Gospel and implanting the Church among people who do not yet believe in Christ [...] The special end of this missionary activity is the evangelisation and the implanting of the Church among peoples or groups in which it has not yet taken root.”²⁵ The implanting of the Gospel would have deeper root if the announcement of the Good News is through the native language of the people evangelised. Moreover, the “Missionary activity is ultimately bound up with human nature and its aspirations.”²⁶ Nothing is as close to 'human nature and its aspirations' as the human language. Hence, a missionary who knows the language can cross the cultural gap and touch the deepest fibre of the people, and thus earn their empathy and goodwill. The ground is prepared and the work of evangelisation will bear the desired fruits. Learning the language of the people to be evangelised helps the missionary to explain faith “in terms of the philosophy and wisdom of the people” and “the Christian life will be adapted to the mentality and character of each culture”.²⁷

Being missionary minded, the Church understands the importance of learning languages. Speaking about the need for training missionaries stress is given to the learning of languages. "They should learn their language so that they can speak it easily and correctly and so be able to enter more easily into the minds and hearts of the people".²⁸

It may be pointed out that for effective missionary endeavours, it is necessary to know the special character of a people, their history, their intellectual heritage, their customs and social structure, and above all, their religious ideas and prescriptions. The key to all these is the language of the people. The missionary must make himself understood; he must be thoroughly familiar with the given language if the message of the Gospel is to be understood and if Christianity is to be adopted and given a solid foothold. Thus it is imperative to learn languages, so that the sowing of the seed of God's word is made effective.

6. Contributions to language and literature by the Salesians of Dimapur province

Under this heading I shall deal with the contributions made by individual Salesians to some of the indigenous languages of Northeast India. We can notice here a considerable degree of interest and zeal manifested by several Salesians in promoting indigenous languages and literature. In some cases the Salesians have been the pioneers in promoting the indigenous languages.

6.1. Fr. Palliparambil George (P.K)

He has published a Wancho Hymnal and prayer book.²⁹

6.2. Fr. Kottarathil Mathai (C.D)

He has made great contribution in the promotion and preservation of the Nocte language. His contribution includes:

1. *Rangkhen Pangte* (a quiz book on Jesus)
2. *Apangse Chhat pe* (Infancy narrative)
3. *Joban Rangtho e* (a prayer book)
4. *Se me Soam e* (a short hymnbook)
5. *Mark Jumko Nginsen* (the Gospel of Mark in Nocte which is yet to be published)
6. *A dictionary* in Nocte language.

6.3. Fr. Mattappally Joby

In his short period of contact with the Nishis, Fr. Joby Mattappally has taken keen interest in the language and authored a book entitled *Spoken English Through Nishi* which has undergone a second revised edition.

6.4 Fr. Kalapurackal Thomas (K.A)

The initiatives and zeal of Fr. K.A Thomas for the Mising people cannot be contested. The community leaders training programme is well known and is a much appreciated initiative. Moreover, he has keen interest in the promotion of indigenous culture, language and literature. Fr. Thomas has co-authored, and helped the publication of many books in Mising such as:

1. *Anu Agom* (a Mising Monthly Newspaper)
2. *Yayoke Doying Payeg*
3. *Mising Gomsiri*
4. *Mising General Knowledge*
5. *Doying Pera* (Folktales)
6. *enpone Komputer Potin* (Computer Manual)
7. *Mopi Lolad Jisu Kristo* (Life of Christ)
8. *Kristan Kumtom* (Prayer Book)
9. *Mathike Adnam* (Gospel of Mathew)
10. *Mark ke Adnam* (Gospel of Mark)
11. *Irroi* (Hymns)
12. *Mathi : KC Adnam Ainc Do : Ying*
13. *Mark : KC Adnam Ainc Do : Ying*

Besides these, he has to his credit two books in Assamese; (a) 2 Volumes of *Idioms and Phrases in Assamese*, (b) *Petals* (General Knowledge on Assam, bilingual).

6.5 Thottathimyalil Francis (T.J)

It may not be an exaggeration to say that he is a linguist of a high calibre. The many pioneering works in the field of literature will corroborate my statement. His contribution is great, both to Nishi and Rongmei languages.

Nishi

1. *Tugung Pui* (Good News Gospels)
2. *Au Gaengda Lampia* (collection of 40 composed hymns)

Rongmei

1. *Inthanmei Cheiguan* (Holy Week)
2. *First Ever Rongmei Grammar*
3. *First Ever Rongmei-Anglo Dictionary*
4. *Jubilee Kang* (compilation 40 hymns composed)
5. *Tingsaeng jaeng inkha loumei Pui* (Novena to Perpetual Succour)
6. *Jisu Lungthu* (Prayer for Divine Mercy)
7. Presently working on the Full Catholic Bible in Rongmei
8. He had edited four magazines published four times a year (*You Decide*, *Nang Ruai Chunmei*, *Parish Khuan Kasuak Khuan*, *Nang Sui Kaibe*)

6.6 Fr. Narimattam Mathew

Fr. Mathew Narimattam is well versed in the Assamese language. He is one of the few Salesians who had shown great interest in the Assamese language and culture. The books listed below will authenticate this statement.

1. *Hotyo Deep* (2 editions)
2. *Snehabandhu*
3. *Christor hoite Aru Christor Obihone*
4. *Jibonor Harothi* (2 editions)
5. *Baibelor Porisoi*

6.7 Fr. Palatty Devassy

The first Bible in the Maram language owes its credit to the inspiration and painstaking effort of Fr. Devassy Palatty. Along with the MACA (Maram Area Catholic Association) he has succeeded in giving to the Maram people the New Testament in their own dialect.

6.8 Fr. Thuruthiyil Sebastian

Working among the Nishis, Fr Sebastian Thuruthiyil has been instrumental in authoring two publications.

1. *An Introduction to Nishi*
2. *Au Gada Yab Lampta* (2 editions)

6.9 Fr. Puthenpurakal Joseph (P.V)

In collaboration with some lay people Fr. Joseph Puthenpurkal has published a book entitled *A Guide to Nagamese*

6.10 Fr. Tinglung Francis

The latest compilation of songs and prayers in Rongmei *Thuanpui Lu* owes its credit to his untiring effort.

At this juncture we may mention the newsletter *Parish Khuan* of Tamenglong Parish. It was started way back in the late 1970's with Fr. Joe Ngamkhuchung and continued due to the interest of Fr. Alex Pulimoottil and Fr. C.D Mathai. Fr. Tony Pellisery standardised it into a booklet in standard print. Fr. T.J Francis changed the name to *Kasuak Khuan* and gave it a further facelift. The newsletter is regular and has gained further momentum and fillip in the hands of Fr. P.X Francis.³⁰

7. Motivating force

The motivating forces behind this entire endeavour were varied in their nature. By and large, the missionary zeal and enthusiasm is the primary force. For a clear understanding I would like to list them here:³¹

1. To make people understand their religion.
2. To make Jesus known and understood better.
- 3.. To make God's word available to all.
4. To make efforts to spread God's word.
5. To develop the language and culture of the people.
6. To help students learn English through their mother tongue.
7. Help the people appreciate their own culture and the logic of their language.
8. To develop local languages.
9. To motivate the people and give them an identity.
10. To strengthen the cultural ethos of the people, unify them and make them grow.

All these points clearly indicate a sincere love for the language of the people and a sense of commitment to the growth of the people both spiritually, culturally and linguistically.

8. Challenges encountered

All the Salesians involved directly in the work of developing indigenous languages face many challenges. Some of them are very realistic while others seem to be posed from within the family circle.

1. Lack of sufficient vocabulary in the local dialects / languages.
2. Lack of understanding of the grammatical structure of the languages.
3. Absence of authorised script in the same language (e.g. Nishi).
4. No previous publication of literature.
5. Presence of dialectical differences in many of the languages.
6. No educated person in the tribe who could proof-read and correct the manuscripts.
7. Financial constraints.
8. Lack of good distributing system.
9. Lack of understanding on the part of some Salesians on the value and importance of the work.
10. Lack of encouragement.
11. Lack of interest in some Salesians.

9. Support from Salesians

Quite many opined that Salesians in general are not very supportive and encouraging in developing local dialects and indigenous languages. Many are indifferent to this dimension of our apostolate. Buildings seem to be more important for us Salesians than promotion of cultures. Developing literature is, therefore, secondary. Moreover, there is money for buildings and other projects, but for developing literature there seems to be lack of funds. Of course, some do express that there was support and encouragement from some confreres and people.

10. Attitude of the province

It may be stated that the province does encourage involvement in the field of promotion of indigenous languages. But a factual analysis indicates that the province is quite *neutral* in its attitude. It neither directly gives impetus to this apostolate, nor does it discourages anyone. The actual attitude is to leave the matter to the interest of individuals. There is neither any explicit regulation on this matter, nor any financial assistance to promote this work. Hence, all the

contributions made to indigenous languages and literature is the fruit of individual enterprise and interest. The confrere has to find his own time, procure the required materials and search for the required funds.

It can be stated confidently that there are confreres who are really interested in the promotion and propagation of indigenous languages and literature. However, without denying the indifference of some, we may affirm that some have realised the importance of knowing the language in the work of evangelisation. My suggestion is that, both the province and individual confreres should work out a strategy to get more people involved in the task of promoting indigenous languages and literature.

11. A situation analysis

Our province presents a context of multiplicity of languages. The vast region incorporates diverse language environments with every change of place. Hence, it is an impossibility to learn all the languages prevalent in the region. Nevertheless, what is expected here is openness to the context, and an attitude of willingness to make sincere effort to learn a language. I do not deny the problem of frequent transfers which our religious vow of obedience demands. Given the context of multiplicity of languages, frequent transfers do come in the way of learning local languages. Quite many feel the futility of attempting to learn a language because one is not sure how long he will stay in a particular area. There is a strong feeling among the confreres that transfers do dampen the interest in learning languages.

Moreover, a confrere placed in a particular place for quite many years faces criticism and negative talks among confreres. But if a confrere is doing well and learning the language of the people and making positive contributions to it, he should be given enough time to do his good work. Of course, confreres who are not making effort in this regard need not be given this privilege. I suggest that we need to identify confreres who have the aptitude and interest for learning languages, and place them in a suitable context where they are able to give their time and energy to learn a particular language. In general, confreres do develop a liking and interest working with a particular group of people. I feel that we can harness this positive point and make constructive decisions towards promotion of indigenous

languages and literature. In this connection, I am aware of the danger of people becoming too much attached to a particular area and group of people, to the extent that they become immovable. Such a situation is not in keeping with our religious spirit because we need to avail ourselves to the needs of the province.

A critical analysis of the situation in the province indicates a sincere commitment on the part of the province, and the authority concerned, to formulate ways and means, to promote and propagate indigenous languages and literature. Each confrere should develop sincere love for the people he works for, so that he will cultivate a love for the language and culture. A passionate interest in the people we work for will generate the interest in their language, history, culture and literature. A person who does not love a group of people should never be sent to that place. Or else he will only have negative opinion of the people, and destroy the good others have done. Furthermore, if a person cannot learn a language, he should be placed in a situation where he is better suited. This will help the confrere to achieve some sense of fulfilment and joy in life.

12. Challenges

The introduction of English medium schools has been an apt response to the need of the time and place. However, in the long run we are churning out of our schools generations of boys and girls who have no link to their culture and language, except the fact that they speak their mother tongue. Many of them feel secure in the English language and given the option they would prefer the English language. The knowledge of English has become a status symbol. The young generation does not like to read literature in their mother tongue. In fact many of them are fluent in English, but not in their own tongue. The confreres also feel that English must be taught at all cost, and in the process indirectly kill the interest of the students for their own languages.

Globalisation has entered the fabric of the tribal mind too. This has given rise to an elitist mentality. Those who are educated, move out of their cultural setting and takes on Western mode of living. A gradual distancing from the language and culture occurs and finally the link is snapped. In this process of globalisation many indigenous languages are threatened with extinction. In most cases they cannot redeem themselves, and an external intervention is required to save them from extinction.

In this context, we are called upon to render our expertise and dedication. We may have to redouble our interest, motivation and efforts to save local languages from extinction. We may have to do the important task of instilling in the people a love for their languages and dialects. We may have to break our own mediocrity, indifference and passivity and take a plunge. Our active involvement in promoting indigenous languages, dialects and literature will be in line with the Church's mind of missionary involvement and inculturation. Let each confrere feel challenged to learn at least one local language. The decision to make every Salesian in initial formation acquire a working knowledge of any local language before diaconate should be strictly enforced. They should be given the freedom to choose a language of their interest and expose them to that language as often as possible. This will prepare them for their future apostolate.

Another serious challenge posed is the availability of fund to undertake publication and propagation of literature in local languages. There is no fund allotted from the province for anyone to assist him in this task. The financial constraint hampers the growth of literature in indigenous languages. The question is, can the province avail some fund for such enterprises? I feel it should, because if we do not take up this task seriously, we will be distancing ourselves from the people. The moment we distance ourselves from the people, whatever great things we may do, it will have no relevance to them. We may create name for ourselves, but we will never make inroad into the inner world of the people. Then the buildings we set up will only stand to testify our pride and arrogance. But getting involved with the people by way of knowing their language and contributing our energy and talent to the preservation of their language, we will write history of imperishable value in books as well as in the hearts and minds of people.

It may be noted that many confreres are neither really convinced of the importance of learning a language nor in familiarising themselves with the culture and history of the people. We lack love for our indigenous staff. They are not encouraged to undertake publication works. We isolate them and feel a kind of self-sufficiency in our situations and create for ourselves islands where we feel snug and comfortable. The challenge is to break free from our fortresses and get immersed in the wants and cares of the people. For that we need to know their languages, since it is the means of their self-expression.

Dimapur Province in Prespective

As already mentioned, frequent transfers hamper the interest in learning languages. At times confreres who are just picking up a particular language are given transfers. Transfers are necessary, but can we not sort out some ways to facilitate the learning of the language while fulfilling the need of the province? One suggestion could be to transfer the confreres who are learning a particular language to another house falling under the area where the same language is spoken. The younger confreres who are more energetic, dynamic and enthusiastic about learning languages are transferred quite often. And old confreres who are neither interested in learning nor promoting a language, are left untouched.

It may be good to consider placing young confreres in mission stations, if they so desire, so that they can pick up local languages. They should be encouraged and supported in this endeavor. It is important that time and money is made available to them for constructive work of creating literature in indigenous languages.

There is need for a planned strategy and concerted effort to promote indigenous languages and literature. It is a challenge for every one of us. All the confreres of the province can make a united effort to get in touch with the local languages. Some of us may be linguists who can go deeper; some others may just pick up only a working knowledge of a particular language. Whatever it is, each one should get involved in the important task of learning languages, according to his capacity.

13. Some suggestions for the future

From a survey conducted, I have gathered the following points for the promotion of the indigenous languages and literature of the region.

The first point for consideration is the realisation by all of the importance of learning the language of the people with whom we work. All must realise that knowledge of the language breaks the barriers for effective communication of the Gospel message. Hence, Salesians should be more committed to learning the local languages. It should be made mandatory for all to know at least one major language of the region. As of now we are an elite group, whose business is to run elite English medium schools. We are living the life of the upper middle class, quite happy with reading English newspapers, magazines, watching English news and making English our mother tongue. Some do look upon the local languages and customs with very little or no respect.

Each confrere could be asked to identify the local language of his preference, and necessary arrangements should be made to facilitate the learning of that language.

There is the need to appreciate confreres who are really involved in this task, and acknowledge their contributions. Encouragement should be offered to such individuals who are sincerely interested in this. A corpus fund for the promotion and propagation of indigenous language and literature could be introduced at the provincial level.

As far as possible we should learn the real tribal names and not be satisfied with the baptism names. We should make our people feel proud of their own tribal names. Through this we encourage the process of inculturation.

14. Possible works that could be taken up

In the first place with regard to the Nishi language the possible works that could be undertaken are the following:

- Publication of small pictorial books on Bible stories.
- Preparation of a Catholic Bible in Nishi.
- Recording audiocassettes on religious themes.
- Dictionary and grammar in Upper Nishi.

It is felt that the people are co-operative and helpful to anyone showing interest in this regard. There is the possibility of joining hands with the "Nishi Elite Society" towards preparing a Nishi script and publishing textbooks. The same kinds of works could be taken up for other languages too.

We can write the history of the locality in their language. Many more religious books could be translated. Many Salesians can get involved in writing articles for the local newspapers. The rich traditional folktales could be collected and written down. Publications of Catechism books in local languages could also be encouraged. If we really explore possibilities we will find quite many. The problem will be time, money, personnel and then the interest of confreres.

Some other suggestions are; publication of grammars and lower primary textbooks, teaching of the language in our schools, learning of the language by the Salesians, and getting lay people to help us.

Dimapur Province in Prespective

Besides these the other suggestions are as follows:

- Establishment of a language laboratory in the province.-
- Building a cultural centre, where artefacts and articles of anthropological interest could be preserved.
- Language seminars could be conducted.
- Documentation and cultural research centre for the province.

All the above-mentioned activities are possible to the extent confreres develop sincere love for the people. If there is love for the people, love for their language, culture, history, customs etc., will follow. Therefore, before we think of doing anything, we need to develop a love for the peoples and cultures of the region.

Conclusion

Language is powerful means of communication within and outside a society. It is the means for the expression of thoughts and thus is a path into the mind and heart of a people. Language is precious to anyone who possesses it. If you speak the language of a person, you have found entry into his heart, his worldview, aspirations, songs and sobs. Since language is a cultural phenomenon, it is also an entry point to the cultural ethos, hopes, dreams, struggles and achievement of a group of people. Hence, the learning of a language is important for the success of any missionary endeavour.

Literature is the outcome of a desire to perpetuate human beings' thoughts, ideas, achievements, history, and cultural development. Literature thus creates history. It does the work of preservation of cultural richness, and the perpetuation of the history of a tribe.

The situation in Northeast with regard to the development of language and literature is still in its infancy. Many of the indigenous languages are still discovering or yet to discover an accepted script. Although many have adopted the Roman script, the search for a well-defined script continues. A great many of these indigenous languages owe their debt to the missionaries, Catholics as well as Protestants, for the preservation and growth of their languages. The Church and the Congregation also have great responsibility towards this. Moreover, as a province, we have many miles to go, before we can rest contented towards contributions to the preservation, promotion and propagation of the indigenous languages and literature.

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20. Ibid., p. 350.
21. Ibid., pp. 351- 353.
22. Ibid., p. 354.
23. Ibid., pp. 354-355
24. *Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales*, 7.
25. Cfr. *Ad Gentes*, 6.
26. Ibid., 8.
27. Ibid., 22.
28. Ibid., 26.
29. The exact year and place of publication was not available to the author at the time of writing this paper. It is the same with many of the publications listed here.
30. There may be other newsletters of different parishes in the local languages. I must confess that I have not made an extensive research on the topic. The lists of contributions made may also suffer some want. Nevertheless, I have made an attempt to include as many as possible.
31. The following points are based on a survey conducted by the author, especially from Salesians who are directly involved in writing and publishing literature in the indigenous languages.

**THE FINAL STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH
SEMINAR 2004
PROVINCE OF DIMAPUR
29 June - 1 July 2004**

The Salesian Province of Dimapur conducted a province level research seminar at Don Bosco Provincial house, Dimapur from 29th June to 1 July 2004. It was organised as a requirement for the national level research seminar to be held in 2005 in preparation for the centenary celebrations of the arrival of the first Salesians in India (1906-2006).

Twenty-four (24) confreres, including the Provincial and the Provincial Council members participated in the seminar. Rev.Fr.Thomas Mulayinkal, the Provincial, presided over the inaugural Mass, and delivered the inaugural address during the first session. In his address he observed, quoting the words of Fr. Egidio Vigano that “the Congregation in India has grown so rapidly that the growth is miraculous. It is especially in India that among all the nations of Asia, the Salesian Mission has had the greatest result”. Hence the year 2006 will be etched in our memory and in the annals of history as a time of thanksgiving for the wonders the Lord has worked in India in the past 100 years. During the seminar 15 'research' papers were presented which covered the following areas: history of the province of Dimapur, policy of expansion, evangelisation, faith formation, youth ministry, education (formal and non-formal), formation, social communication, culture and social development.

The main objective of the seminar was to enable us to take a critical look at the past and the present Salesian life and mission in the province and to “let down the nets for another catch” (Jn.21.6). The general principles that guided the participants of the seminar in their study and discussions are the following:

Dimapur Province in Prespective

1. Fidelity to Don Bosco, Salesian traditions and practices
2. Emphasis on *being* rather than doing
3. Option for the poor and the marginalised youth
4. Training of Salesians and lay collaborators.
5. Role of mass media and social communication and publications
6. Seminars as means of animating the confreres and provincial commissions as means of implementation
7. Responsive areas in evangelisation
8. Learning of local languages
9. Study and appreciation of local cultures.
10. Promotion of peace in the region

Given below is a summary of the salient points arising out of the papers and discussions.

1. POLICY OF EXPANSION

1.1 While planning for the expansion in the province we should keep in mind the validity of the recommendations of Don Bosco to his first missionaries.

1.2. In the policy of expansion, care should be taken to distribute the Salesian personnel and resources among peoples belonging to various ethnic groups and cultures according to their needs and response.

1.3 While appreciating the new trend in the province regarding the works of expansion and diversification of activities, our typical works in mission centres, like parishes, schools, boardings, etc., should be taken up urgently and consolidated with regard to Arunachal Pradesh.

2. EVANGELISATION

2.1 The person of the missionary is basic to evangelisation. Hence he must be a contemplative in action and should “forget his own country, his own people and his father’s house” (Ps 44:11) and be totally at the service of the Kingdom of God and God’s people.

2.2 It is impossible to evangelise without the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Hence we need to be Spirit filled persons and keep abreast of the Spiritual movements that are taking place around us.

2.3 First evangelisation is still one of the important priorities of the province.

2.4 Though everyone is important in evangelisation, the role of the pioneer is unique and he should be recognised as such.

2.5 In appointing confreres to be frontline missionaries and leaders of mission centres, care should be taken to choose persons who have solid theological formation, deep spirituality, ability for team work, pastoral zeal, and are also good models of religious and priestly life.

2.6 Conscious of the presence of various Christian denominations and people of Other Faiths in the region, the province should take initiatives to adopt Church Growth principles and methods of evangelisation of other denominations.

3. EDUCATION TO FAITH

3.1 All our parishes and mission stations should conduct regular and well-organised catechism classes for all the Catholic youth and adults.

3.2 The catechetical commission should prepare materials, which can be translated and put into various Parish Newsletters.

3.3 We could offer ourselves as teachers of Catechism and Moral Science also in non-Salesian institutions close to us and offer specialised training for teachers of Catechism and Moral Science.

4. YOUTH APOSTOLATE

4.1 All our institutions should engage in some form of apostolate, which will be for the benefit of the marginalised youth of their respective localities. Sunday or daily oratories/youth centres is one of the best means of reaching out to the marginalised local youth.

4.2 We should select the best youth from our schools, colleges and parishes and prepare them and motivate them as co-workers to reach out to areas of need.

4.3 We could identify good students and send them to places that provide coaching for medical/engineering entrance tests, IIT/IISc/IIM/IAS/Central Services, etc. DBYES in particular can take initiatives for identifying candidates for such courses and send them to suitable places for training.

5. EDUCATION

5.1 We need to transform our present educational system the target group, our methods, the content - to produce educated people who are honest, unselfish, service-minded and capable of making critical reflection on their society and culture so as to be catalysts for social change.

5.2 We should evolve a programme by which we can prevent drop outs.

5.3 We should provide an education that enables young people not only to develop their personality, but provide job-oriented education.

5.4 While following up our school children we could also organise their parents to participate in our educational system and apostolate.

6. FORMATION

6.1 In the early stages of formation greater emphasis should be placed on the human and the Christian formation of our candidates.

6.2 Candidates to Salesian life should possess sufficient intellectual aptitude to cope with the demands of the studies they need to do as candidates to religious life and priesthood and to be competent educators.

6.3 In order to provide opportunities for on-going formation, every six years either after perpetual profession or priestly ordination confreres should be given a period of three to six months for personal spiritual renewal and updating, according to the interest of the confrere.

7. SALESIAN RELIGIOUS LIFE

7.1 We need to cultivate the habit of deeper personal prayer, greater ability to engage in serious reading, study and critical reflection.

7.2 There seems to be a general decline in our knowledge of Don Bosco and his charism. In order to remedy this situation the following means are suggested:

7.2.1 During all the stages of initial formation regular classes, courses, seminars, conferences, etc. should be conducted on the above themes

7.2.2 Once in every three years the province should organise a 'Salesian Retreat' and make it obligatory for all the confreres of the province to attend the same.

7.2.3 Traditional Salesian practices like, commemoration of the 24th of the month (Mary Help of Christians), last day of every month (Don Bosco), good nights, novenas, triduums, 'academies' prior to major feasts, proper celebration of the liturgical feasts and

commemorations of the saints of the Salesian family and so on are to be emphasised and meticulously carried out in all our houses.

8. HIGHER EDUCATION

8.1 The colleges of the province should be staffed with qualified Salesians and members of the Salesian family.

8.2 Some of our colleges should study the possibility of introducing Christian theology as a major (honours) subject at the graduate level. This is especially in view of preparing the religious and the laypersons for teaching Christian doctrine and Moral Science in Catholic schools, colleges and villages of the region.

8.3 The province should encourage more Salesians to enter into the university departments of the States in which we work with the view to give a Christian influence in the field of higher education.

8.4 The province should encourage confreres who show special aptitude and interest in scientific study and research.

9. SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS

9.1 Courses in mass media and social communication should become part of the normal curriculum for all stages of formation, in all our schools and colleges and other educational settings. We should also extend this service to other educational institutions of the areas where we work.

10. DEVELOPMENTAL WORKS

10.1 The empowerment of women should be given a priority in our apostolate. Every parish and village should have well organised women's groups.

10.2 Many communities and ethnic groups in our region do not have a very positive attitude towards the differently abled (handicapped). Therefore, the province could take initiatives to conscientise the people of the need to care for the differently abled.

10.3 The problem of violence is a serious one in our region. The Salesians need to have a change in attitude towards the present scenario and work for promoting peace.

11. CULTURES, LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE

11.1 There is a need in the province for a cultural centre with a documentation department and a specialised library.

Dimapur Province in Prespective

11.2 Persons who show interest in local languages should be given certain stability in the region in order to learn them well.

11.3 The province should encourage and provide assistance to persons who can contribute to local languages through translations and writing original works.

11.4 Newly ordained priests should be given appointments in such a way that at least for the first two or three months they get opportunities for learning a new local language or specialising in a local language of their choice.

Francis Thottathimyalial SDB
Mathai Kottarathil SDB
Tarcisius Toppo SDB
(The Final Statement Committee)

Don Bosco Provincial house,
Dimapur- 797112, 1 July 2004.

CONCLUDING WORDS

Dear Rev. Fr. Provincial and participants of the seminar,

We have been together for the past three days, engaged in serious study and reflection on a number of important issues related to our life and works in Northeast India. The reports from the groups, the written individual suggestions and the final statement of the seminar, reflect the seriousness with which we went about doing the task that was entrusted to us by the province. They also bear witness to the active presence and working of the Holy Spirit in our midst. Hence our sentiments of gratitude is due, first and foremost, to almighty God.

Next I express my sincere gratitude to Rev. Fr. Thomas Mulayinkal, the provincial, and the provincial council members - Fr. Jonas Kerketta, the vice-provincial, Fr. Joseph Pampackal, the provincial economer, Fr. Mathew Tharakan, Fr. Thomas Kalapurackal and Fr. John Bosco Perianayagam - for their keen interest in this seminar right from its beginning. In fact, it is they who approved the topics for study and fixed the dates of the seminar. In addition, Fr. Provincial himself gave the inaugural address, one of the provincial council members joined the co-ordinating committee, and the provincial economer agreed to bear all the expenses related to this seminar.

Next I wish to express my gratitude to the co-ordinating committee members: Fr. John Pudussery, Fr. John Bosco Perianayagam, Fr. Joseph Thettayil, Fr. Nazarius Lakra, Fr. Tarcisius Toppo and Fr. Thomas Vengakunnel. It has been a pleasure working with them and I thank them for their wholehearted support and collaboration.

This seminar would not have been possible without the fifteen confreres Fr. Sebastian Jose, Fr. Joseph Edakkudan, Fr. M. C. George, Fr. P. A. John, Fr. T. T. Joseph, Fr. Benny Karinattu, Fr. A. J. Sebastian,

Dimapur Province in Prespective

Fr.T.J.Francis, Fr. C.D.Mathai, Fr.Nazarius Lakra, Fr.Joseph Kulathunkal, Fr.Tarcisius Toppo, Fr.Jerry Thomas, Fr.K.A.Thomas, Fr.Nicholas Guangdiat who came forward to write papers on the various themes.¹ I understand that writing the papers meant for them a lot of patient work and sacrifice. Some of them took the trouble to interview people, sent out questionnaires and made on the spot studies of some of our institutions and activities. All these reveal the keen interest they had in this seminar.

Next I thank Fr. Mathai Kottarathil and Fr.Varghese Chittilappily for being the leaders of the groups for discussion, and Fr. John Puthussery and Fr. Nazarius Lakra for being the secretaries of the groups. I thank those who have presided over the Eucharistic celebrtions and moderated the various sessions. A special thanks to Fr. Nicholas Guangdiat and Fr. Benny Karinattu for being the secretaries of the seminar, and to Fr. T.J.Francis, Fr. C.D.Mathai and Fr. Tarcisius Toppo for preparing the final statement based on the discussions in groups and the general session.²

I thank all those who have assumed special responsibilities for the smooth running of the seminar like, Fr. Sebastian Jose who looked after the liturgy and the sound system, Fr. John Puthussery who prepared the files, Fr. K.V.George, the administrator of the provincial house, for seeing to the food and accommodation, and Mr. Joseph Hemrom for photocopying the seminar papers and other related materials.

Finally, I thank all of you who have participated in this seminar and contributed to its success through your active collaboration, sharing of views, suggestions and recommendations. Here I specially remember those confreres who took part in the seminar as special invitees of the provincial: Fr.V.M.Joseph, Fr.M.M.Michael, Fr.T.O.Sebastian, Fr.Nestor Guria and Fr.Francis Tinglung

There are some people who, though not participants, have contributed their share for the success of this seminar by giving their valuable suggestions. My gratitude is due also to them.

Thank you

Fr.Jose Kuruvachira SDB
(Convenor)
1 July 2004

NOTES

1. Originally, 17 topics were chosen for this seminar. But due to some practical difficulties two papers could not be presented.
2. All the participants were given a pre-prepared working document of the final statement for study.

Appendix-1

WORDS OF WELCOME

Dear Rev. Fr. Provincial and participants of the seminar,

It gives me great joy to welcome all of you to this 'research seminar' of the province of Dimapur, in preparation for the national research seminar, to mark the centenary of the arrival of the first Salesians in India in 1906. The national seminar is entitled "The Mission of Salesians in South Asia in the Third Millennium".

On behalf of Rev. Fr. Thoms Mulayinkal the provincial, who is the president of this seminar, and in the name of the co-ordinating committee, and in my own name as its convenor, I welcome all of you to this seminar.

The three days which we will be spending together will be a culmination of a preparation which we began nearly nine months ago, and more intensely in the last few months. I wish you all a time of serious study and fruitful reflection.

Have a pleasant stay at the provincial house.

Thank you.

Fr. Jose Kuruvachira SDB
(Convenor)
29 June 2004

Appendix - 2

WORKING DOCUMENT: FIRST DRAFT

THE FINAL STATEMENT OF THE PROVINCE LEVEL RESEARCH SEMINAR, DIMAPUR 29-30 June & 1 July 2004 SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Salesian Province of Dimapur, Nagaland, conducted a province level research seminar at Don Bosco Provincial house, Dimapur on 29-30 June and 1 July 2004. It was organised as a requirement for the national level research seminar in 2005 in preparation for the centenary celebrations of the arrival of the first Salesians in India (1906-2006).

A total of 27 confreres participated in the seminar, including the Provincial and the Provincial Council members. Rev.Fr.Thomas Mulayinkal, the Provincial, presided over the inaugural Mass, and delivered the inaugural address during the first session. During the seminar 15 'researched' papers were presented which covered the following areas: history of the province of Dimapur, policies of expansion, evangelisation, faith formation, youth ministry, education (formal and non-formal), formation, social communication, culture and human developmental works.

The main objective of the seminar was to take a critical look at the past and the present Salesian life and works in the province and envisage a vision for the future. As the outcome of the study and reflection, the participants of the seminar made the following suggestions and recommendations:

Dimapur Province in Prespective

1. POLICIES OF EXPANSION

1.1 In all policies of expansion, care should be taken to distribute the Salesian personnel and resources among peoples belonging to various ethnic groups and cultures, and not to concentrate too much on certain groups or particular areas alone.

1.2 While maintaining the existing formal structures and formal activities, the province should engage more decisively in caring for the poorer and the marginalised people of the region, such as, the rural poor, unemployed, school dropouts, illiterate, handicapped, orphans, street children, victims of substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, various forms of discrimination, ethnic conflicts and violence.

1.3 At present the overall situation in Arunachal Pradesh seems to be similar to the one that existed elsewhere in the province some 50 years ago. While appreciating the new trend in the province regarding the works of expansion and diversification of activities, our typical works in mission centres, parishes, schools, boardings, etc. should still be maintained and consolidated with regard to Arunachal Pradesh.

1.4 We should allocate more financial resources for the qualification of the Salesian personnel (spiritual, intellectual and cultural formation), for direct evangelisation, faith formation, care of the marginalised youth, promotion of indigenous cultures and languages, mass media and social communication and human developmental works than is the case today so that the emphasis on building structures can pave way for building up of persons.

2. EVANGELISATION

2.1 The person of the missionary is a basic component of evangelisation. Hence he must be a contemplative in action and should “forget his own country, his own people and his father's house” and be totally at the service of the Kingdom of God and God's people.

2.2 It is impossible to evangelise without the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Hence we need to be Spirit filled persons to keep abreast with the Spiritual movements that are taking place around us.

2.3 First evangelisation is still one of the important priorities of the province, especially in Arunachal Pradesh. Hence the primacy of evangelisation must be clearly manifested in our policies of expansion and investment of personnel and resources.

2.4 The province should provide opportunities for confreres to learn local languages and get acquainted with the local cultures before they are assigned to a new mission territory.

2.5 In appointing confreres to be frontline missionaries and leaders of mission centres, care should be taken to choose persons who have solid theological formation, deep spirituality, ability for team work, pastoral zeal, and are also good models of religious and priestly life.

2.6 Conscious of the presence of various Christian denominations and people of other religions in the region, the province should take initiatives to promote ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue by establishing a cell specifically for this purpose.

2.7 In order to evaluate critically and plan strategically our missionary work, once in three years the province should organise a missionary seminar or a similar programme for the animation of the missionaries. The Provincial Commission for Evangelisation and Catechesis could see to its organisation.

3. EDUCATION TO FAITH

3.1 All our parishes and mission stations should conduct regular and well-organised catechism classes for all the young Catholic boys and girls, and wherever necessary also for adults.

3.2 A catechetical centre should be set up for the province which will co-ordinate the work of the Christian formation of the baptised persons. The centre should undertake the task of preparing and publishing catechetical books and other teaching aids in local languages.

3.3 The province should start within two years the publication of a Catholic weekly or monthly of popular nature. It could also be translated into major local languages of the region.

3.4 We could offer ourselves as teachers of Catechism and Moral Science also in non-Salesian institutions close to us and offer specialised training for teachers of Catechism and Moral Science.

3.5 More Salesians should be sent for training in Catechetics. In selecting persons to do this specialisation attention should be paid to their aptitude and interest and competence in local languages.

4. YOUTH APOSTOLATE

4.1 The province should prepare more Salesians who are competent and comfortable with working the young people through a

Dimapur Province in Perspective

specific formation. Such a formation should become part of the normal curriculum of all stages of formation, beginning with the aspirantate/pre-novitiate.

4.2 There is a real need in the province for a paradigm shift in the direction of our youth apostolate along such lines as, from children to youth, schools to out-of school, formal to non-formal, institutional service to youth to non-institutional service to youth, and urban to rural.

4.3 We need to shift from the former problems of the youth to their actual problems today. We have much more to do as regards illiteracy, unemployment, drugs, HIV/AIDS and violence.

4.4 All our institutions should engage in some form of apostolate which will be for the benefit of the marginalised youth of their respective localities. Sunday or daily oratories/youth centres is one of the best means of reaching out to the marginalised local youth.

4.5 We should evolve a strategy by which we form organisations of lay persons, including those of other Christian denominations and other religions (Hindus, Muslims, etc), to carry out lots of our activities in the Salesian way in places where we work.

4.6 We should select the best youth, from our schools, colleges and parishes and prepare them and motivate them to go and serve where we cannot be.

4.7 We should conduct study centres for providing coaching for medical/engineering entrance tests, IIT/IISc/IIM/IAS/Central Services, Allied services, etc.

4.8 We need to become role models for our youth. We are admired as indefatigable workers and great achievers. If we could also be seen as more spiritual and religious than we are now, we could achieve this end.

5. EDUCATION

5.1 We need to transform our education, the target group, our methods, the content - to produce educated people who are honest, unselfish and service-minded and capable of making critical reflection on their society and culture.

5.2 We need to educate people who are not only very well equipped to look after themselves and their families but also to be catalysts for social change and transformation through their social involvement.

5.3 We need to push the young people out of our school and college compounds, out of our parish churches and boardings and make them engage in activities that are socially and culturally beneficial and productive.

5.4 We should evolve a programme by which we can prevent children dropping out of school by arranging free tuition and supervised study for the weaker students in their neighbourhood.

5.5 While providing the masses with general education, we also need to prepare young people who will be competent leaders in society in all possible fields.

5.6 We should provide an education that enables young people not only to develop their personalities to their maximum, but also give them skills that have a demand in the job market.

5.7 While following up our school children we could also organise their parents in various ways and enable them to render lots of service in the social and even in the religious sphere.

5.8 The province should establish more job-oriented formal and non-formal technical institutions for youth.

5.9 Due to the shortage of clerics many of our boardings are cared for by lay people under the occasional supervision of a Salesian. Almost all the boardings attached to diocesan parishes are run by lay people. We should share with them our skills and experiences in dealing with young people.

5.10 All our teachers and other staff should be given a complete course on Don Bosco, his life, values and principles, his method of education, the aims and objectives of the societies he founded, the *raison d'être* of the Salesian congregation, our aims and objectives in the Northeast, and in our local institution, organisational structure of our society, the variety of our apostolic services, etc.

6. FORMATION

6.1 In the early stages of formation greater emphasis should be placed on the human and the Christian formation of our candidates than is the case now. In addition, the emphasis should not only be on quantity but also on quality.

6.2 Candidates to Salesian life should possess sufficient intellectual aptitude to cope with the demands of the studies they need to do as candidates to religious life and priesthood and to be competent educators.

Dimapur Province in Prespective

6.3 In order to provide opportunities for on-going formation, every five years either after perpetual profession or priestly ordination confreres should be given a period of three to six months for personal spiritual renewal and updating, according to the interest of the confrere.

6.4 As a means to promote a culture of critical reflection and periodic evaluation of our works, the various organs of animation in the province and the provincial commissions should conduct at least one research seminar each in every six years.

7. SALESIAN RELIGIOUS LIFE

7.1 There is a need to emphasise more on cultivating our *being* as Salesians and religious than *doing* so that we become true role models for the young and make sanctity our highest goal.

7.2 We need to cultivate the habit of deeper personal prayer, greater ability to engage in serious reading, study and critical reflection.

7.3 There seems to be a general decline in our knowledge of Don Bosco, Salesian charism, Salesian spirituality, Salesian traditions, Salesian pedagogy, Salesian family, etc. In order to remedy this situation the following means are suggested:

7.3.1 During all the stages of initial formation regular classes, courses, seminars, conferences, etc. should be conducted on the above themes.

7.3.2 Once in every three years the province should organise a 'Salesian retreat' and make it obligatory for all the confreres of the province to attend it.

7.3.3 Traditional Salesian practices like, commemoration of the 24th of the month (Mary Help of Christians), last day of every month (Don Bosco), good nights, novenas, triduums, 'academies' prior to major feasts, proper celebration of the liturgical feasts and commemorations of the saints of the Salesian family and so on are to be emphasised and meticulously carried out in all our houses.

8. HIGHER EDUCATION

8.1 The existing five colleges of the province should be provided with Salesians with adequate academic qualifications, such as, post-graduate and doctoral degrees.

8.2 We should seek more collaboration from the members of the Salesian family in managing our institutions of Higher education.

8.3 Some of our colleges should study the possibility of introducing Christian theology as a major (honours) subject at the graduate level. This is especially in view of preparing the religious and the lay persons for teaching Christian doctrine and Moral Science in Catholic schools, colleges and villages of the region.

8.4 The province should encourage more Salesians to enter into the university departments of the States in which we work with the view to give a Christian influence in the field of higher education.

8.5 The province should encourage persons who show special aptitude and interest in scientific study and research and, as far as possible, they should be freed from heavy administrative responsibilities.

8.6 To ensure a solid Christians foundation for the Church in Northeast India, the province should take initiative to establish a Chair of Christianity or a Department of Religious Studies (with Christianity, Ecumenism, Inter-faith dialogue, World Religions, Tribal religions, etc. as its specialisation), in any of the universities of the region which is open to this idea.

8.7 When appointing confreres as heads of our educational institutions and its various departments, care should be taken to choose persons with deep religious and spiritual convictions, pastoral outlook, adequate knowledge of Salesian pedagogy, capacity for collaboration and teamwork. Mere academic qualifications and administrative abilities alone should not be the criteria for appointment to such posts.

9. SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

9.1 Courses in mass media and social communication should become part of the normal curriculum for all stages of formation and all our schools and colleges and other educational settings. We should also extend this service to other educational institutions of the areas where we work.

9.2 Some of our colleges should offer mass media and social communication as subject for degree courses.

9.3 Considering the importance of social communication the province should set up a well equipped centre for social communication with a production and publication department attached to it.

9.4 Within three years the province should launch a weekly or a monthly newspaper which could eventually become a daily for the whole of Northeast India. In this venture we could seek collaboration from other provinces of Northeast, from the Salesian family and from the various dioceses.

9.5 We should qualify more confreres and lay persons in the field of mass media and social communication.

10. DEVELOPMENTAL WORKS

10.1 Widespread poverty and economic backwardness is an alarming reality, especially in the rural areas of our region. There is a need to shift our apostolate from urban to rural so that the persons who benefit from us the most can be the rural poor who need us most.

10.2 The possibility of giving children nutritive food should be considered in our rural schools. It will also be an incentive for more poor children to come to school.

10.3 The empowerment of women should be given a priority in our apostolate. Every parish and village should have well organised women's groups.

10.4 Many communities and ethnic groups in our region do not have a very positive attitude towards the handicapped. Therefore, the province could take initiatives to conscientise the people of the need to care for the handicapped and engage in works that are directly to their benefit.

10.5 In collaboration with other like-minded persons and organisations we should set up a human rights watch cell in our region. In view of this some persons should be sent for the study Law and related subjects.

10.6 The problem of violence is a serious one in our region. Through our educational institutions and personal initiatives of individual Salesians and communities we should engage more in the apostolate of promoting peace.

10.7 We should initiate contacts with leaders of all forms of unions, organisations and associations. We should train such leaders for society by giving them an understanding of the Constitution of the country, national and state level laws regarding the areas of their concern, principles and functioning of democracy, organisational skills, effectiveness in public speaking, art of negotiating, techniques of influencing public opinion, management of campaigns, innovative

methods of fund raising that do not harass people, office management, effective correspondence, prowess in debating, etc.

11. CULTURE

11.1 Province should get more confreres qualified in such subjects as Anthropology, Sociology, Social work, Linguistics, Religious studies, Tribal studies, etc.

11.2 The province should set up without delay a cultural centre with a full time director and a team to assist him.

11.3 The cultural centre will undertake, with the help of experts, scientific studies and researches on aspects of the cultural life of the people of the region.

11.4 The cultural centre will have its own publication department.

11.5 The cultural centre will publish a periodical or review of scientific nature, and organise animation programmes for religious and lay persons working in the region.

11.6 The cultural centre will have a documentation department, a specialised library and space for storing cultural artefacts.

12. LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

12.1 Learning local languages should be insisted upon in all stages of formation and opportunities should be provided for the same. Every year a part of their vacation could be spent for courses in local languages.

12.2 Persons who show interest in local languages should be given certain stability in the region in order to learn them well. They should not be transferred to other areas frequently.

12.3 The province should set up a language laboratory and offer intensive courses in local languages, using methods that are modern, scientific pedagogically sound.

12.4 The province should positively encourage and provide assistance to persons to contribute to local languages through publications, translations and writing original works.

12.5 After two years of practical training the third year should be set aside for leaning a local language.

12. 6 Newly ordained priests should be given appointments in such a way that at least for the first two or three years they get opportunities for learning a new local language or specialising in a local language of their choice.

WORKING DOCUMENT: SECOND DRAFT

**THE FINAL STATEMENT OF THE PROVINCE
LEVEL RESEARCH SEMINAR, DIMAPUR
29-30 June & 1 July 2004
SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Salesian Province of Dimapur, Nagaland, conducted a province level research seminar at Don Bosco Provincial house, Dimapur from 29th June to 1 July 2004. It was organised as a requirement for the national level research seminar to be held in 2005 in preparation for the centenary celebrations of the arrival of the first Salesians in India (1906-2006).

A total of 24 confreres participated in the seminar, including the Provincial and the Provincial Council members. Rev.Fr.Thomas Mulayinkal, the Provincial, presided over the inaugural Mass, and delivered the inaugural address during the first session. In his address he observed quoting the words of Fr. Egidio Vigano that “the Congregation in India has grown so rapidly that the growth is miraculous. It is especially in India that among all the nations of Asia, the Salesian Mission has had the greatest result”. Hence the year 2006 will be etched in our memory and in the annals of history as a time of thanks-giving for the wonders the Lord has worked in India in the past 100 years. During the seminar 15 research papers were presented which covered the following areas: history of the province of Dimapur, policy of expansion, evangelisation, faith formation, youth ministry, education (formal and non-formal), formation, social communication, culture and human development.

The main objective of the seminar was to enable us to take a critical look at the past and the present Salesian life and mission in the province and to “let down the nets for another catch” (Jn.21.6). As

the outcome of the study and reflection, the participants of the seminar made the following suggestions and recommendations.

1. POLICY OF EXPANSION

1.1 In all policy of expansion, care should be taken to distribute the Salesian personnel and resources among peoples belonging to various ethnic groups and cultures, and not to concentrate too much on certain groups or particular areas alone.

1.2 We proposed to follow up the resolutions of the strategic planning held in 2002-2003 wherein while maintaining the existing formal structures and formal activities, the province should engage more decisively in caring for the poorer and the marginalised people of the region, such as, the rural poor, unemployed, school dropouts, illiterate, handicapped, orphans, street children, victims of substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, various forms of discrimination, ethnic conflicts and violence.

1.3 At present the overall situation in Arunachal Pradesh seems to be similar to the one that existed elsewhere in the province some 50 years ago. While appreciating the new trend in the province regarding the works of expansion and diversification of activities, our typical works in mission centres, like parishes, schools, boardings, should be taken up urgently and consolidated with regard to Arunachal Pradesh.

1.4 Giving a direction for expansion of our works we should allocate more financial resources for the qualification of the Salesian personnel - spiritual, intellectual and cultural formation, for direct evangelisation, higher education, faith formation, care of the marginalised youth, promotion of indigenous cultures and languages, mass media and social communication and human development- than is the case today so that the emphasis from building structures can shift to building up of persons.

2. EVANGELISATION

2.1 The person of the missionary is a basic component of evangelisation. Hence he must be a contemplative in action and should "forget his own country, his own people and his father's house" and be totally at the service of the Kingdom of God and God's people.

Dimapur Province in Perspective

2.2. It is impossible to evangelise without the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Hence we need to be Spirit filled persons to keep abreast with the Spiritual movements that are taking place around us.

2.3 First evangelisation is still one of the important priorities of the province, especially in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. Hence the primacy of direct evangelisation must be clearly manifested in our policies of expansion and investment of personnel and resources.

2.4 The province should provide opportunities for confreres to learn local languages and get acquainted with the local cultures before they are assigned to a new mission territory.

2.5 In appointing confreres to be frontline missionaries and leaders of mission centres, care should be taken to choose persons who have solid theological formation, deep spirituality, ability for team work, pastoral zeal, and are also good models of religious and priestly life.

2.6 Conscious of the presence of various Christian denominations and people of Other religions in the region, the province should take initiatives to adapt Church Growth principles and methods of evangelization of other denominations who are open to responsive areas and who live in a “state of mission”.

2.7 In order to evaluate critically and plan strategically our missionary work, once in two years the province should organise a missionary seminar or a similar programme for the animation of the missionaries. The Provincial Commission for Evangelisation and Catechesis could see to its organisation.

3. EDUCATION TO FAITH

3.1 All our parishes and mission stations should conduct regular and well-organised catechism classes for all the Catholic boys and girls, and wherever necessary also for adults.

3.2 A catechetical cell should be set up for the province which will co-ordinate the work of the Christian formation of the baptised persons. It should undertake the task of preparing and publishing catechetical books and other teaching aids in local languages.

3.3 The province should start within two years the publication of a Catholic weekly or monthly of popular nature. It could also be translated into major local languages of the region.

3.4 We could offer ourselves as teachers of Catechism and Moral Science also in non-Salesian institutions close to us and offer specialised training for teachers of Catechism and Moral Science.

3.5 More Salesians should be sent for training in Catechetics. In selecting persons to do this specialisation attention should be paid to their aptitude and interest and competence in local languages.

3.6 A Catechism competition should be organized annually in province for the Catholics and scholarships could be given.

4. YOUTH APOSTOLATE

4.1 The province should prepare more Salesians who are competent and comfortable working with the young people through a specific formation. Such a formation should become part of the normal curriculum of all stages of formation, beginning with the aspirantate/pre-novitiate.

4.2 There is a real need in the province for a paradigm shift in the direction of our youth apostolate along such lines as, from children to youth, schools to out-of school, formal to non-formal, institutional service to youth to non-institutional service to youth, and urban to rural.

4.3 We need to shift from the former problems of the youth to their actual problems today. We have much more to do as regards illiteracy, unemployment, drugs, HIV/AIDS and violence.

4.4 All our institutions should engage in some form of apostolate which will be for the benefit of the marginalized youth of their respective localities. Sunday or daily oratories/youth centres is one of the best means of reaching out to the marginalized local youth.

4.5 We should evolve a strategy by which we form organisations of lay persons, including those of other Christians denominations and Other religions (Hindus, Muslims, etc), to carry out many of our activities in the Salesian way in places where we work.

4.6 We should select the best youth, from our schools, colleges and parishes and prepare them and motivate them to go and serve where we can not.

4.7 We should conduct study centres for providing coaching for medical/engineering entrance tests, IIT/IISc/IIM/IAS/Central Services, Allied services, etc.

Dimapur Province in Prespective

4.8 We need to become role models for our youth. We are admired as indefatigable workers and great achievers. If we could also be seen as more spiritual and religious than we are now, we could be more effective.

5. EDUCATION

5.1 We need to transform our present educational system the target group, our methods, the content - to produce educated people who are honest, unselfish and service-minded and capable of making critical reflection on their society and culture so as to be catalysts for social change.

5.2 We need to push the young people out of our school and college compounds, out of our parish churches and boardings and engage them in activities that are socially, culturally and spiritually beneficial and productive.

5.3 We should evolve a programme by which we can prevent drop outs from schools by arranging free tuition and supervised study for the weaker students of the neighbourhood.

5.4 We should provide an education that enables young people not only to develop their personalities to their maximum, but also give them skills that have a demand in the job market.

5.5 While following up our school children we could also organise their parents in various ways and enable them to render critical services in the social and religious sphere.

5.6. All our lay collaborators should be formed in the preventive system, and should be given skills to deal with young people. They should be made acquainted with Don Bosco and his system.

6. FORMATION

6.1 In the early stages of formation greater emphasis should be placed on the human and the Christian formation of our candidates than is the case now. In addition, the emphasis should not only be on quantity but also on quality.

6.2 Candidates to Salesian life should possess sufficient intellectual aptitude to cope with the demands of the studies they need to do as candidates to religious life and priesthood and to be competent educators.

6.3 In order to provide opportunities for on-going formation, every five years either after perpetual profession or priestly ordination confreres should be given a period of three to six months for personal spiritual renewal and updating, according to the interest of the confrere.

6.4 As a means to promote a culture of critical reflection and periodic evaluation of our works, the various organs of animation in the province and the provincial commissions should conduct research seminars periodically.

7. SALESIAN RELIGIOUS LIFE

7.1 There is a need to emphasise more on *being* Salesians and religious than *doing*, so that we become true role models for the young and make sanctity our highest goal.

7.2 We need to cultivate the habit of deeper personal prayer, greater ability to engage in serious reading, study and critical reflection.

7.3 There seems to be a general decline in our knowledge of Don Bosco, Salesian charism, Salesian spirituality, Salesian traditions, Salesian pedagogy, Salesian family, etc. In order to remedy this situation the following means are suggested:

7.3.1 During all the stages of initial formation regular classes, courses, seminars, conferences, etc. should be conducted on the above themes

7.3.2 Once in every three years the province should organise a 'Salesian retreat' and make it obligatory for all the confreres of the province to attend it.

7.3.3 Traditional Salesian practices like, commemoration of the 24th of the month (Mary Help of Christians), last day of every month (Don Bosco), good nights, novenas, triduums, 'academies' prior to major feasts, proper celebration of the liturgical feasts and commemorations of the saints of the Salesian family and so on are to be emphasised and meticulously carried out in all our houses.

8. HIGHER EDUCATION

8.1 The colleges of the province should be staffed with qualified Salesians and members of the Salesian family .

Dimapur Province in Prespective

8.2 Some of our colleges should study the possibility of introducing Christian theology as a major (honours) subject at the graduate level. This is especially in view of preparing the religious and the lay persons for teaching Christian doctrine and Moral Science in Catholic schools, colleges and villages of the region.

8.3 The province should encourage more Salesians to enter into the university departments of the States in which we work with the view to give a Christian influence in the field of higher education.

8.4 The province should encourage confreres who show special aptitude and interest in scientific study and research and, as far as possible, they should be freed from heavy administrative responsibilities.

8.5 To ensure a solid Christians foundation for the Church in Northeast India, the province should take initiative to establish a Chair of Christianity or a Department of Religious Studies (with Christianity, Ecumenism, Inter-faith dialogue, World Religions, Tribal religions, etc. as its specialisation), in any of the universities of the region which is open to this idea.

8.6 When appointing confreres as heads of our educational institutions and its various departments, care should be taken to choose persons with deep religious and spiritual convictions, pastoral outlook, adequate knowledge of Salesian pedagogy, capacity for collaboration and teamwork. Mere academic qualifications and administrative abilities alone should not be the criteria for appointment to such posts.

9. SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

9.1 Courses in mass media and social communication should become part of the normal curriculum for all stages of formation, in all our schools and colleges and other educational settings. We should also extend this service to other educational institutions of the areas where we work.

9.2 Some of our colleges should offer mass media and social communication as subject for degree courses.

9.3 Considering the importance of social communication the province should set up a well equipped cell for social communication with a production and publication department attached to it.

9.4 Within three years the province should launch a weekly or a monthly newspaper which could eventually become a daily for the whole of Northeast India. In this venture we could seek collaboration from other provinces of Northeast, from the Salesian family and from the various dioceses.

9.5 We should qualify more confreres and lay persons in the field of mass media and social communication and those qualified should be freed for this ministry.

10. DEVELOPMENTAL WORKS

10.1 Widespread poverty and economic backwardness is an alarming reality, especially in the rural areas of our region. There is a need to shift our apostolate from urban to rural so that the persons who benefit from us the most can be the rural poor who need us most.

10.2 The possibility of giving children nutritive food should be considered in our rural schools. It will also be an incentive for more poor children to come to school.

10.3 The empowerment of women should be given a priority in our apostolate. Every parish and village should have well organised women's groups.

10.4 Many communities and ethnic groups in our region do not have a very positive attitude towards the handicapped. Therefore, the province could take initiatives to conscientise the people of the need to care for the handicapped and engage in works that are directly to their benefit.

10.5 In collaboration with other like-minded persons and organisations we should set up a human rights watch cell and legal aid cell in our region. In view of this some persons should be sent for the study Law and related subjects.

10.6 The problem of violence is a serious one in our region. Through our educational institutions and personal initiatives of individual Salesians and communities we should engage more in the apostolate of promoting peace.

11. CULTURE

11.1 Province should get more confreres qualified in such subjects as Anthropology, Sociology, Social work, Linguistics, Religious studies, Tribal studies, etc.

Dimapur Province in Prespective

11.2 The province should set up without delay a cultural centre with a full time director and a team to assist him.

11.3 The cultural centre will undertake, with the help of experts, scientific studies and researches on aspects of the cultural life of the people of the region.

11.4 The cultural centre will have its own publication department.

11.5 The cultural centre will publish a periodical or review of scientific nature, and organise animation programmes for religious and lay persons working in the region.

11.6 The cultural centre will have a documentation department, a specialised library and space for storing cultural artefacts.

12. LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

12.1 Learning local languages should be insisted upon in all stages of formation and opportunities should be provided for the same. Every year a part of their vacation could be spent for courses in local languages.

12.2 Persons who show interest in local languages should be given certain stability in the region in order to learn them well.

12.3 The province should set up a language laboratory and offer intensive courses in local languages, using methods that are modern, scientific pedagogically sound.

12.4 The province should positively encourage and provide assistance to persons to contribute to local languages through publications, translations and writing original works.

12.5 After two years of practical training the third year could be set aside for leaning a local language .

12.6 Newly ordained priests should be given appointments in such a way that at least for the first two or three years they get opportunities for learning a new local language or specialising in a local language of their choice.

Appendix - 4

MEDIA MINISTRY

(Outlines of the homily of Fr. Jonas Kerketta, SDB,
Vice-Provincial, on 30 June 2004)

Gospel: Mk. 16:15-16

Jesus was a communicator par excellence because He not only communicated a message but also Himself. As far as method is concerned, He used the best method of the day, storytelling (Parables). In fact Jesus gave all His messages through parables; "He would not say a thing to them without using a parable", (Mt. 13: 34).

In the film *Jesus Christ Super Star*, Judas sings to Jesus, "*Why'd you choose such a backward time and such a strange land? If you'd come today you'd have reached the whole nation. Israel in 4 B.C. had no mass communication.*"

If Jesus were to come today He certainly would have used the mass media of communication.

To fulfill her missionary mandate (Mk. 16: 15-16) the Church used many traditional methods to preach Christ and His message—preaching, drama, music, etc.

When the modern mass media came she had three attitudes to them:

1. **Demonisation of media:** all mass media are inventions of the devil. Even in the case of print mass media the same negative attitude prevailed. When Johan Gutenberg improved the printing machine in

Dimapur Province in Perspective

1450, he printed the whole Bible but left the first letters of each paragraph to be hand written to give the impression that the whole matter was handwritten. When cinema and television came Church's attitude was more negative.

2. Divinisation of media: Then came a complete reversal. The Church considered the mass media as the best means of communication and as a panacea for all evils and encouraged uncritical use of the media.

3. A more balanced attitude: Gradually the Church acquired a more balanced view and use of the media. All this transition took several years...

Our founder, Don Bosco, was a man far ahead of his times. He used the best method of his day - print media, to propagate and safeguard authentic teachings of the Church. His writings number 1174 and his published works fill 37 large volumes. By 1875 he had 10 rotary presses. In the 1884 national exhibition in Turin his boys performed excellently well...

The media scenario today is far advanced than in Don Bosco's times. India alone today has 51,960 newspapers. She is the highest producer of films in the world. Since 1982 there is a TV boom in India. The IT revolution has taken India by surprise...

The traditional - teachers the family, the school and religion are still doing their best to be sources of information and education to the youth. But the youth today are learning much more from the media than from these traditional sources. Unfortunately the media are influencing the young minds more negatively than positively...As educators we have the great responsibility to be aware of the power of the media, to be wise users of the media and teach the youth too to be critical users of the media.

As evangelizers in the media saturated, post modern times, we have to learn to recognize the media as the "first *areopagus* of the modern age' as John Paul II calls them. Paul VI has said the Church would feel guilty before the Lord if she did not utilize these means that human skill is daily rendering more perfect (*Evangelium Nuntiandi*, 45)...

Let us begin with the basics. Cultivate the habit of (1) Reading...what we do not have we cannot give to others... (2) Writing...publish or perish, (3) Prepare our sermons well...Dr. Syiemlieh, history professor in NEHU, in the recent Diocesan Symposium in Shillong, urged upon the priests to prepare homilies and sermons well...Our teacher of advertisements in UPS once enquired from the priest students, "How much effort do you priests put in to sell the most precious commodity of all, Word of God? Look at the sales men, to sell their perishable goods they spend so much time, money and energy by way of advertisements..."

Appendix-5

CENTENARY SEMINAR HELD

(Newspaper Report in *Nagaland Post*, *Eastern Mirror* and
Nagaland Page
on 30 June / 1 July 2004)

DIMAPUR, 30 JUNE: The Salesian (Don Bosco) Province of Dimapur, comprising the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Eastern Assam, Manipur and Nagaland, held a three-day long seminar (June 29 - 1 July 2004), at Don Bosco Provincial House, Dimapur, in preparation for the national seminar to be held in 2005 at Bangalore.

The convener of the seminar, Dr. Jose Kuruvachira sdb, said the seminar is meant to review the various types of ministries being done in the Province on behalf of the people, particularly the youth. It was first of the regional level seminars to be held in preparation for the national seminar in 2005, he said.

The seminar papers included the following themes: (1) History of the Salesian province of Dimapur, (2) Critical examination of the expansion policies in Dimapur Province, (3) Youth work in the Province of Dimapur, (4) Youth centers and youth movements in the Province, (5) Gospel message and its impact on local cultures, (6) Challenges to Salesian work today, (7) Efforts at deepening of Christian faith, (8) Training of Salesian personnel, (9) Salesian involvement in developmental activities, (10) Media Ministry in the Province of Dimapur, (11) The impact of Salesian schools of the Province, (12) Non-formal education in the Province, (13) Contribution of Salesians to higher education, (14) Salesian contribution to the cultures of Northeast India and (15) Contribution of Salesians to the indigenous languages and literature.

Fr. M. P. Thomas sdb, Provincial, in his inaugural address on 29 June, presented a brief history of the Salesians' arrival and work in India. St. John Bosco, popularly known as Don Bosco, founded a Religious Congregation (Society) in Italy in the 19th century primarily for the welfare of youth, particularly the poor. As the Congregation grew in number he sent Salesians (the name 'Salesian' comes from the patron saint, St. Francis of Sales) to different parts of the globe.

The first group of five Salesians left Genoa in Italy on 17 December 1905 and reached Tanjore in Tamil Nadu on 14 January 1906. Since then the number of Salesians has grown and today they are carrying out various types of ministries for the people especially the poor youth in the Provinces of Bangalore, Chennai, Dimapur, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai, New Delhi, Tiruchy and in the Vice Province of the Konkan Region.

The Province of Dimapur, bifurcated from Guwahati and headquarters at Dimapur, was inaugurated on 18 June 1982 with 154 Salesians. Today there are 221 Salesians in 39 institutions, engaged in various ministries with special thrust on school and higher education, non-formal education, faith formation, development works, youth services in formal settings and disorganized sectors, promotion of indigenous cultures, etc.

Reported by
Jonas Kerketta SDB
Don Bosco Provincial House, Dimapur

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

PAPER 2: *A Critical Examination of the Policies of Expansion of the Salesian Congregation in Northeast India with Special Reference to the Province of Dimapur. What could be the Policies for the Future?*

Fr. Joseph Edakkudan SDB

2.1. Do you agree with the contention of the author that the recommendations of Don Bosco to the first Salesian missionaries to Argentina (19th century) are applicable in the 21st century, as methods that can be fruitfully employed for the expansion of the Congregation in our context? Is the notion of A creative fidelity to Don Bosco applicable in this case?

2.2. How far is it true that, until recently, the expansion of the Salesian Congregation in Northeast India was practically identical with the story of the growth of the Catholic Church in the region and that the early Salesians hardly made a distinction between the Church and Congregation?

2.3. Can you articulate some of the major policies of expansion adopted by the Province of Dimapur since the time of its existence in 1982? Are they still valid or should there be a paradigm shift?

PAPER 3. *The Youth of Dimapur Province*

Fr. George Menampampil SDB

3. 1. Examine the suggestions of the author regarding what more the Salesians could do for the youth of our region?

3. 2. What do you think of the challenges facing the Salesians in our province with regard to youth ministry?

PAPER 4. Youth Ministry in Dimapur Province.

Fr. John Puduserry SDB

4.1. How can the young Salesians be trained to become effective youth ministers today?

4.2. Suggest means through which the Salesians can tackle the problem of unemployment and other allied evils like alcoholism, substance abuse, terrorism, HIV/AIDs, etc.

4.3. How can DBYES team serve the province to co-ordinate better the youth ministry?

PAPER 5. Work of Evangelisation: Aims, Methods and Impact on Cultures

Fr. Francis Thottathimyalil SDB

5.1. Missionary activity in the traditional sense of the term is part of the Salesian life. Art. 30 of our constitution says, "People still awaiting the gospel message were the special object of Don Bosco's concern and apostolic effort. They continue to stimulate our zeal and keep it alive. We look upon missionary work as an essential feature of our congregation". *Ad Gentes* 6 also speaks in this vein. Can we truly say that this is the essential feature of our province?

5.2. Pioneering work needs to be done among various tribal groups in the region and it is here that the young are offered great challenge. Our Salesian youth apostolate is tested precisely here. Is the Christian formation we impart to the young adequate enough so as to make them capable and ready to share their faith with those who do not have it? How far are the Salesians responsible for the lack of enthusiasm among the youth for missionary challenge?

5.3. Tribal societies are generally oral societies. Methods of storing information by oral societies are memory, symbols, stories, rituals. How far have we changed our methods of evangelization to suit these groups? (hints: tribal songs, poetry, riddles, proverbs, colour, art, painting, carvings, stories, dramas, narrative dances).

PAPER 6. Challenges to Salesian Missionary Work Today

Fr. Kottarathil Mathai SDB

6.1. The person of the missionary is a basic component of evangelisation. Suggest some ways in which the person of the Salesian can be better prepared to face the challenges of evangelisation.

Dimapur Province in Perspective

6.2. Suggest some ways in which we can promote ecumenism, inter-religious dialogue and inculturation in our context of work.

PAPER 7. *Formation to Christian Faith: Methods, Impact and Problems*

Fr. Nazarius Lakra SDB

7.1. Critically analyse the present state of our apostolate of formation of people to the Christian faith in the province with special reference to our: a) formally established parishes, b) mission centres; c) educational institutions (schools, boardings, colleges, youth centres, etc.)

7.2. What are some of the concrete steps which the province should take in order that we may give a better quality of faith-education to the people entrusted to our care.

PAPER 8. *Formation of Salesians: Past, Present and Future*

Fr. Joseph Kulathunkal SDB

(Questions below will include also some general aspects of salesian life)

8.1. How can we form or educate our Salesian candidates: a) in the right use of authority; b) to make their life a continuous and deep experience of God; c) develop and nourish healthy friendship (same sex and heterosexual)

8.2. It appears that, as years go by, our knowledge of Don Bosco, the Salesian charism, Salesian pedagogy, Salesian spirituality, Salesian family, etc. is on the decline. Suggest ways in which we can foster among us greater knowledge and appreciation of Don Bosco and the Salesian charism?

8.3. Often we are accused of superficiality in living our Salesian and religious life and in emphasising more on *doing* than *being*? What could be some of the underlying reasons this state of affairs? How can we remedy the situation?

PAPER 9. *Salesian Involvement in Human Developmental Activities*

Fr. Jerry Thomas Pathikulangara SDB

9.1. Examine the concerns raised in the paper by the author with regard to the involvement of Salesians in human developmental works.

9.2. What are some of the areas of life of the people of our region where we need to involve ourselves more decisively as a sign of our option for the poor.

PAPER 10. *Media Ministry in the Province of Dimapur*

Fr. Tarcisius Toppo SDB

10.1. Are you satisfied with the media ministry in the province? What are the difficulties faced in this ministry?

10.2. What are the concrete ways to improve this ministry for better effectiveness in the province/region?

PAPER 11. *The Impact of Salesian Schools of the Province of Dimapur*

Fr. Joseph Thettiyail SDB

11.1. It is often alleged that we Salesians educate people and produce individuals who are very well equipped to look after themselves and their families but fail to be agents of social change and transformation.

11.2. How far is this claim justified? Do you think that there is a real need to push the young out of our school compounds, colleges and boardings towards the poor, the needy and the marginalised of society?

11.3. Identify some of the major social, political, economic and cultural problems of our region. How can our educational institutions help in order to solve them?

PAPER 12. *Non-formal Education in the Province of Dimapur*

Fr. Benny Karinattu SDB

12.1. Is non formal education truly a Salesian work? (cf. article 42) Did we delay in beginning non-formal institutions in the province? If so how that has affected the region socially, politically and economically?

12.2. Are the centres of our non-formal education truly centres of learning and personality development? Or have they turned out to be money-making enterprises?

12.3. How can we enrich our existing non-formal centres? What more need to be done in order to make the non-formal education more vibrant in the province?

PAPER 13. *Contribution of Salesians to Higher Education.*

Fr. Sebastian Aelavanthara SDB

13.1. In recent years, the province of Dimapur ventured into establishing five colleges in four different States of Northeast India, emphasising thereby the importance of higher education. Identify some of the positive aspects of this ministry. Is this ministry truly relevant in our context?

13.2. What are some of the major problems and difficulties we face today with regard to the apostolate of higher education? Suggest some practical ways in which we can overcome the situation?

PAPER 14. *Salesian Contribution to the Indigenous Cultures of Northeast India*

Fr. Thomas Kalapurackal SDB

14.1. If we had been one of the members of the first batch of Salesians to North-East India, what direction would we have taken in engaging indigenous cultures?

14.2. What are the attitudes / concepts we Salesians have towards indigenous cultures? Cite examples.

14.3. How can we contribute more to indigenous cultures in our work of education and evangelization, so that future generations will have a kinder word for us? What are the other possible ways in which we can contribute?

PAPER 15. *Salesian Contribution to the Indigenous Languages and Literature*

Fr. R. K. Nicholas Guangdiat SDB

15.1. Is there a genuine interest among the confreres of our province for learning local languages? Can we say that we Salesians have made substantial contributions to the promotion of local languages of our region or could we have done more?

15.2. Suggest concrete ways in which we as a province can promote the study of languages and development indigenous literature?

15.3. Is there a need in our province to set up a cultural centre where documentation of indigenous literature is done, artefacts stored and scientific studies and researches are carried out on aspects of indigenous cultures?

16. EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH SEMINAR

16.1. According to you what are some of the positive aspects of this research seminar? Do you advocate similar initiatives in the future?

16.2. Kindly give your opinion on the following:

1. Relevance of the topics selected for the seminar;
2. Methodology of research followed by the authors of the papers;
3. Scientific, objective and scholarly quality of the papers;
4. Nature of workshops and general discussions.
5. Organisational aspects
6. Any other?

16.3 In what manner can the province implement, in the most effective and practical way, some of the important recommendations and suggestions that have emerged during this seminar?

Appendix -7

GROUPS FOR DISCUSSION

Group 1

1. *Fr. Mathai Kottarathil*
2. Fr. John Puthussery (Secretary)
3. Fr. George Menampampil **
4. Fr. Jerry Thomas Pathikulangara
5. Fr. Benny Karinattu
6. Fr. Thomas Vengakunnel **
7. Fr. Mathew Tharakan
8. Fr. Joseph Pampackal
9. Fr. Tarcisius Toppo
10. Fr. Francis Tinglung
11. Fr. Joseph Kulathunkal
12. Fr. Michael Mundathanathu.
13. Fr. Nestor Guria

Group 2

1. *Fr. Varghese Chittilappally*
2. Fr. Nazarius Lakra (Secretary)
3. Fr. Sebastian Aelavanthara
4. Fr. Jose Kuruvachira
5. Fr. Nicholas Guangdiat
6. Fr. Joseph Edakkudan **
7. Fr. Bosco Perianayagam
8. Fr. Jonas Kerketta
9. Fr. Sebastian Jose Aerimattathil
10. Fr. Joseph Thettayil **
11. Fr. Francis Thottathimyalil
12. Fr. Joseph Variathukalayil
13. Fr. Sebastian Thazhekadan
14. Fr. Thomas Kalapurackal

Please note:

1. The secretaries of the groups kindly present the reports in writing.
2. In case a group does not finish discussing the questions within the allotted time, the group concerned will find its own time to complete the same before the general sessions.
3. Please be present for all the sessions and workshops.

** These persons did not participate in the seminar.

Appendix - 8

TIMETABLE OF THE RESEARCH SEMINAR 2004 29-30 June & 1 July 2004

President: Rev.Fr.Thomas Mulayinkal SDB, Provincial

Co-ordinating committee: Frs. Jose Kuruvachira SDB (convenor), Joseph Thettayil SDB , Nazarius Lakra SDB, John Bosco Perianayagam SDB, Thomas Vengakunnel SDB, John Pudusserry SDB, Tarcisius Toppo SDB.

MONDAY 28 JUNE 2004

7.00 p.m Preliminary session
7.30 p.m Vespers and spiritual reading

TUESDAY 29 JUNE 2004

6.30 a.m Inaugural Mass: President Rev.Fr. Provincial
8.30 a.m Inaugural session
 Words of welcome: Fr. Jose Kuruvachira SDB

Inaugural address Rev. Fr. Thomas Mulayinkal SDB , Provincial

General information on the modalities of the seminar

Presentation of papers (only summaries: 15-20 minutes each)

First session

Moderator: **Fr.Kottarathil Mathai SDB**

Paper 1. *Salesian Province of Dimapur: A Historical Perspective*

Fr.Sebastian Jose Aerimattathil SDB

Dimapur Province in Prespective

Paper 2. *Policies of Expansion of the Salesian Congregation in Northeast India*

Fr. Joseph Edakkudan SDB

Paper 3. *The Youth of Dimapur Province*

Fr. George Menamparampil SDB

Paper 4. *Youth Ministry in Dimapur Province*

Fr. John Pudussery SDB

10.30 a.m Coffee break

11.00 a.m Workshop

12.30 p.m Lunch

03.00 pm Tea

3.30 pm Second Session

Moderator: Fr. Tarcisius Toppo SDB

Paper 5. *Work of Evangelisation - Aims, Methods and Impact on Cultures*

Fr. Francis Thottathimyalil SDB

Paper 6. *Challenges to Salesian Missionary Work Today*

Fr. Kottarathil Mathai SDB

Paper 7. *Formation to Christian Faith: Methods, Impact and Problems*

Fr. Nazarius Lakra SDB

4.30 p.m Workshop

5.30 p.m Break

5.45 p.m General Session

Moderator: Fr. Jerry Thomas Pathikulangara SDB

7.30 p.m Vespers, spiritual reading

8.00 p.m Supper

WEDNESDAY 30 JUNE 2004

6.30 a.m Holy Mass President: Rev. Fr. Vice-Provincial

8.30 a.m First session Moderator: Fr. Sebastian Jose SDB

Paper 8. *Formation of Salesians: Past, Present and Future*

Fr. Joseph Kulathunkal SDB

Paper 9. *Salesian Involvement in Human Developmental Activities*
Fr.Jerry Thomas Pathikulangara SDB

Paper 10. *Media Ministry in the Province of Dimapur*
Fr.Tarcisius Toppo SDB

10.30 a.m Coffee break
11.00 a.m Workshop
12.30 p.m Lunch
03.00 p.m Tea

3.30 p.m Second Session

Moderator:Fr.Francis Tinglung SDB

Paper 11. *The Impact of Salesian Schools of the Province of Dimapur*
Fr. Joseph Thettayil SDB

Paper 12. *Non-Formal Education in the Province of Dimapur*
Fr. Benny Karinattu SDB

Paper 13. *Contribution of Salesians to Higher Education*
Fr.Sebastian Aclavanthara SDB

4.30 a.m Workshop; 5.30 p.m Break

5.45 p.m General Session

Moderator:Fr.JohnBosco Periyamayagam SDB

7.30 p.m Vespers, spiritual reading
8.00 p.m Supper

THURSDAY 1 JULY 2004

6.30 a.m Holy Mass President: Rev.Fr.Mathew Tharakan SDB

8.30 a.m First session Moderator: Fr.Nestor Guria SDB

Paper 14. *Salesian Contribution to the Indigenous Cultures of Northeast India*

Fr.Kalapurackal Thomas SDB

Paper 15. *Salesian Contribution to the Indigenous Cultures*

Fr. R.K.Nicholas Guangdiat SDB

9.30 a.m Workshop (with an evaluation of the seminar)

10.30 a.m Coffee break

11.00 a.m General session

Moderator: Fr. Francis Thottathimyalil SDB

12.30 p.m Lunch

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3.30 p.m *Workshop on the draft of the final statement and recommendations*

4.30 p.m Break

5.00 p.m General Session

Moderator: Fr.Jonas Kerketta SDB

7.00 p.m Concluding session

Concluding words

Fr. Jose Kuruvachira SDB

7.30 p.m Vespers, supper

PS: Due to some practical difficulties the following papers will not be presented during the seminar, though they had been included in the original list of topics.

1. "The quality of our Salesian life and the witness value of our Communities".
2. "Formation of Salesians for a more effective mission tomorrow".

Final statement committee:

Fr.T.J. Francis SDB, Fr.C.D. MathaiSDB, Fr.Tarcisius
ToppoSDB

The co-ordinating committee will have a short meeting every evening to assess the day.

Seminar materials: (files, photocopying, backdrop, hall arrangements, etc.):

Fr.P.A. John Pudusery SDB Fr. Jose KuruvachiraSDB

Liturgy & sound system:

Fr. Sebastian Jose Aerimattathii SDB

Secretaries:

Fr. R.K.Nicholas Guangdiat SDB, Fr.Benny Karinattu SDB

Appendix - 9

PARTICIPANTS OF THE RESEARCH SEMINAR 2004

1. Aelavanthara Sebastian (A.J)
2. Aerimattathil Sebastian Jose
3. Chittilappilly Varghese (C.T)
4. Edakkudan Joseph¹
5. Guria Nestor
6. Kalapurackal Thomas (K.A) (Provincial Council Member)
7. Karinattu Benny
8. Kerketta Jonas (Vice - Provincial)
9. Kottarathil Mathai (C.D)
10. Kulathunkal Joseph
11. Kuruvachira Jose (Covenor)
12. Lakra Nazarius
13. Menampampil George (M.C)²
14. Mulayinkal Thomas (Provincial)
15. Mundathanath Michael (M.M)
16. Pampackal Joseph (Provincial Economist)
17. Pathikulangara Jerry Thomas
18. Perianayagam John Bosco (Provincial Council Member)
19. Pudussery John
20. R.K. Guangdiat Nicholas
21. Tharakan Mathew (Provincial Council Member)
22. Thazhekaden Sebastian (T.O)
23. Thettayil Joseph (T.T)³
24. Thottathimyalil Francis (T.J)
25. Tinglung Francis
26. Toppo Tarcisius
27. Variyathukalayil Joseph (V.M)
28. Vengakunnerl Thomas (V.A)⁴

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1. Wrote the paper "A Critical Examination of the Policies of Expansion of the Salesian Congregation in Northeast India with Special Reference to the Province of Dimapur. What could be the Policies for the Future?" But did not attend the seminar.
2. Wrote the paper "The Youth in Dimapur Province" but did not attend the seminar.
3. Wrote the paper "The Impact of Salesian Schools of the Province of Dimapur" but did not attend the seminar.
4. Member of the co-ordinating committee. But he did not participate in the seminar.

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Contributors

Fr. Thomas Mulayinkal SDB

Fr. Sebastian Jose Aerimattathil SDB

Fr. Joseph Edakuddan SDB

Fr. George Menampampil SDB

Fr. John Puthussery SDB

Fr. Joseph Thettayil SDB

Fr. Benny Karinattu SDB

Fr. Sebastian Aelavanthara SDB

Fr. Francis Thottahimyalil SDB

Fr. Mathai Kottarathil SDB

Fr. Nazarius Lakra SDB

Fr. Joseph Kulathunkal SDB

Fr. Jerry Thomas Pathikulangara SDB

Fr. Tarcisius Toppo SDB

Fr. Thomas Kalapurackal SDB

Fr. R.K. Nicholas Guangdiat SDB

DIMAPUR PROVINCE IN PERSPECTIVE

Papers and Documents from the Research Seminar 2004

From 29 June to 1 July 2004, a group of confreres of the Salesian Province of Dimapur came together for a province level research seminar at Don Bosco Provincial house, Dimapur, Nagaland. The seminar was organised as a requirement for the South Asia level research seminar to be held in 2005 in preparation for the centenary celebrations of the arrival of the first Salesians in India (1906-2006). The aim of the seminar was to reflect as a province on the mission of the Salesians of Don Bosco in South Asia in the Third Millennium.

The seminar saw the presentation of fifteen papers on different aspects of Salesian Charism, namely, evangelisation, catechesis, youth ministry, education, culture, formation, social communication, work for the marginalised youth and human development. The papers contained a mine of information about the life and activities of the confreres of the province. Hence it was keenly felt that the papers should be compiled, edited and preserved for the future as a point of reference. This book is the realisation of it.

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