

CHAPTER 4: MISSION DURING WAR TIME 1939-1945

Administrator of Chaotong Vicariate to replace Mgr. Chen who had resigned. In a party held by the school teachers in honor of the Nuncio, Mgr. Zamin read the decree appointing Fr. Kerec as Administrator and in the name of Father Provincial, he also declared Fr. Majcen as acting rector with all the power and obligation of a house rector. Now that he was a Monsignor, Fr. Kerec immediately prepared a purple cloak and some cassocks with purple buttons for his small stature, as well as the coat of arm for his new title. After finishing the retreat for his confreres, the new Monsignor hurriedly went back to Chaotong.

Mgr. Kerec was really God's blessing for Chaotong. Within a few years, with the rebellious spirit now vanished in Chaotong, Mgr. Kerec managed to build a Small Seminary, a house for the virgins, and the Vicariate office. He also restored the cathedral where he celebrated his inauguration Mass after receiving all the authority.

The War Situation

The world situation grew more and more disastrous. The Japanese first occupied Manchuria, then Peking, Tin Shan, Shanghai and Canton, and continued to bomb even Kunming. Fr. Majcen got enough news about the political situation both in Europe and the Orient thanks to a radio set he had bought from a French who left Kunming. Thus he was informed that Germany had occupied Poland, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. After each victory of Hitler, the German soldiers in Kunming gathered in the park previously belonging to the French to feast until late at night, and sang out triumphant chants on the way home after they were drunk.

FOREWORD

The chief author of this book is Father Andrej Majcen, a Salesian missionary. He has worked for 22 years in the missions in China and then for 22 more years in Vietnam, first in the North and then in the South. He has also worked for some more years in Hong Kong and Taiwan before eventually returning to his country.

After his return to Slovenia (former Yugoslavia), in response to the wish of the General Superiors, he began collecting historical documents and the monumental private notes he had taken in all his missionary life.

Father Mario Rassiga, SDB, the author of the *History of Salesian Works in China and Vietnam*, has organized the data from Fr. Majcen's abundant notes, with a literary editing by Dr. Emilio Bonomi.

This book is a very valuable resource for the study and research in the missionary history of the Salesians. As a historical narrative, it is expected to help everybody to have a general knowledge of the matter, but for the Vietnamese Salesians in particular, it is a precious record of the beginnings of Don Bosco's works in their country.

Ljubljana 24 September 1989



Don Majcen (*standing*) and Don Kerec (*sitting*)

The first Salesian missionaries to set foot on Kunming, China

Chaotong Apostolic Vicariate

Chaotong was an Apostolic Vicariate entrusted to the Central Diocese of China. It covers 5,000 square kilometers, with a population of 2 million including 8,000 Catholics. The territory lies in north-west Yunnan; it was split from Kunming diocese to become an Apostolic Vicariate. Mgr. Chen had been appointed for this Vicariate, but he was not welcome because he came from another province. Shortly later he was opposed by some of the clergy and laity. As a reaction against their grave abuses, he imposed anathemas on them. One of them stirred up a rebellion to the point that poor Monsignor Chen felt anxious for his safety. That was why the Apostolic Delegate had commissioned Fr. Kerec to come there to inquire and soften the behavior of the priests and laity. Right after Fr. Kerec's arrival in Chaotong, the Apostolic Vicar appointed him Administrator and immediately left for Kunming and then went to Rome.

A very comforting visit of Father Provincial

Shortly later, Fr. Braga came to Kunming. His visits always were a cause for celebration for the confreres in this solitary Kunming region. The purpose of this visit was to examine the Kao Dong situation which had required Fr. Kerec going there, and to preview a change of personnel, because he intended to send the new theology students to Shanghai. During this visit, Fr. Braga inaugurated by a simple ceremony the new house for the shoemaker's, carpenter's and printing workshops. Next, Fr. Majcen had a high wall built for the protection of the whole plot and had to pull down part of the old house that was likely to crumble due to the bombing tremors.

Fr. Kerec became a Monsignor

On October 11 1938, the Apostolic Nuncio, Mgr. Zamin, went to see Fr. Kerec and handed him a decree nominating him as

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1939-1945**

A. The Beginning of the War (1939)

**Fr. Majcen as Vice-rector (acting Rector) during the years
1939-1945**

Fr. Kerec was rector of the house but he was often absent, so Fr. Majcen, who was prefect and councilor, had to take his place. In 11 October 1938, the Delegate Apostolic Mgr. Zamin appointed Fr. Kerec as Administrator of the Apostolic Vicariate of Chaotong. With this new office, Fr. Kerec could no longer take much care of the house, and so with the proposal of the confreres and the consent of the Superior, Fr. Majcen took up the care of the community. On October 15 1938, Fr. Kerec left for Chaotong with a caravan of belongings. Full of emotions and afraid of his new responsibility, Fr. Majcen accompanied Fr. Kerec as far as Hinleunteng. While they were bidding goodbye, Fr. Kerec encouraged Fr. Majcen with these words: "You surely will make mistakes, but you'll know how to correct them!"

The journey was not peaceful for Fr. Kerec. Hardly had the caravan come to the Kun Shan mountainous region than he was robbed of all his money (HK\$ 4,000), together with the watches he had bought for the priest in Chaotong, and suffered a cut in his belly. Fr. Kerec would later dramatize this cut; in fact, it was only a small wound, because on arrival in Chaotong, he could right away sit down before his typewriter to give a dramatic account of what had happened to him!



Just graduated from a teachers' college, the young man Andrej Majcen determined to offer himself to God...

... and received the Missionary Crucifix, Fr. Majcen bids farewell to his mother to go to far, far lands, China and Vietnam.



The young priest Andrej poses for a photograph with his family.



the machine came, Fr. Avalle who had been sent by Fr. Braga as confessor remarked that the printing of a political newspaper, even with a religious character, was against our religious rules, and such an affair had been prohibited by Fr. Ricaldone in his canonical visit to Macao in 1927. It was really embarrassing to report this to Archbishop Yupin, and in fact he was somewhat offended. We refunded the money to the bishop, while the printing machine was used for our printing shop.

The war situation

The Chinese government withdrew its troops to Chungking to prepare for a counter-attack with the help of the Americans. These had built a strategic route in Burma, from Mandalay to Kunming, and in the meantime they had built a big airport near Kunming and other small airports in the neighboring areas. As for the Japanese, they were not inactive. They frequently bombed the city. Around September 1938, they destroyed many buildings and there were heavy casualties. Every time they heard the alarm, the assistants hurriedly took the children to the suburbs. On the contrary, Fr. Majcen and some others found safer to remain in the concrete building.

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them go to Hà Nội. Then Fr. Kerec went there to receive them and accompany them to Kunming, and from Kunming they went on horseback and by cart to Chaotong. Fr. Kerec took this opportunity to give a spiritual retreat to the local clergy.

Comforting visits of the Superiors

So as to alleviate the Kunming Salesians' feeling of loneliness and isolation, Fr. Braga and Fr. Guarona occasionally went to visit them, assess the situation and preach retreats. Fr. Majcen always considered these spiritual exercises as a missionary novitiate. From 1st to 10th October 1937, the General Prefect Fr. Berruti and Fr. Candela of the Superior Council made an extraordinary canonical visit. From Thailand they came to Hà Nội, Vietnam, and from Hà Nội they took the train to Kunming. They were very pleased with the work done there: the good constructions and running of the school, and the promotion and formation of vocations. They voiced their admiration at the *Bollettino Salesiano*, and this made some veteran French missionaries envious, because they did not usually show sympathy for the Salesians who adopted Don Bosco's policy of not doing politics nor having extreme nationalism, and did not want to imitate the imperialist methods of the French.

1938: A Decision of not printing a political newspaper

That was on the threshold of World War II. Nevertheless in China, war had been raging for a long time, and among the people who flocked to Kunming from the cities occupied by the Japanese, there was also the archbishop Yupin of Nanking. In those time Fr. Kerec made use of some space in the old house and also had evening classes for students. Archbishop Yupin intended to continue his politico-religious newspaper and gave some money to buy a good printing machine from Hong Kong. The economer of St Louis School bought the machine and sent to Kunming. When

In a visit to his country after many years away, Fr. Andrej with his old mother and family at the romantic lake of his Slovenia.



...and poses for a souvenir.

in fact a filled-in old pool. Another obstacle was the prohibition from the police: they had not given permission to proceed yet. The procedure took a lot of time, but through the intervention of the Missionary Society's representative who was a friend of the governor, the construction could proceed faster and after a short while some classes and shoemaking workshops could move to the new house.

Frightening moments

It was a frightening day when Bishop De Jonghe informed that Mao's army was approaching. The army was led by General Chu Te, a military officer from Kunming, and they were on the point of attacking the city. The governor ordered his men to fight and bomb by small aircrafts. All Westerners, except the missionaries, had fled to Hà Nội, and the Salesian confreres, with their rosaries in hand, were anxiously waiting for the coming events. But after a few days, everybody got news that the communist soldiers had gone away. Life went on normally as before.

The first baptism by Fr. Majcen

In 1937, for the first time Fr. Majcen gave baptism to a boy named Chu Wai Sing after the boy promised he would not perform his habitual superstitious actions when his parents died. Unfortunately his father died shortly after, and true to his words, he fled to Chaotong where he began his studies and later became a priest. Fr. Chu Wai Sing died in 1978 when he was professor of Oriental philosophy at the Hong Kong [Holy Spirit] Seminary.

The Sisters of Mary Immaculate in Chaotong

With the care of Fr. Kerec care and the invitation of Bishop Chen, Vicar Apostolic of Chaotong, the Sisters of Mary Immaculate came to Chaotong to run the hospital here. Fr. Kerec asked the Salesians in Hong Kong to receive the Sisters and help

invited by the Fathers of the Foreign Missions of Paris to come to their Small Seminary for convalescence. And after having fully recovered, he went back to his school. The rector being often absent, all the burden weighed heavily on his shoulders, but he had the cooperation of his confreres who always wanted to do everything well. As for the pupils, they first learned to keep cleanliness (they were not used to this!), then they learned to be quick, punctual, and they also learned music and sport. After just a few months, they could already march in the street with their brass band, and in their new beautiful uniforms, they got the admiration of the people. In addition to Chinese, Fr. Majcen also learned some French, though never formally in class, but only through talking with the good Fr. Michel from the Foreign Missions of Paris who came to the school almost every day.

Fr. Majcen got a valuable experience concerning communication: speaking with outsiders was not as easy as speaking with his pupils. One day when Fr. Kerec was out, some civil officials came and Fr. Majcen had to receive them. Not understanding what they said, he replied: "Fr. Kerec is out... We are also Chinese... We are building a vocational school." Not knowing what to do and to break the ice, he led the guests into Fr. Kerec's office and offered them a glass of wine, and after a series of bowing out, he showed them to the gate. He later admitted: "I never knew what they came for..."

Workshops

We started the boarding school very soon. Not all the pupils were Christians, but they all attended Mass. Then with these pupils we could begin to form a group of Altar servers, have sacred music classes, a choir and other religious associations.

The construction proceeded very slowly: first because we had to dig very deep to find the firm soil for foundation. This land was

INTRODUCTION

Fr. Majcen tells us the story of his missionary adventure that God has led him through. He is acknowledged as the "patriarch" and "founder" of the Salesian Congregation in Vietnam. After a series of long conversations and interviews with him, Fr. Rassiga has published the *Don Andrej Majcen, A Salesian Missionary in China and Vietnam*.

It is now time for us Vietnamese Salesians to study the account of the *History of the Salesian Works in Vietnam* through this book edited by Fr. Rassiga, together with other writings of Fr. Majcen at the request of Don Viganò who was then Rector Major of the Salesians, as well as his personal correspondence during his last twenty years in Slovenia. Thus this *History of the Salesian Works in Vietnam in the footsteps of Don Majcen* will closely follow Fr. Rassiga's published book, with some additions or minor revisions based on other writings from Fr. Majcen.

The following document aims to help everyone who wishes to respond to the appeal of the Archbishop of Ljubljana: "All who personally knew the Servant of God Fr. Andrej Majcen are kindly invited to inform vice-postulator Anton Ciglar SDB about anything that might benefit the process (of his beatification). Please send declarations of your encounters with missionary Andrej Majcen to this address: Rakovniska 6, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia."

Fr. Majcen's sanctity is a most cherished legacy for all of us who are his spiritual children. And it is hoped that his children in Vietnam will eagerly cooperate to bring his holiness to light.

Xuan Hiep, November 30, 2006

Feast of St Andrew, Patron of Fr. Majcen

**DECREE FOR THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE
BEATIFICATION PROCESS OF THE SERVANT
OF GOD FR. ANDREJ MAJCEN SDB**

Archiepiscopal Ordinary's Office in Ljubljana
No. 1253/10

In accordance with the Apostolic Constitution "Divinus perfectionis Magister" of 25 January 1983, Chapter I, Art.1, following the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints of 7 February 1983 "Normae servandae", No. 11b, and "Sanctorum Mater" of 17 May 2007, Art. 43, §3, on behalf of the Archdiocese of Ljubljana,

I hereby commence the process for the beatification of the Servant of God, Fr. Andrej Majcen, SDB.

The Servant of God Fr. Andrej Majcen SDB (1904-1999) was a fervent Salesian and priest, spiritually matured for sainthood in the twenty-two years of exceptional missionary apostolate in China and Vietnam as well as in the last twenty years of his life in Slovenia.

On 13 December 2007 the Salesian Provincial Office in Ljubljana requested the commencement of the diocesan beatification process of the Servant of God Fr. Andrej Majcen through postulator-general Enrico dal Covolo SDB. He noted the full agreement of Vietnamese and Slovene Salesians who can attest to his exemplary Christian and Salesian life as well as heroic fulfillment of the Christian virtues. Besides this, many people claim to regularly pray for his intercession as he passed away with a reputation for holiness. Also his spiritual legacy, especially Reflections, Spiritual Diaries and Personal Spirituality (more than 6,000 hand-written pages), clearly reveal his depth and systematic daily striving for spiritual growth.

CHAPTER 5: THE END OF WORLD WAR II

builders who could do concrete work. The construction began in January 1936.

As a Prefect of studies

Fr. Majcen was appointed confessor in Kunming, but the Rector did not like that appointment, so he asked Fr. Braga to change it and appointed him a prefect of studies.

Starting with only 20 pupils, the school now already had 6 elementary classes. It was organized in accordance with the school regulations. Highest in authority was a Council with a Chinese as President. However, this president was a good person who conceded all his powers to the Salesians. Under this Council was a Prefect who was responsible for all the school finance and had the right to admit and pay the teachers. The Prefect at that time was the rector Fr. Kerec. A Principal had the duty to run the study programme of the school. The relation between the school principal [and the Salesians] in the Salesian schools in China were very complicate, but Fr. Kerec knew how to use his experience and the guidance of Fr. Braga, so that he always proved himself to be the leader of the school.

Learning languages

A big obstacle for the missionaries was the study of language. Often they were like thrown into water to know how to swim. Fr. Majcen had Br. Fernandez Lee as Chinese teacher. He used a Spanish textbook to learn Chinese. A Chinese teacher taught him correct pronunciation. Very enthusiastic, he could already publicly babble some Chinese with the pupils after just a few months. Later he would admit: "I wasn't sure how much they understood me, but they applauded me heartily!" After a while, he could already preach short sermons and also teach catechism to his pupils, using a small catechism book. But he was caught by a typhoid fever and had to go to hospital for three weeks. Out of hospital, he was

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The Yangtze River flows from roof of the world, Tibet, passes through Yunnan province to form a large arc at Chaotong Apostolic Vicariate that was entrusted to the Chinese ecclesiastics. It was here that between the years 1939 and 1952, Fr. Kerec of small stature was consecrated bishop and was appointed Apostolic Administrator. The two apostolic vicariates of Tali and Chaotong had been split up from Kunming Diocese just a few years before.

Kunming city still kept the appearances of ancient Chinese cities both in its buildings and surrounding walls. During his first years in Kunming, Fr. Majcen still saw bound-feet women of old such as seen by Don Bosco in his dream. The foot-binding custom would be abolished during the 1949 Revolution.

There was a Grand Seminary run by the Saint Sulpice Fathers, while the Sisters of St Paul of Chartres had the Wisdom School, the one of which our early school was a department. There were also the Carmelite Sisters and Sisters of other congregations. Outside the city was the Small Seminary of Pelotang, with an adjacent cemetery where the first heroic missionaries of Yunnan were buried. From this seminary came the first Yunnan Salesians Fr. Barnaba Li and Fr. Gregorio Py.

The project of the new ‘Wisdom School for Academic and Vocational Education’ in Kunming.

As the existing school building was degraded and was not likely to stand for long, the Provincial Braga and the Rector Kerec planned to build a new building in ferroconcrete, the first building of this kind in Kunming.

The first thing they had to do is to get a loan from the Indochina Bank and have a French architect who had to enroll builders from Hà Nội, because there were no competent local

Following the request of my predecessor, the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints issued a document 'Nihil obstat' on 5th November 2008 stating that nothing hinders the commencement of the mentioned process.

Considering all these facts and the indisputable spiritual excellence of loyal gospel preacher the Servant of God Fr. Andrej Majcen who has proven himself as a missionary among Salesians and people in the local Church and abroad, as well as being convinced that his virtues will encourage missionary zeal and growth in holiness, I hereby notify the Archdiocese of Ljubljana of the commencement of the aforementioned process.

All who personally knew the Servant of God Fr Andrej Majcen are kindly invited to inform vice-postulator Anton Ciglar SDB about anything that might benefit the process. Please send declarations of your encounters with missionary Andrej Majcen to this address: Rakovniška 6, 1000 Ljubljana.

All God's people of Ljubljana Archdiocese are requested to pray for the beatification of Fr. Andrej Majcen, for his intercession and to report about favors granted in writing to the vice-postulator. The more declarations of this kind we receive, the sooner the universal Church will recognise the Servant of God as a heavenly intercessor.

God bless all your efforts and may he help us successfully complete the process.

From Ljubljana, 4 August 2010

PART ONE

PROVIDENCE PREPARES DON MAJCEN FOR HIS MISSION IN VIETNAM

CHAPTER 1: HIS EARLY LIFE (1904-1924)

His Childhood

Fr. Andrej Majcen was born in Maribor, the second largest city of Slovenia (former Yugoslavia).

His father—also named Andrej—was from Borove. After finishing secondary school, he was sent to the seminary, as his mother Teresa had wished him to become a priest. However, realizing himself not fit for the priestly vocation, he stopped all his seminary formation and went to a teachers' college instead. For this his mother never forgave him, seeing it as a defection and considering him a wayward boy, so that without money he had to drop his studies to earn a living. At first he worked as an office clerk, then as a consultant at Maribor's Court, where he could manage to have a secure living. He then married Maria Schlick, a very virtuous girl from the same town. After finishing primary school, she entered a school run by the nuns where she was taught the rules of economy and housework besides religious instruction. And the first lovely fruit of this wedding was the birth of our boy Andrej, then his sister Maria, his brother Zoran who died as a child, and his youngest sister Milka.

they had to start learning Chinese in the dialect of Yunnan for their contacts with local people.

B. From Hong Kong to Kunming: 1938-1939

At that time, the safest route to go from Hong Kong to Kunming was by passing through Vietnam. Thus, right after the feast of Mary Immaculate, the confreres to be sent to Kunming were led by Fr. Braga on a French train heading for Hải Phòng-Hà Nội. They were Fr. Majcen (Slovenian) and the lay brothers Charles Lee (Chinese) for printing, Louis Oravec (Slovak) for carpentry, and Stephan Meolic (Slovak) for shoemaking. In Hà Nội, Fr Majcen admired the devotion to Don Bosco, especially after his canonization, and a great sympathy towards the Salesians, fruits of Don Braga's travel, and of his character and lovely conversations that attracted many people.

It was very pleasant to accompany Fr. Braga in his travel, because he knew how to explain everything about the places he had been to. The train had to roll on difficult railroads from below sea level up to 2,000 m above sea level leading to Kunming. The group arrived in Kunming in the afternoon of December 18 1935. A warm welcome was given to the newcomers by the confreres who had been there before and who had opened a small primary school there.

Kunming, a new homeland

The Chinese Yunnan province is as large as France, bordering on Vietnam and Burma (now Myanmar). The province has mountains as high as 2,000 to 4,000 meters above sea level. Its capital district was Kunming, a very ancient city, once the capital of the Viceroy. At the time the missionary group came there, it was governed by a governor named Long Yun, from the Yang ethnic. Very sympathetic with the Salesians, he proposed to them to open a vocational school there.

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Don Bosco and who wanted the Salesians to come and work in his diocese.

Already in 1910, he knew of the presence of the Salesians in Hong Kong and wrote to Fr. Olive and Versiglia expressing his intention. Fr. Versiglia replied that since the Salesians had just been in China for four years, they could not expand their work yet. In 1924, on the occasion of the first Synod of China, Mgr. De Corostarzu met Mgr. Versiglia in Shanghai, and reiterated his invitation, but even by this time, his wish was not granted. It was by another Apostolic Administrator, Mgr. Giorgio Maria de Jonghe of Ardois, who fulfilled the wish to have the Salesian presence in the city district of Yunnan (the name for Kunming at that time). Several years before this event, the latter had had a visit to Don Bosco School in Shiuchow and had a very good impression. When coming to Kunming as an Apostolic Administrator, Mgr. Giorgio Maria was aware of his predecessor's wish. He offered Fr. Braga a lovely piece of land with a house on it (once used as a kindergarten for Franco-Vietnamese children). Though the house was in bad condition, it could still be used at least for the beginning. He gave in addition a small printing machine and 20,000 francs from his purse. He promised all his spiritual support to the Salesians, but he also honestly told them that this was a very poor missionary country, and he was not able to promise any further material aid. Between the years 1934 and 1935, there was an exchange of correspondence between Kunming, Hong Kong and Turin: proposals were sent, negotiations were made, contracts and agreements were signed. In April 1935, the Provincial went to Kunming accompanied by Fr. Joseph Kerec (a Slovenian) as Rector, and two clerics Albino Fernandez (Spanish) and Antonio Perkumas (Lithuanian). Of course they talked among themselves in Italian while using French with the MEP Fathers in Kunming, and

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When Andrej was four, his parents moved their family to a minor court in Kozje, then to a major court in Krsko, where by his honesty and wisdom, his father was entrusted the delicate charge of assuring the good of the teenagers and the orphans. Father Majcen later would tell us that his family had been living in a house that was very humid and harmful to their health, causing his father to fall seriously ill, and it was only by his mother's care and prayers that he could save his life. After moving to Krsko, his family could live in a better house. But when Andrej was ten, there broke out a war with Serbia that instantly evolved into the European War. During the war, Andrej was educated in a secondary school where German and Slovene languages were used. Those were very terrible years for all the people: nobody had much to eat, because even with a lot of money you could not buy enough food.

In 1919, his parents sent him to a teachers' school in Maribor where there were very good teachers but where also liberal and socialistic ideas were so popular that could otherwise endanger his young mind. Fortunately he was saved through his mother's constant prayers and encouragement.

His father was often ill, his sisters kept growing, and much money had to be spent for medicines. Andrej kept studying very hard, knowing he would later have to be the bread winner of his family. In his final year at school, he was almost tempted to drop, but with the aid of his aunt Catarina who gave him lodging in her house, he managed to finish his studies, and graduated in 1923. It was on this occasion that his father made a great effort to buy him a new suit.

An elementary school teacher

Graduated as a teacher at 19, Andrej was too young to get a job. Unemployment was unbearable for him. His mother kept praying to Our Lady in the nearby church of the Capuchin Fathers, and her prayers were unexpectedly granted, thus making a decisive

turn in his life. Hearing that Andrej was unemployed, an ancient teacher of his who had become a school inspector found for him a teaching post in the school of the Salesians in Radna. The Salesians here had near their formation house an elementary school for children who had lost their parents during the war and who were entrusted by the government to the Salesians' care. Getting his salary for the first time in life, he immediately wanted to send 100 dinars to his mother but she refused to take it. The Radna castle had been bought by Don Rua several years before; it was surrounded by a very lovely park. It was there that the Polish and Austrian Salesians were received first, and then after the war, it was there that the first novitiate house in Slovenia was erected by Father Provincial Tirone.

Andrej had never known the Salesians before, but their gentleness, their cheerfulness, their seriousness in study and their profound devotion greatly impressed him and made a big change in him. While he had been suffocated by the unhealthy atmosphere at the Teachers' College previously, now in Radna he could enjoy serious learning, joyful work in the vineyards and in the fields, and happy festivals and solemn processions. He heard a veteran missionary speaking on the missions in America and on the great figure of Cardinal Cagliero. All this made him imagine the large extent of the Salesian Congregation.

One day the teacher Fr. Knific asked him if he wanted to learn Latin, that is, if he wished to become a priest. In fact, that was the germ of his vocation. He first told this to her mother who felt extremely happy, but he did not dare to tell it to his father who dreamt of a teaching career for his son. Later on, however, seeing the beneficial atmosphere at Radna, his father gave his consent too.

In August 1924, Andrej asked Fr. Provincial Tirone to admit him to the novitiate. The Provincial asked him: "Do you love Our Lady?" Without hesitation he replied: "Sure, Father." And Father Provincial told him in Slovene: "Very good. Please ask the

missionaries who went to China, there was Fr. Paul Jansen who was a German and was Andrej's voyage companion. As Fr. Jansen could speak very little Italian, he spoke German more at ease.

All the missionaries arrived in Hong Kong on October 3, feast of St. Therèse de Lisieux, a patron of the missions. They were received and embraced with paternal love by the Provincial Fr. Braga. Andrej's heart was conquered by this embrace. From that moment, Fr. Braga was Andrej's superior for the next 16 years. When they came to the formation house in Shau Ki Wan, they were warmly received by the confreres there, of whom Fr. Majcen particularly remembered Fr. Massimino who later would live together with him in Vietnam.

After a short stay in Hong Kong, Fr. Majcen also went to Macao where he visited the Mother House erected in 1906 by the Saint Bishop Versiglia, and when saying the Mass in its chapel, Fr. Majcen prayed to St. Versiglia to intercede for him that he could receive the grace of martyrdom, at least without bloodshed. This account will prove that the Saint has accepted Fr. Majcen's prayer.

Back to Hong Kong, Fr. Andrej underwent the scrutiny for the "permission to hear confession" and started learning Chinese—the mandarin—under the guidance of Fr. Francis Wong. In the meanwhile he prepared himself for his missionary departure to Kunming, where he had to bring necessary materials for the setting up of shoemaking, carpentry and printing workshops.

The Salesian House in Kunming: Its proto-history

The cleric Carlo Maria di Corostarzu once went to Don Bosco to ask for advice regarding his vocation, since he wished to engage himself in the missions. The Saint recommended him to enter the Seminary of the *Missions étrangères de Paris* (MEP). He was admitted there, and one year after his ordination, Fr. Carlo Maria was sent to Yunnan, China, where he became Apostolic Administrator. He was a fervent Cooperator who was very fond of

**CHAPTER 3: BEGINNING OF MISSIONARY LIFE
IN CHINA BEFORE WORLD WAR II (1935-1938)**

A. Farewell to his mother and his country For Kunming

Saying farewell to his mum and his country

Fr. Majcen went home to say farewell to his mother. Very sad, his mum said: "Why should you leave me at this very moment when I've lost your dad?" Fr. Majcen could not find the words to answer. But looking into his tearful eyes, his mother understood the internal fight between his love for her and his duty. "Alright, go wherever God calls you to," she said. "Keep this blessed crucifix as a souvenir and kiss it frequently. Try your best to be a good priest and a good missionary."

After the farewell ceremonies in Ljubljana, he left his country which he would not see again for many years.

On his arrival in Turin, he embraced Father Rector Major, and listened to the conference of the General Prefect Fr. Berruti to the missionaries.

He recorded these four thoughts: "1. Become Chinese with the Chinese. 2. Never speak about your own country, at least within two years. 3. Admire everything that is good in China. 4. Frequently read and reread Don Bosco's recommendations to the Salesian missionaries."

On September 11 1935, Fr. Andrej left the port at Trieste together with other missionaries. They embarked on the big Conte Verde vessel for the Orient. The missionary group included the renowned missionary Fr. Boccassino as head of the group, and some others heading for India, China and Japan. Among the

government to let you quit your teaching post and prepare yourself to enter the novitiate in September." And so he applied to the Provincial for admission and was accepted."

**CHAPTER 2: TEN YEARS OF SALESIAN LIFE
IN LJUBLJANA (1924-1935)**

Becoming a Salesian (1924-1925)

On August 31 1924, Andrej entered the novitiate in Radna. On September 8, he went to Ljubljana together with other fellow novices. Cardinal Cagliero would consecrate the Shrine of Mary Help of Christians in the city town of Rakovnik, in Ljubljana. All the novices were eagerly making preparations for the consecration rites, and so they had the opportunity to see Cardinal Cagliero and listen to his conference on Don Bosco's testament: "Work, work, together with the curses against the slothful."

The donning of religious habit had been scheduled on September 11, and Cardinal Cagliero was expected to preside over it in the great expectations of the Salesians and the people in Radna. But due to the fatigue after so many ceremonies on the days before, the Cardinal could not be present, and the Superior Councilor Fr. Faschie had to perform the rites instead.

Fr. Majcen recorded about his novitiate: "That year, in spite of some contamination of previous liberal ideas, was and still is for me a complete renewal: a taking off of my old self to put on the spirit of Don Bosco. From then on this source of spirituality came back to my memory again and again, especially in 1960 when I started the first novitiate in Vietnam as a novice master."

CHAPTER 3: BEGINNING OF MISSIONARY LIFE IN CHINA BEFORE WORLD WAR II (1935-1938)

Andrej made his first profession on October 5 1925, feast of St. Francis of Assisi. The profession day had been delayed for a month due to the absence of Father Provincial.

The year 1925 was declared by the Rector Major Fr. Philip Rinaldi as the “Year of Mission”, and the cleric Andrej, by reading on the *Bollettino Salesiano* the articles of the missionaries (including those of Fr. Kerec), felt himself imbued with these saintly sentiments.

Ten years in Ljubljana (1925-1935)

After his profession, the cleric Andrej was sent to Ljubljana as a student of Latin and philosophy and as a teacher of the trade students in a school there. Apart from this task, he translated German textbooks into Slovene to teach technical subjects, and during summer holidays, he also took a professional course organized by the State so as to get competences in teaching technical drawing and technics.

In September 1928, his father—who grew ill day after day—called him back home for a family gathering on the 8, his mother’s birthday. Only with difficulty did he get permission (the religious discipline was very strict at that time), and he came back to the great joy of the whole family with whom he posed in a photo wearing his cassock for the first time. On October 10, he received a telegram telling him his father was going to die. He hurried back to his father’s deathbed. The moribund was in a coma but still conscious. The parish priest prompted him to say brief invocations and the Our Father three times. He was in agony. When his father began to breathe with difficulty and was at the point of death, he was carried to another room. And he died a moment later.

Back to Ljubljana in 1929, he began his theological studies while continuing to teach at the school that was currently having so

CHAPTER 2: TEN YEARS OF SALESIAN LIFE IN LJUBLJANA (1924-1935)

much difficulty with the technical instruction. The official teacher of this subject had just died. Besides, Andrej’s health was not very good: that was partly why he found this year very difficult. But his patience was up to the point that he satisfied even the most demanding pupils.

He was ordained priest in 1933, and after his first Mass, he was nominated prefect of studies and member of the House Council, responsible for the vocational training department of that school. In this new office, apart from his previous engagements, he had to run this department and other extramural activities, including the responsibility for the Don Bosco Association of “very different types” of pupils. Father Majcen later would write: “That was truly a good practical training period for my future missionary ministry.” His missionary aspiration grew higher and higher, especially after the martyrdom of Bishop Versiglia and Father Caravario. Nevertheless, in spite of his repetitive applications for going to the missions, he only received a “No” from his Superiors. In May 1925, however, the way to missions was open before him: The Freemason regime in Belgrade ordered to close all private vocational schools. Even the school in Ljubljana suffered the same fate. That was a carpe diem for Don Majcen. He again applied for the missions, and he was accepted this time.

common actions for both schools, and the Carmelite abbess also consulted him on a weekly basis. Fr. Majcen was reconfirmed as confessor for the Carmelite Sisters.

Bro. Meolic had several quarrels with the secondary students and Fr. Majcen once again had to appease the students, teachers and even Bro. Meolic.

Students from other secondary schools fled to the mountains to join the guerrillas and learn communist doctrine with a hope to get a “status” in the new regime. On the contrary, our students were more at peace: our school was well organized, and some officials sent their children to our school and even commanded them to attend catechism classes which were zealously taught by Fr. Majcen with the use of the religious filmstrips bought by Fr. Bordeneve and occasionally also some comics to cheer them. The successful catechism classes attracted the students’ interest to know Catholicism, a religion that was called by many Fr. Majcen’s religion!

Chinese priests showed an indifferent attitude towards the Bishop and began to be contaminated by the independent spirit of a separatist church.

In the schools, the communist propaganda helped to create disorder and police suppression still aggravated the situation. The governor was in no way concerned in all this because he had made up his mind to change side.

A great number of soldiers deserted and joined the guerrillas, but those who were caught were shot at once. The famous VIII Corps proved to be loyal and determined to protect Kunming to the end, but then...

In spite of his hard obligations, Fr. Majcen occasionally came to visit Kunming leprosarium and accepted Fr. Valdeslao’s invitation to hear confession to the poor inmates. He remembered a

An important visit of the Provincial

Fr. Braga went to Kunming and stayed there from 9 to 11 January 1940 to visit the confreres for the last time as he had foreseen. He entrusted them to Fr. Kerec whom he asked to take care of the Salesians in Kunming on his behalf, and made arrangements for the personnel. Before leaving, he earnestly recommended them to have a filial devotion to Our Lady and consecrate the house to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The new Bishop, Vicar Apostolic and the Salesian celebrations

Shortly after the Provincial left, there was a visit of the new Vicar Apostolic, Bishop Larregain, the successor of Bishop De Jonghe. The Kunming house welcomed him warmheartedly, but the bishop showed some reserve with the Salesians because they were not French and in his eyes they were too... progressive!

In the month of Saint Joseph, Mgr. Kerec came and solemnly celebrate his Patron’s feast, surrounded by the Altar servers group that had been well trained by Bro. Meolic. In the meantime the choir under the direction of Father catechist Rizzato marvelously performed the music part.

The feast of the Immaculate Conception was solemnly celebrated in the cathedral, made remarkable with the choir and Altar servers group. In the house, the feast of Mary Help of Christians was highlighted by a musical performance and other ceremonies, to recall Fr. Braga’s recommendation: “The more difficult the time is, the more we have to honor Our Lady, because she can do miracles.”

A trip to Shanghai

Fr. Braga cut short his visit in Italy to come back to China with the instructions of the Superiors on their behavior during war time. He called Fr. Majcen to Macao for a talk. After getting a visa

CHAPTER 4: MISSION DURING WAR TIME 1939-1945

for Vietnam from the consulate of France, Fr. Majcen went to Macao with some money in his pocket to buy there some material for the shoemaking shop at home. After delegating his powers to Fr. Rizzato as his substitute, he took the train for Hải Phòng on 26 July. On arriving at the cathedral, he wanted to see the Superior, but the Vietnamese guard could not understand any of the languages he spoke—Latin, French and Chinese. He then had to write down Chinese characters to express his request, and the man understood and went to inform the Superior. Fr. Fernandez went out and warmly welcome him and showed him a room for rest and installation of his belongings. The prefect also mentioned the presence here of a French Salesian priest named Fr. Dupont. Thus the two Salesians had opportunity to talk with one another for the whole evening and the next day. Fr. Dupont had been a parish priest in Tokyo. There he was mobilized and work as an interpreter for the French officers whenever they spoke with their Japanese counterparts. He was very fervent, devoting all his leisure time to his priestly ministry and wished to be soon demobilized in order to wholly serve the souls. He asked Fr. Majcen to send his words to Fr. Braga who was then in Hà Nội, to ask whether the Provincial could admit him. At this time, both the government and the Bishop of Hà Nộiproposed to the Salesians to take over an orphanage for the Eurasian children. A few days later, Fr. Majcen left for Hong Kong and arrived there by sea after three days. In Hong Kong, he saw that the Salesians were very few and busy, because the confreres of the Studentate and others had been expelled due to their Italian or German nationalities. They had gone to Shanghai. Thus Fr. Majcen went to Macao but Fr. Braga was not there. The vice provincial Fr. Guarona advised him to go to Shanghai to see Fr. Braga. A few days later, Fr. Majcen and Fr. Arduino, the newly appointed rector of Don Bosco school in Shanghai, embarked on a small boat and after a very hard journey by sea, they arrived in Shanghai and got a warm welcome in Namtau. Fr. Majcen had an

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he went with these Camillians to Taiwan where he continued to serve together with them.

The last school year of Salesian School in Kunming before the communist regime: September 1948 to September 1949

A man of optimism, Fr. Braga provided the house with good confreres. He sent Fr. Rubini who had just been ordained on August 1 1948. The newly ordained priest was happy to be in Kunming again. Here, as an economer, he was a great helping hand to Fr. Majcen. Another confrere, the cleric Joseph Ho, was a football star. He was a great gift for the house, but he must be careful because of his ebullience. There was also Fr. Fernandez, a smart sportsman and musician. Bro. Marongiu and the newly ordained Fr. Timmermans also were very helpful. Then there was Fr. Petit, a somehow scrupulous assistant but a man of punctuality. It was a pity he could not speak Chinese though he was sent there to hear confession. And there were Fr. Hoang, catechist and teacher, and Fr. Sing who just got home from the hospital after he had broken his leg in an accident. The two Saint-Sulpice Fathers of the Grand Seminary, Fr. Stulz, its new Rector, and Fr. Bordanave, also came to help teaching catechism to the school children.

Teachers of the secondary school were also carefully chosen to avoid political troubles.

The situation was more and more difficult: the inflation rise was devastating the economy and the central government was threatened by the malicious communist propaganda. Robbery, killing, and military desertion were commonplace. A great number of foreigners and even missionaries who had fled to Kunming during war time now began to go back to their country. Many wealthy Chinese sold their property out to move to safer places.

Fr. Majcen frequently consulted Mgr. Derouineau about the way to manage the issues that changed day after day. On her part, the Superior of the girls' school also came to Fr. Majcen for taking

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these unwanted refugees, the McMillan government and general Alexander signed an agreement with Tito to hand them over. A first group of them was brought in a train which the British said will take them to Italy. Dr. Janez was one among them and he soon realized they were duped. When the train stopped on Yugoslav land, amidst the confusion he escaped from his new master to hide in a corn field nearby. Only when the train had resumed its journey did he go out and, avoiding the main road, he turned round and found himself free now that he was already on Austrian land, and upon arriving in the camp he revealed the trap the British had set for them. All the refugees therefore fled to the mountains, and the British had to really take them to Italy.

They went on several trucks but they had one of them sit beside the driver with a revolver in hand to avoid being duped for a second time. On his arrival in Italy, Dr. Janez first lived in Rome then went to Argentina to work with Dr. Ladislao Lencek, a Lazarist priest who from Argentina continued to help the Slovenian missionaries in the world. Knowing from this priest doctor that Mgr. Kerec was looking for doctors for Chaotong, Janez immediately went to China. He later reported that when he was nearly killed in the corn field, he vowed that if God let him live, he would give all the rest of his life to the missions. He went to Kunming on August 15 1948 and stayed with Fr. Majcen for several months and was very helpful through his profession. Then he went to Chaotong on November 24 1948. Mgr. Kerec was very happy to welcome him. He wanted to work immediately in the hospital of the Slovenian missionary Sisters. At first his surgeon met with several difficulties due to the lack of surgery tools, but after he received them from the American army, he could perform his tasks more easily. Thus he remained in the hospital and tirelessly worked there as a surgeon until he was expelled from China in 1952. He went to Hong Kong where he worked with the Camillian fathers who too had been expelled from Chaotong. Then

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important talk with Fr. Braga on the war, the current situation and the personnel, without forgetting to convey Fr. Dupont's wish to the Provincial. Fr. Braga appointed him a leader for an indefinite time, because he could not know when he could be able to see him again. Afterwards, Fr. Majcen stayed in Shanghai, visited our works there, bought some books and then left for Macao. Fr. Guarona let him rest for about ten days in a small Salesian farm entrusted to the care of Fr. Louis Montini, a nephew of the future Pope Paul VI. Hardly had he recovered thanks to the rest and good food, than he was called back to Macao by Fr. Guarona to head for Kunming before the situation became worse. He had brought with him shoe leather and other material for the workshop and intended to go to Hong Kong when he was ordered to go to Hải Phòng. On the way, he got news that the Pétain government had conceded some strategic sites in Indochina to the Japanese. At the Hải Phòng episcopal office, he met Fr. Dupont and conveyed him the advice of Fr. Braga: "Take courage and be patient, never give up!" But the Provincial could not send him any staff for the moment. The next day Fr. Majcen went to Hà Nội, but he was informed that the railway had been cut: it had been blown up at the last tunnel near the borders by the Chinese government for fear that the Japanese could use it to invade China. Fr. Majcen went to Mr. Pasqualini (an Italian engineer who later became an Italian consul in Hà Nội) who phoned the airport and found a seat on a small French aircraft for Fr. Majcen to fly to Kunming. There were on this flight only two passengers beside the pilot, and in the afternoon of 17 July, Fr. Majcen arrived in Kunming. Fr. Rizzato with his brass band went to welcome him back in a cheerful atmosphere, but this soon vanished in the worries for a dark future. Right away they got into the chapel to pray, such as Fr. Braga had recommended them in time of distress.

Five days later, the Vichy government ordered to stop the Japanese expansion into other areas. But the order was delayed, and the Japanese quickly occupied some more areas, and

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unexpectedly arrested all the French officers and took over their powers. On September 25, the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo Axis was declared, resulting in the isolation of the Kunming confreres from their Superiors in Turin and from other confreres of the China Province.

Fr. Majcen's collaborators

During the past years, Fr. Majcen received a great help from the following people:

The cleric Fernandez, a Spanish. He spoke Chinese fluently and was very fond of music. With music, he brought to the house its Salesian cheerfulness. Later, he studied theology in Shanghai, and after ordination, Fr. Fernandez came back to Kunming and lived here till 1951.

The cleric Perkumas, a Lithuanian. In Kunming, he was a mature assistant, sensitive and knowledgeable, and easily kept order and discipline among his pupils.

The cleric Henry Changeat, a French. Already when the Salesians came to Kunming, the MEP Fathers had asked Fr. Braga to send a French confrere and insisted on this when Fr. Braga and Fr. Berruti came to Kunming. Those Fathers, especially the elderly ones, held that religion could not be introduced into the Chinese people unless it passed through the French culture!!! Once he saw it feasible, Fr. Braga sent to Kunming the cleric Changeat who was French but was born and educated in London. In Kunming, Changeat was a good assistant, delicate and devout. He helped Fr. Majcen a great deal in learning French. He stayed in Kunming until the number of pupils went down because of bombardment. Fr. Braga called him back and sent him to study theology in Shanghai.

Bro. Charles Lee worked in Kunming in the years 1936-37. He was specialized in printing, had a good communication with the

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with another guerrilla who was a fanatic Stalinist. But when the latter was about to shoot him, he was quicker. After this incident he left Italy for a while to go to the Near East. Dr. Fasana was never interested in learning Chinese, and this caused him to make a lot of funny confusion. One day a patient came to him. He ordered the man to take off his shirt but the man refused no matter how he insisted. And the quarrel kept going on until an interpreter explained to him that it was not the man himself who was sick but his child at home.

Other doctors in Chaotong included Dr. Wong, Dr. Chang, and Dr. Janez.

Dr. Wong was a Chinese traditionalist physician who had fled from Singapore when this island was invaded by the Japanese. He came to Kunming. He had recourse to Fr. Majcen's intervention and was recommended to Mgr. Kerec who admitted him and sent him to work in the hospital of the Slovenian Sisters.

Dr. Chang was also a Chinese graduated in medicine from the Aurora Hospital in Shanghai. He too had fled to Kunming and was recommended by Fr. Majcen to Mgr. Kerec who admitted him. He learned catechism and was baptized in Chaotong, became a loyal and fervent Christian even under the communist regime that had sent him to prison.

Dr. Janez was born in 1913 in Dolski, near Ljubljana. As a young man, he was very pious and his mother thought he would become a priest, but he chose medicine instead. He was educated in Ljubljana, Gratz, Vienna, and Zagabria and graduated in May 26 1937. After the war ended, he was informed by a friend that he was in the list of those Tito wanted to eliminate. He fled to Austria where he met other militants from Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia who also were hunted as Tito's enemies because they were not in the same boat with Tito. Austria at that time was occupied by the British who sent them to a refugee camp. Not wanting to harbor

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came other Camillian nurses and a doctor named Dr. Fasana. In Dunhuang they soon built a hospital with the good brothers Caon and Pavan as builders themselves because they could not hire other capable builders, and by doing so they could save a lot of money and also. In the meanwhile, Fr. Rizzi, Superior of the house, was aware of his need for a good knowledge in Chinese language. He went to the Beijing School of language to learn while Fr. Antonelli went to the Aurora Medical University of the Jesuits in Shanghai where he stayed in our Salesian house. After finishing his studies, he worked first in Chaotong then after many years, in Taiwan, where he was a Superior. In 1949, he also cared for the leprosarium in Kunming.

The Camillians evangelized according to their charism, and they opened dispensaries everywhere and opened even hospitals in bigger centers. Fr. Crotti invited Fr. Majcen to preside over the inauguration of the hospital in Huatzi. He accepted the invitation because he also wanted some days of rest due to great fatigue. In this new hospital, Fr. Majcen could see the Camillian nurses teaching other nurses. Fr. Majcen later remarked that although he was there chiefly for a physical rest, those days had brought him so much spiritual good. In those days Fr. Pastro and Fr. Valdesolo heard of some satanic obsessionphenomena at some places in Dunhuang. Evil spirits often came at night to pester. The local Christians believed those were the faithful souls who had once been killed by the Muslims and thrown into a well. Dunhuang was and still is an important Muslim center. The priests tried a number of exorcisms but unsuccessfully, and the troubles only stopped when Fr. Valdesolo hang blessed medals of Our Lady on the door latches. The spirits came for the last time, but when they saw Our Lady's images, they screamed and went off for good.

There are some other doctors serving in the missions in Chaotong too. One among them was Dr. Fasana, a former guerrilla militant of general Pertini. He once was almost killed in a quarrel

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pupils thanks to his knowledge of Cantonese, and in his communication with his Salesian confreres, he used Italian which he had learned at the Rebaudengo Institute.

Bro. Joseph Shi came to replace Bro. Charles Lee in the printing department.

The cleric Augustine Valete, a French. He was sent to Kunming to replace the cleric Changeat. Bro. Valete was not successful with his studies in Shanghai, so Fr. Braga sent him to Kunming as an assistant. He was zealous and eagerly wanted to teach catechism to the children in the house. He prepared his lesson very well, but he spoke Chinese with a French accent so that nobody understood him. Not wanting to become a lay brother, he went to Burma to find way to get back to France. He stayed for a few months in a Salesian house in Mandalay. In that difficult period of the Japanese occupation, there was a bubonic plaguewhich he contracted and which caused his death.

The cleric Simon Liang lived in Kunming in the years 1937-38. He also had to cut short his studies at the studentate and became a lay brother. However, because he used to wear the long black Chinese gown that looked like a cassock, he appeared before the public as a real cleric. He was a wonderful assistant, and not wanting to give up his studies, he could manage to resume them through the help of Fr. Avalle. Fr. Braga called him to Shanghai together with the cleric Changeat and he was re-admitted in the studentate and was ordained through so much hardship. Fr. Liang worked in Macao and Linchow. After innumerable tribulations suffered here, he died a martyr by his royalty to the Pope, in the prisons of Linchow in 1956.

In 1937, it was the tailor Yip who set up a sewing workshop on good base.

Fr. Joseph Avalle came to Kunming as a confessor and a great helper of Fr. Majcen. He had been working in Kunming for two

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years until his poor health forced him to go. He left a loveable memory there.

In 1939 Fr. John Rizzato came to Kunming as a catechist. Young and zealous, he initiated in Kunming a new approach to teaching catechism, designed a presentation of catechism and applied a form of prayer using spoken words instead of the ancient unintelligible prayers. All this made a great impact but it did not please the French missionaries who were still too attached to the old methods. After realizing that he was no longer needed in Kunming, he left the school in December and made a dangerous journey by car across several provinces and eventually came in the diocese of Shiuchow where Fr. Braga sent him to work.

The lay Brother Lodovico Rojak came to Kunming on December 27 1939. He was head teacher of the carpenter's shop and an excellent sculptor.

In September 1940, Fr. Joseph Seng came as a prefect of studies, together with the cleric Louis Rubini, a very good assistant. Shortly after came the lay Brother Marongiu to help Father economer.

B. War time 1940-45

During the war, Monsignor Kerec strictly obeyed Fr. Braga's recommendation to be his representative. He went to Kunming to make the "canonical visits", preach retreats and arrange for the smooth running of the confreres, even of the temporary Rector. He said he can shout, animate, encourage and create enthusiasm. Monsignor Kerec was always loved by the missionaries and the French people who lived in Kunming. Everybody well knew that when he encouraged others, it was as if he was emboldening himself, who by temperament was not courageous at all!

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French residents disappeared, the club no longer had its raison d'être. Because Mgr. Derouineau was its owner, he offered it to the Salesians. Having got this space, Fr. Majcen all at once thought of developing our school by opening a secondary school. He asked permission from the School Department to begin with the lowest class and would add a new class each year until there were all the classes of the secondary school. After getting the permission, he started to have the furniture made and enrolled teachers as well as prepared the games for the new spacious court and the skating rink.

*The Camillians in Yunnan

As we have occasionally mentioned about the Camillians earlier, it seems fit here to say a few words about their coming in China and their activities. During a trip to Rome in 1945, Mgr. Kerec asked the Superior of the Camillians to send some of his members to come and work in Chaotong Apostolic Vicariate. The first group included three priests who came to China at Shanghai port, being unable to disembark at Hong Kong. They were received by Fr. Braga and his Salesians and were invited to stay for a few days. They then resumed their trip and came to Kunming on May 19 1946 and were warmly received by Fr. Majcen and his confreres.

After paying a visit to Mgr. Derouineau and the Catholic works in the city, they all at once went to Chaotong. They arrived on July 18 and stayed in a small house provided by the Slovenian Sisters who were working in the hospital. Together with the house, the Camillians also accepted the care of an orchard and a dispensary. A second group included three priests and three brothers who without delay came to Chaotong after their arrival in Kunming on April 8 1947.

Mgr. Kerec entrusted them with the care for the southern area of the Apostolic Vicariate including Dunhuang city and other population centers. After having temporarily been settled, there

check-out: His passport was still signed by King Peter of Yugoslavia and he had come to Shanghai without the government's permission! That was why he had to overstay for a few days in Shanghai and had an occasion to visit the Don Bosco school in Jiangsu, the agriculture school in Sinjiang, and the initial work in Quabei. In Shanghai he also visited the Salesian publications that were publishing all over China catechism books, sacred histories, interesting readings for the young and educational plays. These plays were later adapted by the cleric Gregorio Py and were performed at the new theatre in Kunming. It was in this theatre that with the trio Fernandez, Pavlin and Py, these plays and other smaller were presented very successfully.

Those were among his achievements in Shanghai during that remarkable trip. With the help of the clerics, the religious movement of the Salesian associations and catechesis developed. The catechism course was solemnly concluded by the annual catechetical examination which Mgr. Derouineau was very eager to attend. Evidence of the fruits of these activities was the baptisms of a number of children. Although many children asked to be baptized, baptism was only administered to those children who had the consent of their parents and who were likely to persevere. Some vocations would also come from these children: some would be sent to the aspirantate in Macao, and though not all would become Salesians, nevertheless all would be successful in other paths of life.

Bishop Derouineau offered us the French Club

There was a tall building behind our school with lovely places and a skating rink. It was a club for the gatherings and feasts of groups of French people who formerly had been in great number in Kunming but were currently leaving one after the other: the French bank closed its branches, the Calmet hospital was handed over to the university, and the railways system was nationalized. When the

Since 1940, even in Kunming, the preparation for war increased day after day, while the Japanese air raids caused more and more damages and casualties. The bombings went on until 1944, resulting in the reduction of the number of students number because people kept flocking into the school for refuge and eventually the school had to be closed. There were only five boarding student who remained with us, as they had nowhere to go. As we said earlier, some confreres had been sent somewhere else by the Superiors. The rest, having no longer the income from the students' fees, had to make the school ground a vegetable garden to get some money; they were short of salt and rice, and each only had one bowl of rice twice a day. To earn a living, our confreres decided—without asking for the government's permission—to reopen the classes every evening, when the bombing had stopped. Then there was an order that all German citizen should leave China and all Italians had to be concentrated. Even the cleric Rubini had no choice but to obey, but remembering Fr. Michel's advice, we all kept silence. The police did not know the names of the foreigners in Kunming and Bro. Rubini was not harassed but could still go on with his task in the school, and the number of students gradually increased.

1941 — Amidst the dangers of bombing and the troubles from the Bishop

Bishop Larregain had in mind that the religious members must absolutely serve the bishop as did the good Sisters of St Paul and the Saint-Sulpice members at the Grand Seminary. Fr. Majcen tried to please him as far as possible, and the Bishop wanted him to say Masses to the Carmelite Sisters at 5.00 every morning, as well as to the Sisters of Mary where there was an old Sister who, wearing her watch, always showed her annoyance every time he came even a minute late. She did not know that he had to go in the rain and the wind, and often had to jump over water holes on the way.

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Still, the Bishop wanted him to come as a confessor to these sisters, and also to preach retreats at the Seminary, all of which cost him dearly. He moreover insisted that in our Salesian houses, we should use the ancient prayers formulae, and a MEP missionary even sent in a boarding student to spy on and provoke disorder in the house. The real reason for all this foolish thing was never told but it was bare truth: the Bishop belonged to the ‘French’ Catholic Church that advocated the expansion of the French culture (and not only culture) in China. Our Salesians did not want to yield. Once, a troublemaking boy was dismissed, and it happened that he had been sent to us by a MEP Father. Fr. Majcen was not aware that in the contract signed between Fr. Braga and Mgr. De Jonghe, there was a clause saying that the Salesians should receive up to 40 pupils from the MEP Fathers. Fr. Braga was too generous in this, but Fr. Majcen, on the other hand, could not bear such troublemakers in the house, while the Salesians themselves could not have two frugal meals a day! The confreres were right when they said we are exempt religious, who are not obliged to obey the Bishop in his extreme demands and beyond his jurisdiction. And poor Fr. Majcen had to pilot the community in such a condition, when the nerves of everybody were so tense because of the bombings outside and the privations in the house.

The number of students went up to 150, thanks to the wisdom of the Salesians who showed that they did not belong to the French Church, that they loved China and the Chinese. They did not have any other politics except that of Our Father.

During the first days of August, there was an examination in the school under the government’s supervision. The students got very good results, resulting in the increase of the school’s prestige. More students enrolled during summer, thus increasing the amount of school fees by which we could pay the teachers and the confreres and could improve their living standard.

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where he soon recovered from his shock. A few days later he could take another plane to continue his travel to Shanghai.

Attending the Provincial Chapter in Shanghai

Fr. Braga held a Provincial Chapter in Shanghai in 1947 with a view to update our missionary work to adapt it to the new needs of the after-war. Fr. Majcen took a Chinese Airlines flight on a military aircraft over Chungking and Hanchao to Shanghai in 7 flight hours. In Shanghai he was warmly welcome by the Provincial and the confreres, of whom several had been working with him in Kunming. Among other things, he had to report on all what had happened in Kunming and on how he had managed the tasks during the war. After the Chapter, he and the confreres made a visit to Kukchow north of Nanking province and attended the inauguration of a school there. Being announced in advance, they arrived at the railways station a few hours earlier and could get the tickets to depart.

On their arrival in Kukchow, they were welcome by the school Rector, Fr. Ferrari, and Fr. Majcen was very happy to see again Fr. Li, a confrere belonging to the Miao clan from Yunnan. In the evening, he was invited to give a goodnight talk and everybody admired his mandarin with a Yunnan accent. The Chapter members were happy to be in the Shrine of Our Lady at Toxa and attend the ceremony glorifying Our Mary Help of Christians, Queen of China. A day as wonderful as in heaven! Our Lady was solemnly crowned Queen by Bishop Wang Uan Sach of Shanghai and by Bishop Yuen Peng of Manshin, in the presence of Bishop Riberi, Apostolic Nuncio, together with the clergy and laity. Almost all had a supernatural impression of the presence of Jesus and Mary as an assurance of their divine protection over the people.

When everything was over, Fr. Majcen was about to leave when his departure was delayed because of an incident at the

The erection of Chinese ecclesiastical hierarchy

The Chinese hierarchy was erected by the Holy See in 1945, and Bishop Derouineau became archbishop of Yunnan, with other leaders for the dioceses in the archdiocese including Mgr. Magentis, Vicar Apostolic of Tali, Mgr. Kerec, Administrator of Chaotong. The event was solemnly celebrated in Kunming with a high Mass with the cooperation of the Salesian choir, the Altar servers group and the seminarians. Of course there was a sumptuous banquet with the presence of many priests and guests around the Archbishop as well as other ecclesiastical leaders of other dioceses in the archdiocese.

General Liu Han's separatist movement

Since long there had been disagreements between the Yunnam governor and the central government, and eventually a revolt broke out. Within a few days the whole city was paralyzed by the firing between the rebels and the loyalists. Finally the government's loyalists won. The governor was dismissed and replaced by general Liu Han, a member of the Wuhien clan, the most populous of the region.

A cleric who fell from the air

One day a Belgian airplane suddenly landed at the Kunming airport for fuelling. On board were some missionaries and sisters. The airplane was on its way to Shanghai. Among the passengers there was a Belgian cleric. He was very happy to pass some days in our house. Unluckily when the airplane started to resume its flight, it lost altitude and fell on an old cemetery near the airport.

In the crash, the plane was broken into pieces, the pilot was killed, some passengers were hurt and the cleric named Timmermans was safe but very frightened. Fr. Majcen, who had accompanied him to the airport, brought him back to our house

Moreover, the bombardments were very frequent but none touched the school. They occasionally fell near it and several glass panes were broken. Doors and windows were swept away to give free access to rain and wind.

The Americans set up radarscopes to discover the enemies' bombers and accordingly fired back by series of cannons called "flying tigers". There were even air battles that made the aircrafts of both sides fall down like torches!

The famine and Christian charity

The war brought with it famine too. Many people died of hunger. Christian charity came to help: Bishop Romaniello of Qylin diocese and Bishop Pasang of Keungman had to flee before the Japanese invasion. In Kunming, the Salesians all at once prepared the meals for poor people who were at the point of starvation. Mgr. Romaniello had the idea of making large pots of porridge out of American flour to save many people with minimum wastage.

A radio set

Thanks to the optimal location of Kunming, Fr. Majcen could easily receive the radio waves of Europe, thus he could hear the fanatic voice of Hitler, noisily declarations of Mussolini and discourses of Churchill promoting the resistance. At night he even could listen to the radio programs in Slovenian from a secret radio station located near Trieste giving news on the activities of Tito and Pertini's guerrillas.

The Sacred History and the shoemaker's shop

A Jewish lady, the German ambassador's wife, went to see Fr. Majcen. She saw an illustrated Sacred History, The Old Testament, and she was very excited. She had a son who had a twisted foot but Bro. Meolic had made for him a shoe that fitted it very well. The

CHAPTER 4: MISSION DURING WAR TIME 1939-1945

book and the shoe pleased her enormously, and since then she became a great promoter of our shoe's shop, helping it to increase its customers both in number and quality.

Mgr. Kerec in Mandalay

Mgr. Kerec went to Kunming to preach a retreat. Knowing that Bro. Meolic was going to Tali and Lashiofino, Mandalay, to buy materials for his shoe's shop, he wanted to accompany him too. In Mandalay, Mgr. Kerec was warmly welcome by the confreres, believing that by this visit, the Monsignor fulfilled Don Bosco's dream about the meeting between the Salesians who came from the North with those in the South. Actually that dream was about the meeting of the Tartarians with the Chinese, but in Mgr. Kerec's fancy, it became an historic event.

The invasion of Burma and the plague

In March 1942, the Japanese invaded Burma and cut off the strategic route to Burma. Thus the Americans had to make another route called the Stilvelt road crossing Assam to transport their military supplies to China. To avoid the Japanese invasion, many Chinese had to leave Burma and went to Kunming. Unfortunately enough, they brought along the plague that affected the whole city. Of those affected by the disease, was one of our boys who lived near our school who, on his way home for a treatment, died after having said the short invocations Fr. Majcen had taught him.

The death of the Bishop

Bishop Larregain caught a typhoid and was immediately taken to hospital where he died on April 21 1942. Fr. Majcen arrived at his deathbed before his death and asked him to bless our school. Fr. Michel became the diocese's Administrator until 1944, and during this time he regularly came to visit us with so much love.

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The mechanics shop

Fr. Majcen desired to open a mechanics shop in the school. To satisfy his desire, Fr. Braga sent him a very smart lay brother, Bro. Francis Martinez. Although he had been used to working in well equipped workshops, he knew how to adapt by starting with a small workshop equipped with only one lathe and a few other tools. He immediately got some pupils, and under his guidance, they quickly made remarkable progress. It is a pity that only one year later, he was called back by Fr. Provincial and Bro. Marzari was sent to replace him.

This brother could not adapt himself to the existing workshop and thus a big machine was bought, though with very much sacrifice. Unluckily Bro. Marzari was a type who preferred traveling to teaching at workshop. He got acquaintance with the French consul and regularly came to work at his house, where he could enjoy better meals than he could at home. He left the workshop to the tutorship of a senior student who had learnt something from Bro. Martinez and who could not teach much to his classmates. Consequently Fr. Rector was very unhappy because the mechanics workshop could not develop as he wished.

The acting Rector became the full-fledged one

In the first visit of Father Provincial to Kunming after the war, Fr. Majcen told him that he had been working as an acting Rector for 6 years already, so it was time the Provincial had to appoint a new one to the house of Kunming. Fr. Braga smiled: "Be patient, dear Fr. Majcen. Let's forget everything during war time. Here we've had the Rector Major's decree nominating you a Rector for the three years 1946-1949." Reluctantly Fr. Majcen had to comply, and after the swearing-in, he continued to ... toil!

The war had ended in Europe but there was no sign of its ending in Asia. The Americans kept bombing the Japanese army, and finally two atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 5 and 9 respectively, ending all Japanese resistance and the Japanese Emperor eventually surrendered.

A theatre and St. John Bosco's chapel

In 1944, all that remained of the old house collapsed in an earthquake. A decision was made to build there a theatre with an upper floor for a chapel and other badly-needed rooms. All the confreres decided to continue collecting money and got to work immediately. By December 12 1945, when Bro. Rubini was called by the Provincial to go to Shanghai for his theology studies, the construction had almost finished. When everything was complete, the chapel was equipped with three altars, benches, the confessionals and all necessities. In spite of the poverty of the school, we should never be thrifty with regard to the chapel.

The theatre was also completed well, and on the stage, various performance programs were organized: artistic presentations, music and songs, and even small operas, etc...

An increase in personnel

The war ended, Fr. Provincial could now go to Kunming: he was very pleased to see the school develop in spite of the war and the bombing devastation. He sent more confreres including Fr. Francis Hoang as catechist, and two clerics Gregory Py and Stanislas Pavlin. As a local of Kunming, Bro. Py could easily communicate with his pupils, but his wisdom had him insist on their speaking mandarin with standard Pekingese accent. As for Bro. Pavlin, he showed great talent in music and pedagogy while he was learning to speak their dialect.

The death of the MEP Vicar General and the illness of Mgr. Kerec

Fourteen days after the death of Bishop Larregain, the MEP Vicar General, Fr. Savin, suddenly died on April 25. After they had attended the funeral mass for the Bishop in Chaotong, Fr. Majcen and Mgr. Kerec also came to pay homage to the Vicar General's body. Mgr. Kerec touched the forehead of Fr. Savin mumbling: "Poor Fr. Savin!" But Fr. Majcen warned him: "Don't touch his body! He has died of the plague: it's contagious!" Frightful, Mgr. Kerec on his way home asked Fr. Majcen how to prevent the contamination. He told him that liquors were very effective against disease. So Mgr. Kerec had someone buy him a liter of alcohol and he drank a lot of it. One hour later, Mgr. Kerec called Fr. Majcen and said: "I have a heavy stomachache! The disease has got into my stomach! I'll surely die. Please say good-bye to my Superiors and relatives and tell them I'm very sorry!"

And he immediately went to Fr. Michel to make a general confession and then felt a little better. But he wanted Fr. Majcen to call Sister Paola of the Maryknoll, a nurse of the American Red Cross Hospital, to take him to hospital. Paola called an ambulance but Mgr. Kerec without being aware that he was sick, put on his Monsignor's habit and walked himself to the hospital; he even went up the hospital's steps! Two weeks later he went home, healthier and fatter thanks to the hospital, and he celebrated a thanksgiving Mass.

Disturbances in the school

Because of the increase in the students' number, the principal Thân Văn Tường asked Fr. Majcen to take in two teachers he considered very capable.

So far our school had always run very smoothly, but the two new teachers were full of democratic and communist ideas. They began to stir up the senior students so that these became arrogant

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and unruly. One day Bro. Meolic had his workshop materials stolen, so he beat one of the students. It was like the sky was falling, because the schools in the city were full of violence and the police had shot a student recently. Although the agitation in the house went down when Bro. Meolic publicly apologized for his behavior, the two new teachers introduced their revolutionary ideas into the school and even the principal was affected by those ideas. In November, students of the final grade ran riot, breaking glasses and furniture... Fr. Majcen had to take strong measure: he summoned the principal to give him a warning and fired the two new teachers and the rebellious students, as he threatened to dismiss even the principal. The principal Thân Văn Tường immediately obeyed and the problem was settled. From then on, however, the principal was no longer on friendly terms with Fr. Majcen. On his part, Fr. Majcen was ready to fire him at the end of the school year to replace him with Mr. Joseph Leung, an alumnus who was currently a literature professor at university. Fr. Majcen later wrote: "It seemed I was playing a game: I needed to be careful in each move, otherwise I would lose, meaning the closure of the school." In the school, he tried to promote and strengthen the Salesian spirit by giving goodnight talks to the confreres, and by his conferences to the students based on the teaching of Salesian tradition collected by Don Ricaldone in his "Salesian Formation". He encouraged his confreres to keep calm, because the events were God's trials. Speaking to the students who were mostly pagans, he followed Fr. Braga's advice, explaining Confucius' sayings in order to develop natural virtues.

That was his way of introducing his boys to Christian life.

A bitter pill to swallow

On December 8 1943, Monsignor Alexandre Derouineau was appointed Apostolic Delegate of Kunming. While waiting for his

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neurotic. One day he had an accident while riding a bicycle and broke his leg. He was immediately taken to an American military hospital and had to stay there for a long period. Fr. Majcen was very unhappy because of the accident and also because he lost a very great helper when he was very busy.

Two confreres... coming from heaven

That year Fr. Majcen received two heaven-sent missionaries, Fr. Pizzato and Fr. Szeliga. They came from Namtung, of the Shiuchow diocese that was occupied by the Japanese. Fearful for their lives, they fled. They had walked for many days through mountains and forests and reached an American base that was about to withdraw before the invasion of the Japanese. The American officers took them to Kunming by plane. As there were no suitable jobs for them in the house, they began to serve in the American army as patrols of the military posts and thus continued to earn their living.

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In 1945, the war ended. In Europe, the Allies attacked on all fronts. Mussolini was executed. Hitler killed himself. August 5 marked the victory of the Allies' armies in Europe. Tito took this opportunity to hold power in Yugoslavia and many Yugoslavians fled to Italy and Carinzia. These included also those guerrillas who had fought against the invaders but did not follow Tito and might be killed by him. Doctor Janez was one among them.

Dr. Janez later came to China, in the Chaotong region, and now (1985) he still works with the Camillian Fathers at a hospital in Taiwan.

Good relations with the MEP

Mgr. Derouineau greatly helped to improve the relations of the Salesians with the MEP and solved a number of inconveniences due to misunderstanding. The former contract signed by Fr. Braga with the MEP was revised, stating that it was incumbent on the Salesians to receive the MEP's students only on condition that these were really poor and at a suitable age for their grade: because students who were too old could not sit together with the smaller ones.

The bombing of the Carmelite convent

In an air raid of the Japanese, a bomb fell on the Carmelite convent. Fr. Majcen came to visit them and was introduced into their closure, an exception given by the Bishop for some exceptional visitor of the convent.

There he witnessed some damages made by the bombing, and admire the sisters' poverty. In his conversation with the Abbess, he wondered how she was so wellinformed of what was happening around. His question was soon answered. The Sisters earned their living by raising some cows and selling their milk to the city. It was through the selling girls that the Sisters got all kinds of news and it was through the Abbess that Fr. Majcen could have the news about the missions and the missionaries that he otherwise had not known. In fact, some secluded convents had ... special antennae to get news.

Fr. Sing had an accident

In those times, Fr. Sing was very happy to meet his eldest brother whom he had not seen for very long. But that joy did not last long: the brother, who had got a disease for a long time, died shortly after. It was too painful for Fr. Sing to become like a

arrival, Fr. Michel prepared a report on the running of the diocese *sede vacante*. He met Fr. Majcen and, with a malicious smile, handed the draft to him. Fr. Majcen read it and saw it full of praises for the Carmelites, the Missionary Sisters of Mary and of Saint Paul and their orphanage, but without a word about the Salesians and their innumerable school activities. Fr. Majcen was immensely offended. He realized that our school wasintentionally forgotten because it did not belong to the "French Church"! He tried to swallow his pride, without saying a word about this to his confreres for fear of their being offended, and this of course was a legitimate feeling. On the other hand, Fr. Majcen always showed his humility before those (French) priests, who had been hurt by the famous article of Fr. Berruti on the *Bollettino Salesiano* extolling the Salesian Preventive System for its best effects in education without having to use the French language and French culture! Evidence of the fruits of the Preventive System was the great number of the children baptized on Fr. Majcen's feastday, and by the increase in the number of the pupils to 635, including 135 boarders and 15 vocational students. Catechism was prohibited by the government in the curriculum. It must be taught outside the school classes, often in the evening. Catechism students were divided into different groups: one taught by Fr. Majcen, another by Fr. Tuong, and the rest by the Saint Sulpice Fathers and some theology students of the Seminary. The students were very eager to attend catechism classes in which they could listen to the stories taken from the Bible, the Gospel and catechism books.

Other troubles

Among the many troubles of that period, there were several intrusions of burglars. Although Fr. Majcen had a high wall built around the house, yet the thieves managed to make holes in the wall to get in. At one side of the house there was a small unfrequented alleywhere those "unknown rogue at night" could easily perform evil deeds. There were lots of troubles at that time.

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In Kunming, hosts of troubling incidents took place. The State launched several mouse eradication campaigns. Each family must hand over to the police 10 mice per month, and each school 15 mice. By offering some money to the cooks, Fr. Majcen could easily get enough mice to pay his tax. But for those families living in clean, concrete buildings, it was not easy at all. And the police came to help them. They took the mice people brought to them and resell them for some money, thus helping those families fulfill their duty. But this making money game could not last long; it was soon detected, and people began to be cautious enough to throw the mice into a barrel of lime right after they were received by the police.

Fr. Majcen got a fever

Weakened and exhausted by continuous stress, Fr. Majcen got a fever in June and had to stay in bed. Fortunately there were at that time several priests who were taking refuge in the episcopal office, whom Fr. Majcen could ask to replace him in saying the masses.

The replacement of the principal

After the past incidents of November, Fr. Majcen decided to change the principal, and with the generous help of the president of the school council he easily got the necessary permission from the Education Department. He gently dismissed the principal and, to save his face, he announced this decision during a dinner before the presence of all the teachers. He used very kind words to thank the principal and introduced his successor. This replacement was a great victory with the Salesians, but Fr. Majcen did not show any triumphalism. He always tried to be very humble (as a servant of servants according to the advice of Fr. Braga). He however kept

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control of everything and nothing would happen without his consent.

A meeting in the school yard

All confreres of Kunming were very attached to and interested in the good running of their house. The school was in a very difficult financial situation due to the interest they should pay to the bank. The confreres held a meeting on the school yard to solve this and other problems and they deliberated to live thrifitly and tried to find other ways to increase their income.

Bro. Meolic would raise the price of shoes from his shop without causing it to lose its customers. The head of the printing shop would find additional orders from the railway management which, although already nationalized, still used the ticket forms in French. The two confreres of the carpenter's shop, Rojak and Ovarec, thanks to their business with outsiders, could not only keep the shop but also make furniture for the school and provide maintenance services for the house, thus saving a lot of money. Even Bro. Marongiu could earn some money by selling socks... With those savings and various businesses, and the selling out of unnecessary things of the house, the confreres could get a good amount of money (around 2 million Chinese yuan), enough to clear all the debts Fr. Kerec had borrowed earlier from the bank. Everybody felt relieved.

Remarkable visits

There were frequent visits by the American officers stationed in Kunming. One day, an officer told Fr. Majcen that once in a canal in Taiwan, a ship carrying the Salesians was shipwrecked. The officer was very sorry for them and offered a good sum of money to Fr. Majcen to say Mass for them. It turned out that they were three Salesian postulants on their way to Shanghai for their novitiate).

**From Kunming to Hong Kong: August 25 — September 15,
1951**

On August 25, Fr. Majcen said his Mass in the bishop's office and asked Mgr. Kerec for a blessing. Mgr. Kerec gave his blessing in tears, then he also asked Fr. Majcen to bless him. At that moment Mgr. Kerec feared that he might suffer martyrdom. Without having breakfast which was not ready, and fasting for the whole day, Fr. Majcen at once went to the air office. His luggage was weighed and they meanly demanded his extra weight which included his overcoat, his dress and even his handkerchiefs. At the air office, he had to wait for one hour together with Fr. Sing and the two could talk and bless each other once more. A bus took him to the airport. There, after a long delay, he underwent another luggage check. The police intentionally turned his breviary and his Filotea page by page to see whether anything was hidden. Then they carefully check his photos and other personal souvenirs so dear to him and threw them all into the wastebasket. At last the airplane arrived and after a final check, Fr. Majcen boarded the airplane and parted from Kunming forever.

After three hours the plane landed in Chunkiang. After a while, a policeman came to check the luggage like in Kunming, examining the papers one by one. Nothing more was detected. He just saw a few notes taken on the Don Bosco's dream *The Snake in the Well* which he had prepared for a goodnight talk. He ordered him to read, translate and explain it for one hour. He also wanted him to read something in his Russian dictionary, then called a small car to take him to a riverside restaurant. It was here that he met Fr. Fernandez, Bro. Marongiu, the Carmelite Sisters and the Franciscan Daughters of Mary. They had been here for a week waiting for a ship to take them on the river.

girl who, once a zealous communist party member, got leprosy but strongly affected by Christian charity, demanded and was admitted to baptism.

An extraordinary visit of Fr. Bellido

That year Fr. Modesto Bellido came to Kunming in an extraordinary canonical visit. He was very impressed by the fact that our school was respected both by the State and the Ordinary. We had masses in Latin, had a brass band, organized excursions into the forests, held catechism classes and had catechumens' groups. On Don Bosco's feast, Fr. Bellido had the joy to administer baptism to a number of children. Among them there was an orphan whom he gave the Christian name Modesto—the same as his—and another younger boy whom he gave the name Savio.

From Chaotong Monsignor Kerec also came to Kunming on this occasion to place his grievance about the amount of money he could not receive. This is a long story which will be briefly reviewed here.

The Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith through the Apostolic Nuncio had sent the annual subsidies for Chaotong, and the nuncio handed them to the Salesians who would transfer them to the due destinations.

This transfer was neither easy nor safe, and thus the money could not be transferred right away. Since Mgr. Kerec was notified that the money had been sent, he was impatient because of the delay. Then there was the money exchange issue. It was not known on what basis Mgr. Kerec counted so high the exchange rate that the Provincial economer could not accept it. After Fr. Bellido's visit, the economer transferred 8,000 US\$ to Mgr. Kerec's account in the bank, leaving him to deal with it himself.

The confreres in crisis

Bro. Oravec had some serious doubts about his vocation, while Bro. Meolic was scared of the communist impending coming. Both asked to go to Macao for consultation with the visiting Superior and for a retreat. After that, they asked to leave the Congregation, got the dispensation of the vows and went back to their own countries: Bro. Ovarec to Slovakia and Bro. Meolic to Yugoslavia. To fill in their posts, Fr. Majcen had to rely on his two past pupils who had completed their professional training in Macao and Kunming.

Fr. Provincial's visit

That year, Fr. Braga also made a visit, especially for a negotiation with Mgr. Kerec on financial issues. He went by a car reserved for him to Chaotong where he discussed important problems and tried his best to solve those involving Mgr. Kerec and finally came home satisfied.

The last feast of Mary Help of Christians

The feast was very solemnly celebrated in the former French club, with a Mass and a Eucharistic procession presided over by Mgr. Derouineau. In the entertainment program, however, Fr. Majcen was annoyed when listening to a song with very negative words but it was very popular with the communist youth of those days. Such incident made Fr. Majcen more and more vigilant, because it could lead to the closure of the school. Fortunately the communist members began to leave the school, freeing Fr. Majcen from possible troubles.

A trip to Hong Kong

The situation everywhere were more and more serious, prompting the Provincial to call Fr. Majcen to Hong Kong for a

On August 21, while he was walking with Mgr. Kerec, Fr. Majcen was kindly invited by the police to follow him to the police station. Fr. Majcen asked to take his hat, and with it, also some medicine and money he had got ready. At the station, the chief police asked whether he had money. "Money? For what?" he asked. "To get an air ticket to Hong Kong." So he asked to go to get money and he was allowed to go. Then the police told him: "You have to publish on the press a notification for three days, and after three days if nobody accuses you or demands any debts, you may go!" He at once went to the air booking-office and booked a seat on the 25 August. He fervently prayed to Mary and Don Bosco that no trouble would fall on him at the last moment. Luckily it was summer holiday time, the teachers were on holiday, and few people read his notifications on the press. In the mean time he weighed his belongings, taking one thing out and putting another in, so that his luggage did not overweigh the 40 pounds allowed. In his case were 4 heavy volumes of the breviary, a colossal Russian dictionary, and the *Filotea* printed in 1899, in Slovene, a precious souvenir of his mother, and then some towels and clothes.

Having no money for the ticket, he went to Fr. Sing who quickly came to borrow some money from the Vietnamese Carmelite Sisters who were living in Kunming. And Fr. Majcen promised to pay them back from Hong Kong via the bank.

On the evening of August 24, the two friends still discretely met behind the cathedral. Fr. Majcen exhorted Fr. Sing to be confident in trials and adversities, and have devotion to Mary. Finally the two gave each other the blessing of Mary Help of Christians.

**CHAPTER 7: THE SCHOOL CONFISCATED,
FR. MAJCEN CAME TO HONG KONG — MACAO**

for imperialist crimes. At that moment a police officer intervened to take him to prison. They prepared a public trial for him on September 9 and he was sentenced to a 30-year imprisonment. After those 30 years of immeasurable sufferings, he was released still alive, physically very weak but spiritually as strong as ever. The conditions have changed a little for the better, and now, still living as a normal citizen in Kunming, he earns his living by translating books for the government and does his priestly ministry as much as he can.

On August 17, Fr. Fernandez and Bro. Marongiu left, as did the Carmelite Sisters of Kunming and the Franciscan Daughters of Mary, after having handed over all their missions and possessions to their Chinese and Vietnamese Sisters. Except Fr. Wang in prison, there remained in Kunming other Salesians: Mgr. Kerec, Fr. Majcen, Fr. Sing, the cleric Ho and the lay brother Diep.

On August 18, while Fr. Majcen was walking in a small yard with Mgr. Kerec who was speaking of his pending martyrdom, a police came and ordered Fr. Majcen to gather Mgr. Derouineau and all the Salesians in the sitting room. Fr. Majcen came to report the matter to Mgr. Derouineau. The latter exclaimed: "This is the end!" He took his pastor ring, put in his pocket some medicine and some money which he had got ready. He went down to the sitting room where were present Mgr. Kerec and other priests. The chief police came with a long list, saying: "Here is the imperialist and colonialist bishop Derouineau!" (At that, several policemen from the doors and windows pointed their guns at the Bishop. The chief police went on reading on his paper a series of accusations: "He...". He concluded declaring: "Therefore he is condemned by the people to imprisonment." Immediately he was surrounded by the police and led to a room on the fourth floor where he was to stay day and night, lie on the floor and could not talk to anybody.

CHAPTER 5: THE END OF WORLD WAR II

consultation. Fr. Majcen moreover wanted to go to Hong Kong where he could find materials for his workshops. In Hong Kong, he was reaffirmed as Rector of Kunming, but during his trip he was robbed of his purse and passport although he had been very careful before departure. Fortunately, thanks to the Apostolic nuncio in Hong Kong, he was at once granted a Vatican passport and thus could embark a French vessel for Hải Phòng where he boarded a small aircraft and flied to Kunming as he did in the past.

In those days he and his confreres were kept a close watch on. Some teachers who were identified as Kuomintangmembers left the school to find safer places.

The school was opened again, but students were still few. Nothing was sure in those days when people later knew that the governor Liu Han and general An had secretly prepared to go with the Red Army.

CHAPTER 6: UNDER THE CHINESE COMMUNIST REGIME (1949-1951)

Fr. Majcen was Rector for one year under the Chinese communist regime (September 1949 to September 1950)

Governor Liu Han against Chiang's government

After secret preparations, the governor Liu Han and General An rose up against the central government and declared the communist regime. The VIII Corps also followed the communists, except some separatists who managed to reach Taiwan by several routes.

At that time Mgr. Reberi recommended his priests to remain in their posts and tried their best to adapt to the new regime with a view to saving what can be saved. Schools were reopened and while the postal service was still in place with Hong Kong, Fr. Majcen began sending there all the school's documents and Dr. Janez also took this opportunity to send all his valuable medicine books to Bro. Mirzel at Aberdeen School in Hong Kong.

Writing to Fr. Majcen, Fr. Braga exhorted him to continue his work in the school, but to be humble and avoid all appearance of a superior. Though optimistic, Fr. Braga nevertheless thought it was not easy to deal with the communists even by being sensible, wise and considerate.

In those days there was a general who had once rebelled against the central government and who organized the guerrillas in Yunnan. He led his soldiers to Kunming and paraded in the streets, equipped with old weapons. He was expecting the people to cheer and acclaim them but people were only silently looking on their

Fr. Majcen's last month of in Kunming: August 1951

We could still make our retreat together in the cathedral's sacristy, but in secret: The retreatants included Fr. Fernandez, Fr. Wang, Fr. Sing, the cleric Ho and the two lay brothers Marongiu and Diep. Mgr. Kerec gave the conference and Fr. Majcen the meditations. In the clear moonlight of one evening, Fr. Majcen, Fr. Sing, Fr. Wang and Bro. Diep were sitting at the steps of the cathedral. Fr. Majcen told them: "We are about to leave, but you should stay. We recommend you three things: Love for the Eucharist; have a great devotion to Mary; and be loyal to the Pope." Fr. Wang responded: "We are Chinese and we'll do our best. As for loyalty to the Pope, we'd rather die than be separated from him!" And he kept his words.

On August 14 or 15, all the Salesians could still have dinner together. Fr. Sing invited us to a Vietnamese restaurant a little far from our school where we had a sumptuous European dinner with a perfect French wine. The dinner was as marvelous as it could be. But we spoke softly and the Vietnamese of the restaurant did too: that was the atmosphere of that time!

On the feast of Assumption there was little attendance in the cathedral because of fear. Bishop Derouineau solemnly celebrated his last Mass here. After the Mass, he summoned Fr. Majcen to hand him the chalice souvenir of his first Mass, commissioning him to take it to Hong Kong and from there send it back to his family. In those days we prayed a great deal, perhaps more than ever before.

On August 16 afternoon, Fr. Majcen was informed of Fr. Wang's arrest. The students of our school kept shouting and uttering insults by calling him a dog of the imperialists who had deceived them by his doctrine and led them astray, and saying that they wanted to see his bloodshed on this school yard in reparation

Sister Claudia died in the same way. In Chaotong Sister Schiler of the Yugoslavian congregation also died of typhoid.

The Church situation became worse

Now almost all believed that sooner or later all the European missionaries, even bishops, would be expelled after having undergone the trial, mistreatment and even the prison.

The Nuncio ordered all the Ordinaries to choose among their Chinese clergy the Vicars for their dioceses, so that they would not be short of leaders.

Thus Bishop Derouineau chose Fr. Ho for this purpose, Mgr. Kerec chose Fr. Phan, a St-Sulpice priest, and Bishop Arduino of Shiuchow summoned Fr. Wang, a Salesian, also for this purpose. Fr. Wang was quite happy to be called, because, as he said, "When I made the profession, I asked from God three favors: chastity, episcopate, and martyrdom." He then went to the police for permission to go, but he was answered that he must stay in Kunming. In reality they were preparing to arrest him!

Mgr. Kerec notified the Holy See (when communication was still in place) of his choice of Fr. Phan as episcopal Vicar of Chaotong and this was approved by the Holy See on August 15; but because Fr. Phan belonged to another diocese (Guangdong), he could not come to Chaotong, and so Chaotong became sede vacante.

In June and July the situation became calmer (the calm before the storm), but on June 21 Mgr. Kerec fell ill and Bro. Amici, a Camillian lay brother, daily went from the leprosarium to the bishop's office to take care of him, of course with the government permission.

parade. Then the "true" communists began to purge the opportunists.

One day an aircraft suddenly entered the city. Fr. Petit who was assisting the pupils saw it, cried in alarm and immediately rushed with his pupils into a classroom. A while later Fr. Majcen heard the whizzes of bullets; he at once layclose to the ground next to the wall of the printing shop. After the attack was over, he discovered a bullet on the ground and a plaster block fallen from a pillar nearby. He thanked God for his protection: had he not lain down to the ground, the bullet would have killed him!

Even in Chaotong, general An declared the People's Republic, and the people were trying to adapt without knowing how to do. Mgr. Kerec, who had been living in Tito's country, tried to explain to them what he himself might not know, while Dr. Janez, who fully knew Tito's affairs and the real face of the communists, was reticent and continued helping the poor instead.

Replacement of principals one after another

In the school, the good principal Leung had been dismissed for some time and was replaced by Mr. An. And again this principal, by disagreement with the teachers, also resigned and Fr. Majcen replaced him by another also called Leung. This Mr. Leung was baptized but was almost ignorant about religion.

People were anxious and fearful waiting for the coming of the communists. The opportunists were ready to welcome the triumphant soldiers: they cheerfully went in crowds in the streets and prepared the flags of the new regime to decorate the city for the coming of the liberation army. In those days, our pupils also had to do these things. Many believed that with their coming, the situation would be better in place, but Fr. Majcen was not so optimistic. Well aware of the revengeful actions of the communists both in Yugoslavia and in China, he was reticent and prepared. He

asked his confreres to be cautious, avoiding all words or anything else that could make a pretext and be seen as a provocation.

The coming of the liberation army

After so much expectation, the communist army finally came to Kunming and paraded in the streets. A squad paved the way for the parade, always ready to suppress any opposition intentions. Then came the army, arranged in twelve columns, each group to be led by an official on horseback.

They paraded for hours and hours. One army wing advanced toward the government's Palace where the interim government were awaiting them, while the other wing went through the city and left it to go in the direction of Burma and took control of the rest of Yunnan province.

The beginning of the new regime

The government at once ordered the schools to reopen. Newspapers were printed in simple and popular language. The regime's newspapers did not aim at publishing the news but were intended as propaganda means to bring political instructions to the people according to the dogmas and teachings of President Mao.

Visits

On the occasion of New Year, a State official came to visit Fr. Majcen. Fr. Majcen offered him tea and the two men had a friendly conversation. The official regarded (or feigned to regard) Fr. Majcen as Tito's friend. He said: "We communists know your good deeds, and we admire you, Mr. Majcen. We know Don Bosco was a great educator of the young, and we have to learn from him. But Mao Zedong is also great, you have to learn from him."

according to the time specified, but he had to wait until 11 a.m. for the interrogation to begin. They repeated all the questions of the previous interrogation, and if his answer differed even a iota from the last interrogation, his inquisitor would lose his temper (he was a fanatic university student). It made Fr. Majcen scared. The officer wanted to know who were Fr. Majcen friends, old and actual ones, especially those in the Kuomintang, the school inspectors in those years, and from what merchants did he buy rice, and for what did he spend the money he received from the Americans in the past twenty years. Of course Fr. Majcen could not remember all those things, and whenever he said he did not know, he made the judge completely indignant. Then the story about his sister's vineyard was reiterated, anh his inquisitor wanted to know its exact surface. To this question Fr. Majcen at first said he did not know, then he accidentally said perhaps 4 or 5 ha. At this the inquisitor bounced up shouting: "Lie, lie!" and went on with an endless argument against lying. Fr. Majcen could not open his mouth any more. He had been standing too long, and without a drop of water, he felt he would faint, and became as white as a wall. Even the girl secretary felt very tired by the long interrogation; she said: "Enough, enough! Don't you see he about to faint?" The interrogator shouted at Fr. Majcen: "Get out of here!" Thus ended the frightening interrogation. Fr. Majcen bowed to thank the secretary then staggered out with his hands leaning on the wall to avoid falling. Luckily he found a jinricksha to take him home half dead!

Knowing the conditions of Mgr. Kerec, of Fr. Majcen and of the Salesians in Kunming, from Sun Choun region, the good Fr. Rizzi, Superior of the Camillians, wrote to Fr. Valdesolo, Rector of the leprosarium near Kunming: "If the Salesians, our benefactors, need money, please be generous with them, because with our hospital and leprosarium, we are able to help them." A few months later, the good Fr. Rizzi died of meningitis, and the Camillian

permission and the bishop's consent, he moved all his belongings to the bishop's office, without forgetting to let the guardian boy check his belongings first to be sure he did not take the State property: it was true to say that all the school property was the State property! Bishop Derouineau gave him the room next to Mgr. Kerec's room. So from that day he always had his meals with the Bishop and Mgr. Kerec and the Bishop never wanted him to pay anything for board and lodging. From then on he would never go out of the bishop's office, except when he had to go to teach Russian.

Mgr. Kerec got news from Chaotong that his two vicars, Fr. Chu and Fr. Wang, had been arrested, shackled, accused for many things and badly treated. Being very sick and having to go a long way without food, they died before arriving at the prison. That was a terrible news for the poor Mgr. Kerec.

Fr. Majcen reported on his situation to Fr. Braga who, by a telegram, ordered him to leave for Hong Kong. Fr. Majcen therefore went to the police saying that he had to depart at once because he had received order from Fr. Braga, his superior. But the chief police said: "Who is Mr. Braga? He doesn't have any power to call you back, because Mao President thinks of everything and he will say when you should go." The police even made him know that he himself is having a trial set up to judge Fr. Majcen's crimes. Fr. Majcen later knew that this police chief was actually not interested in this matter at all.

Because Fr. Majcen was not allowed to go, everybody from the Bishop downward believed that the police were preparing a public trial against him as a representative of the Salesian schools. This belief was strengthened by the fact that he was summoned again to be inquired about his life, and this time the inquisitor was really terrible. Fr. Majcen quickly showed himself at 8 a.m.,

On another visit, State officials also said: "Dear Mr. Majcen, you are the highest authority in the school board. You therefore are responsible for the good running of the school. What we expect from you is to continue doing as you have been doing so far for the honor of the school. From our part, we will help you." Thus Fr. Majcen continued to enroll the students and collect the school fees, although no few teachers wanted money should go into their hands.

A reforestation competitive campaign

The communists continued to spread the belief that forests had been made thinner because the old regime did not take care of them. Now every student must go to the hills to sow pine seeds and water them.

A sanitation competitive campaign

Sewers must be cleaned, insects must be killed. Our students at once responded, cleaning the school and the neighborhood.

An Anti-opium campaign

Opium taking was very popular. Opium takers who were caught were put to jail. In those days many opium takers committed suicide. Many killed themselves before being caught, knowing that once in jail and without opium, they would die very painfully. It happened that a woman entered a secondary school without permission, then accused the students to steal her money. Her intention was to blackmail. The police kept her there until the next afternoon. She had been used to opium and was addicted. She began tossing and twisting. When the police officer came and saw her pale face, he understood. He then lectured her about the evil of using opium. And the story ended.

Brainwashing

Every day from 7.00 a.m. to 7.30 a.m. there was an ‘inculcation class’ for the teachers. Fr. Majcen had to attend too. They lectured on Darwinism, then made investigations and other things. Those were unacceptable to Fr. Majcen, but speaking against them was dangerous, and so it was wiser to keep silent. Once they spoke about freedom, and Fr. Majcen spoke out the Church’s teaching on this matter. His words had good effect and from then on he was exempt from attending such classes.

The students had to attend too. Before entering the class, they had to read newspapers to study communism. They had to detect enemies among the people to denounce the reactionists, fascists and imperialists, even Salesians. As they did not know “who were the imperialists”, the lecturers reprimanded them that “Westerners taught you to become blind, and you do not want to open your eyes!” Those were the measures used by them to terrorize the missionaries, whether they be Catholics or Protestants. They stirred up the faithful to denounce their pastors. In those days the press also had poisoning articles against the French and British, considering them as the imperialists who were guilty of taking opium to China.

The crimes of the wealthy

All people who were known for their wealth were considered exploiters of the people, and for reparation they must open their purse to give big sums of money to help the flood victims of North China, as it was said. In the meanwhile there was also a campaign to draw money from the rich in order to help the victims of the South.

The people were called to voluntarily give rice to support the liberation army. Fr. Majcen was also notified to give his

bowl to the ground, broke it and loudly protested that “this white demon” did not give him a good sum. Not being able to justify himself, Fr. Majcen hurried into a small road to get rid of him. He knew that if the police saw this, they would probably say that the beggar was right and as a consequence he had to compensate for at least 50 times the worth of the broken bowl.

Around March or April that year, there was a demonstration in which everybody must take part, including the priests and religious sisters. Leading the demonstration was the liberation army, then the people’s representatives, and lastly the prostitutes and the priests to show that they were the true image of the people. In those days there were on the press countless accusations against the Catholic priests, and because everybody must read the papers, many eventually believed in the truthfulness of the press, and chiefly because nobody was allowed to say anything against it. Nevertheless among the school’s students and teachers many were very kind toward Fr. Majcen and they did not want others to speak ill of him, for fear of the school’s prestige damage.

One night at 10 o’clock, a student came to Fr. Majcen telling him that in a meeting it was decided that Fr. Wang must get a death sentence because in an argument against the communists he had spoken too strongly. Fr. Majcen was unable to sleep that night. Afterward, to prevent any harm that could be done to Fr. Majcen, a group of guards was placed before his room door. But the boys who kept guard were so noisy that he could not sleep at all.

One day the principal Ling shared with him a mournful news that his father had killed himself for fear of being put in prison or vexed by opium addiction. In those days not few people of high status took their own lives. And Fr. Majcen from his part shared with the principal that he could not sleep because of the noise of the guardian boys. The principal suggested him to go and sleep at the bishop’s office where it was quieter. With the teachers’

judgment... in a Solomon's style (sic): "You are really rich: you have ear rings and gold bracelet; so you have to give this miserable boy your bracelet!" Thus the rascal got a gold bracelet while the poor woman both lost his property and was ridiculed!

Dangerous even on the road

Fr. Majcen occasionally came to the bishop's office to visit and comfort Mgr. Kerec who wanted to show off his courage but in fact were always afraid and anxious whenever he heard something about the foreigners. Once Fr. Majcen accompanied him to a leprosarium to preach and hear confession. On the way, Fr. Majcen showed him the place where a girl had taken a gun near an ex-general and playfully pointed at him to frighten him; but the shot actually touched him and gave him a coup de grâce. While they were talking about the situation, a 10-year-old boy pointed his gun at them and ordered them to go away. Mgr. Kerec complied at once and Mgr. Kerec later admitted that with a fool one could not argue at all and once could be killed without any reason!

In another instance, while going through a small road leading to a well, Mgr. Kerec approached to see whether there was water in it. Fr. Majcen warned him to be careful because previously when a Protestant pastor passing by had just looked at the well and was accused of throwing the poison into the well and then was arrested and imprisoned for several months. Mgr. Kerec immediately rushed off in order not to be seen!

Now it became clear that the communists wanted to harass and as far as possible harm the foreigners, especially the missionaries to stir them up against the regime. Another fact convinced Fr. Majcen of this. Once on his way, a rascal disguised himself as a beggar approached him to ask for alms. When Fr. Majcen gave him the little money he had in his pocket, the rascal at once threw his

contribution. He solemnly made this contribution with the accompaniment of a brass band.

Gathering the people for inculcation

One day many poor people, porters, briefly all the lowest class of the people were gathered on the school yard. After some gongs were struck, people began to raise questions without understanding anything: some simply asked where they could eat, others where they could take opium, etc... until the "cadres-comrades" shouted: "Now you should only listen and obey, and not demand anything else!"

Volunteering to go to Korea

In Korea, the Chinese fought against the Americans and in China, they enrolled volunteers. Soldiers of III Corps then volunteered (sic!) to go to Korea and thus they were forgiven their crimes against the people when they served the old regime. They departed with garlands round their necks, amidst acclamations and patriotic songs. We know these guys were sent to atrocious battle fronts, without a weapon in hands, to fight against determined armies armed to the teeth. Once they heard of their victorious deaths, the government organized solemn commemoration ceremonies for them, accompanied by meetings in which our school brass band also took part.

In the new regime, beggars no longer existed in China

That was the affirmation on the press, and this became true. Fr. Majcen told this episode as he had witnessed. One day he saw beggars with bound hands were led in lines by the soldiers. It was known that they were being led to a public execution place where each digged a hole for oneself, received a bullet in the head and was buried there.

Fr. Majcen was kept a close watch

Fr. Majcen continued to take charge of the school and thus was responsible for the behavior of his Salesians. Some students were assigned to keep watch on the Salesians. Fr. Rubini was the most spied on, because he was very strict and demanding in the school. Once he even rebuked a teacher for breaking a door lock to get in a room that needed Fr. Majcen's permission to enter. Fr. Wong also was spied on because he was strong in philosophizing, often pushing his interlocutors into an impasse. He thought that being a Chinese he could speak freely because the government had declared freedom of speech. But he never understood the communist meaning of freedom which somebody has while others don't.

The confessions and the people's court

In those days many were imprisoned and were ordered to write down confessions, including their past crimes and immoralities. They were told that if they were sincere, they would receive indulgence from Mao President! In fact, these confessions were intended to accuse people and identify "crimes" to justify the trial procedures of the people's court. These shameful procedures aimed at two things: to repress the people's spirit and in the meanwhile to get rid of enemies or those regarded as enemies of the new regime. A formal trial of the people's court invariably proceeds as follows: the persons accused as people exploiters—whether guilty or not—have to kneel down, often on stones or broken terra cotta pieces, before a crowd where they have to listen to the accusations without being able to protest and receive insults and even blows on their face. Finally "the people" shout, cry for a sentence. All have been prepared in advance and the miserable is convicted and then sent to a shooting execution.

Mgr. Kerec could not return to Chaotong

After his visit to the part of the Apostolic Vicariate entrusted to the Camillians, Mgr. Kerec went to Kunming and came to the bishop's office for a rest. He intended to return to Chaotong after the Conference of the Yunnan Ordinaries, but he was not allowed to return and had to guide his Apostolic Vicariate through his correspondence to the Camillians, to Dr. Janez and the Sisters... He also wrote letters to Fr. Braga to notify him of the situation, and this correspondence would help the author to write down his biography.

Incidents with the Sisters

As a confessor, every week Fr. Majcen continued to go to different convents, and he evidently realized that the communists were having an anti-religious campaign everywhere. The Sisters of St. Paul of Chartres who ran a school and an orphanage had to suffer a great deal because their pupils, infected by the new regime's ideas, rebelled against the Sisters, especially the French Sisters, and accused the Sisters of not giving them freedom and even killing a great number of infants. In China there was a campaign against the orphanages and centers for abandoned children called "Infant Jesus Center". Not only the girls but some ex-religious women also were contaminated by the false doctrine in this anti-religious campaign. The Sisters in Kunming were ready to leave China step by step; but some decided to stay in the hope of still being able to do some good to the sick and sufferers.

The police harassment

Not only foreigners but poor people also were unreasonably harassed by the police. Once a woman went into the city to sell eggs. She was pushed down by a rascal. When she called a policeman, he came, looked around and pronounced a wise

The death of Monsignor Vicar General

That year Mgr. Michel died. In the previous years, he regularly came to visit Fr. Majcen and through their conversations he helped Fr. Majcen improve the French language he had known a bit for the missions. After a solemn funeral ceremony, Mgr. Michel was buried in the Pelonang Small Seminary. This seminary was later taken by the government and became a workshop, like the Salesian school in Ljubljana. Mgr. Michel was one of the ancient missionaries in China, dating to the times of the emperors, and at that time he still wore mandarin costume, with tailed cap in the Chinese fashion!

An interrogation

And then all foreigners, especially the missionaries, were convoked for a special interrogation. Among them were some MEP Fathers and the Salesians, Fr. Fernandez and Bro. Marongiu. And finally Fr. Majcen was convoked too. The chief police was assisted by a secretary. This man kept writing the questions and answers on the minutes. They asked him about his parents, date and place of birth, his studies, his friends and his resources. Then about his sisters, where and how they lived, their property and assets, etc... The chief police even wanted to know the exact surface of his sister's vineyard. Fr. Majcen replied he did not know because he never saw it, but as the police insisted, he finally answered that it was about 2 or 3 ha. He was reproached as insincere and even threatened every time he answered inaccurately. Both Fr. Fernandez and Bro. Marongiu alike were reprimanded in such interrogations. This kind of harassment in the interrogations was to intimidate and punish all the individuals the communists wanted to get rid of. Because of this and other instances in everyday life, Fr. Majcen had to live in the fear of being brought to trial after his confessions.

Once, in one of the trials of this kind, there were 40 people convicted. While they were marching to the execution ground, one of them (probably a Catholic) when passing by the cathedral saw a missionary, and this priest secretly gave him absolution.

A trial against our school

On May 13, Fr. Majcen, who now was no longer able to take control of our school situation, saw people carrying benches from the classes to the yard, and understood that they were preparing for a meeting where students of other schools were also invited. In the meanwhile the secretary of the school committee approached Fr. Majcen to tell him about an important matter. He said: "Europeans are our friends, but not all of them, because some by their behavior have proved to be 'fascists', including Mr. Rubini and Mr. Rojak. If they sincerely acknowledge their faults before the crowd, they will receive indulgence; otherwise they will be put to prison and even worse. So, Fr. Majcen, as their superior, try to persuade them to admit their faults to avoid bad consequences." Fr. Majcen immediately told them about this reality, but the two confreres at first did not want to understand, especially Fr. Rubini who said that all their accusations were wrong, all was a sham only. But Fr. Majcen patiently insisted: "Of course it was all sham, but you need only an apology to avoid worst consequences." In the meanwhile they were called to go to the place prepared for them on the yard. Fr. Majcen stood in between them, one on his right and the other on his left. Then came the secretary of the school committee, and the students of other schools began to shout against "the fascists". The secretary started to read the accusations: the 'rascal' Rubini was accused to have said that the Chinese were thieves (in fact he only said that the teacher who broke the lock to enter the room without Fr. Majcen's permission might be considered a thief): "He has insulted 600 million Chinese so he deserves a death sentence 600 million times!" As for Bro. Rojak, they accused him for

CHAPTER 6: UNDER THE CHINESE COMMUNIST REGIME (1949-1951)

spitting at the girls (actually this confrere had the bad habit of spitting anywhere, and probably he had unknowingly spat when

the school girls were passing by). “Spitting at the Chinese, this rascal deserves death too.”

Fr. Rubini was indignant at the accusations, but Fr. Majcen suggested: Go and kneel down slowly, mumbling an apology and then everything is over! Fr. Rubini reluctantly complied and Bro. Rojak also took off his hat and bowed round. The show was over, but not its consequences. The committee’s secretary approached Fr. Majcen and said: “The two rascals Rubini and Rojak have admitted their sins and so President Mao Zedong generously forgives them. But they had better leave the school.” Therefore the two ‘fascists’ went to stay near the Cathedral and from there, a few weeks later and together with Fr. Timmermans, they left Kunming for Hong Kong, where Fr. Braga called them to.

CHAPTER 7: THE SCHOOL CONFISCATED, FR. MAJCEN CAME TO HONG KONG — MACAO

Gradual changes in our school

A few months earlier, the principal introduced to Fr. Majcen the new secretary of the school committee as “the man to put our school on right track”. To a man so high in authority, the principal afterward came to ask for a rise in his salary.

The secretary started to set up unions of teachers, of students and of servants. Being a European, Fr. Majcen had no right to vote

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appointing him as a Russian teacher at Au Ming School. Coming there on scheduled date, Fr. Majcen saw a thousand students wanting to learn this language. He never expected such a multitude, he went up the platform but ventured to teach just a few Russian sentences. Then he told the principal the students were too great in number and suggested him to choose from among them a limited number of clever students who would take along notebooks and pen so that he can teach them speak and write Russian. A salary was then fixed for him, a good sum he regularly got each month. After a few months, there was a meeting of the students to assess this teaching, and then the principal notified Fr. Majcen of the result of the meeting. He said: “Dear Mr. Majcen, you are very good at Russian, but my students remarked that you spoke too fast!” It was Bishop Riberi who told the missionaries to try all means to not abandon their posts, Fr. Majcen therefore also make use of the Russian teaching to be able to stay in Kunming as long as possible.

A documents’ loss

One day an official came to ask Fr. Majcen for the documents relating to the land, the construction permission and other permissions for the elementary, secondary and vocational schools (they said they would copy them) which would be returned to him. But days and days passed, and Fr. Majcen also did not get any receipts on this borrowing because “it is not necessary for the government!), but he thought it necessary to have his papers back. He therefore sent a friend of his to take them back, but the official, in spite of all his promises in the sky, answered that the papers were currently at the department chief who, “like God, is everywhere but cannot be seen when one has to look for him!!” Fr. Majcen therefore understood that he would never get them back.

to Fr. Wong who was sick, and stealthily took things out of the storehouse and sold them to have money for the necessities of the Salesians.

Stopping a plot

One day a good boy secretly came to Fr. Majcen and disclosed to him that in one meeting the students had decided to send a student of the previous year to Fr. Majcen to ask him to give back the books and the watch that he (said) had entrusted to him for safekeeping. The informer said this was staged to make Fr. Majcen lose his temper and make trouble. He therefore recommend Fr. Majcen to keep calm. In fact, the malicious student did come and was warmly received as a good friend by Fr. Majcen: that made him shocked. And instead of talking haughtily with Fr. Majcen, he spoke very gently and retold him the whole story. Fr. Majcen replied that he would inform Fr. Sing. Fr. Sing took this student to the dormitory and Fr. Majcen did not know what happened next. In the meantime Fr. Majcen retreated to the bishop's office and thus the plot failed.

Fr. Majcen became a Russian teacher

One day some teachers from Au Ming School came to see Fr. Majcen. Seeing on his desk a big Russian dictionary and a grammar book, they asked what characters and what language these were. Fr. Majcen explained it was Cyrillic characters, because created by St. Cyril. But they were not interested in this. They were only interested in the Russian (written by Cyrillic alphabets). So they chose passim in the dictionary and asked Fr. Majcen to read for them. He was fond of the Cyrillic because this alphabet was also used in Yugoslavia to write Slavic language. He read them correctly while explaining them. The teachers discussed among themselves and a few days later Fr. Majcen received a letter

or be elected. The Chinese elected were merely those who were not involved in his authority in the school and they were elected only to make money for the school and to watch over the “fascist members” and prevent these from disturbing the smooth running of the school.

When money was exhausted, the principal, Mr. Ling, came to Fr. Majcen suggesting him to sell out the printing machines that had been inactive for a long time and that were having a good price. Fr. Majcen agreed but wanted that the contract be signed by the principal and not by him. He wanted to avoid being alleged as abusing his power to disperse State property.

One day Fr. Majcen was informed that in an unannounced inspection in the house of the MEP, the police found American flags and weapons. Evidently those had been introduced by the police usual tricks. Consequently most of the MEP Fathers were isolated in the bishop's office. They were kept sitting in a room, could not talk to one another, and could not talk with Fr. Bohenen who brought them meals three times a day. After a few months they were sent back to Hong Kong.

Once general An secretly came to Fr. Majcen saying his life could be endangered because he had rebelled against Chiang Kai-shek. He was actually aware that all the opportunists were eliminated one after another. He therefore begged Fr. Majcen to write a recommendation letter for him to secretly escape to Macao. Of course Fr. Majcen could not do that since it could involve the Salesians. He could only pray for him when he knew that the general was watched very closely and could no longer escape. Even governor Liu Han had to hide in the dark, for how long even Fr. Majcen could not know. When summer came, all the boarders had to go to their home; nevertheless, the school was never vacant because the students came there everyday to take the intensive courses on (communist) thoughts.

**CHAPTER 7: THE SCHOOL CONFISCATED,
FR. MAJCEN CAME TO HONG KONG — MACAO**

One day a teacher of the secondary school came to Fr. Majcen and informed him that the school board had decided to use the chapel for a meeting hall, because the law no longer permitted religious rites to be performed in the school. The Salesians could say their masses in their private rooms or in the cathedral. Fr. Majcen came to Mgr. Derouineau for advice. The bishop suggested to comply to them, because all protests were useless. Thus Fr. Majcen ordered to move the tabernacle, the altar, the statues and images, the confessionals and prie-dieux out of the chapel to deliver the place. Crosses and other religious icons in the chapel were to be erased too. And even Don Bosco's name should be erased because now 'the name of Mao Zedong stands out everywhere'. Of all that belonged to the chapel, Fr. Majcen had a part transported to the cathedral, another to the city's parish. The last feast to be celebrated was the Assumption of Our Lady in 1952.

All the news was notified to Fr. Braga. He telegraphed to Fr. Majcen telling him to immediately nominate Fr. Sing as Rector in his stead. Fr. Majcen summoned the confreres and announced the Provincial's decision. He thanked all the confreres for their cooperation. He handed everything over to the new Rector and then invited the confreres and the teachers to have a snack in the Salesians' refectory. All came except the secretary. Fr. Majcen spoke to them and said he was happy to hand the direction over to a Chinese appointed by Fr. Braga. He thanked everybody and recommended them to obey Fr. Sing. His words were received with an icy silence, without a single acclamation.

The next day Fr. Sing asked Fr. Majcen to hand the rector's office over to him. Fr. Majcen willingly did it. He moved to the upper floor and stayed in the room reserved for Mgr. Kerec.

**CHAPTER 7: THE SCHOOL CONFISCATED,
FR. MAJCEN CAME TO HONG KONG — MACAO**

Fr. Sing was pleased with his post. He had cigarettes and candies ready in his office, waiting for people to come and ask for his advice as Fr. Majcen used to do. But days after days, no one came to see him. It seemed he was completely forgotten. In the meanwhile the principal occasionally came to see Fr. Majcen and ask for advice.

Thus ended the rectorship of Fr. Majcen in Kunming. The school secretary, who never showed himself before Fr. Majcen, took to himself all the powers of Fr. Majcen, including the financial one. Thus the school went on, actually run by the teachers only.

Fr. Majcen's life after leaving the school's rectorship

After the school secretary took over all Fr. Majcen's powers, Fr. Sing being the Salesian rector was nevertheless a mere teacher in reality.

The school's running from now on depended entirely on the teachers: the Salesian confreres, Fr. Fernandez, the cleric Ho and other priests.

Fr. Sing and Fr. Wong were under the principal Ling who decided on the running of the house: they received their salaries for their English and music teaching. Bro. Marongiu went on with his selling stationery and collecting school fees. Fr. Sing was in charge of the vocational school as long as it existed. The teachers included Bro. Yip for printing and two past pupils for shoemaking and carpentry.

The Salesian community had a separate block: the rooms, the workshops, the storehouse, the sacristy used for chapel, the infirmary, a meeting room, a refectory and kitchen. Thus the confreres could still have the practices of piety in common. A good Shanghaiese woman named Mrs. Chan daily brought special meals

A third cross was Fr. Dupont's signing the contract with a term requiring the consent of the orphanage administration in the admission or dismissal of any children. In fact, in the case he found among his children a black sheep whom in his Salesian conscience he needed to dismiss for the good of other children, he was forbidden to do so by the contract.

And the last one was that he was not free in using money for the necessary expenses. In one instance, he wanted to solemnly celebrate St. John Bosco's Day, but the orphanage's bursar refused to provide him with money, saying this was not written in the contract.

As Rector of the orphanage, Fr. Dupont saw the need of providing the children with a trade. Together with the Association's president, he intended to open a trade school for a hundred children. He also wanted to have Latin classes for the promotion of religious vocations.⁸

He also received and notified to the Provincial about an offer from the Bishop of Sài Gòn to open there an orphanage and a large printing house. Evidently, to do this, Fr. Dupont asked Fr. Braga to send Salesians including priests, clerics and lay brothers. He thought it was quite easy, while Fr. Braga could not easily find those confreres, and even if there were, how to take them from Shanghai.

When accepting the direction of the Orphanage, Fr. Dupont had turned his back against a bright future that was awaiting him with his capacity, his eloquence and also his acquaintances. Although the Orphanage was cherished by the benefactors, by the Governor and all sorts of pensions, nevertheless what it lacked was a spirit of piety and love, and each one lived for oneself only and without thinking of the future.

⁸ See Jean Dialmas and Robert Orsini's witnesses in *RPFDP*.

The Carmelite abbess wanted to offer them three meals per day: breakfast, lunch and dinner. Of course they did not refuse: in each meal there were two boiled eggs with salt and a cup of tea. In the voyage on board there were about 400 passengers who mostly were expelled missionaries, the group coming from Kunming being kept apart. In Chunkiang, while the ship stopped, Fr. Majcen was once more summoned to the police station where a student girl re-examined his file containing an extract of the two previous interrogations. Then together with Fr. Fernandez and Bro. Marongiu, Fr. Majcen was released to resume his journey.

The trip on Yangtze was really wonderful, especially when passing through deep courses under tall cliffs (perhaps along 40 km). These were among the most lovely landscapes in the world. Arriving in Hanchao, the group came with the Franciscans, then got on a ferry and went to Wuho to take the train to the south, enjoying in the meanwhile the immense forests in between the cliffs. By night when they crossed the mission territories of Shiuchow, they remembered Mgr. Versiglia and other missionaries who had been working there, Fr. Geder in particular. And they came to Guangdong in the morning. Together with Fr. Fernandez and Bro Marongiu, Fr. Majcen went to visit Bishop Tang. The bishop asked them to pray for him to accept either the impending imprisonment or martyrdom. At the railway station to Hong Kong, they underwent another scrupulous check on their luggage and bodies, even hearing shouts and insults from the police when a Protestant pastor burst out laughing loudly because he was tickled when the inspector touched his armpit. Before leaving Chinese borders, Fr. Majcen sent back to Fr. Sing in Kunming his money left, and gave other sums of money to the Red Cross for their work at the border gate.

After crossing the border gate, he found Fr. Poletti of the PIME (in those years, these Italian missionaries were true angels to

all the expelled missionaries from China). Fr. Poletti entertained them by a good dinner with a delicious beer. Then they took the train to Kowloon and Shau Ki Wan where they were warmly and fraternally welcome by the Provincial Fr. Braga, Fr. Massimino and other Salesians. Now that they were free, they were nevertheless not able to regain their calm to report on their sufferings and terrors.

The events in Kunming after Fr. Majcen's departure

After Fr. Majcen's departure, the lay brother Diep also left Kunming and went to Beijing where he died.

Remaining in Kunming, apart from Mgr. Kerec, there were also Fr. Wang who was in prison, and Fr. Sing and the cleric Ho who lived in the school under tremendous pressure.

On August 28, Mgr. Kerec was summoned to the police and underwent the interrogations in the communist style.

In a gathering of about a thousand people on September 9, Fr. Wang was sentenced to a 30 year imprisonment and Bishop Derouineau was forced to leave China.

The police demanded Mgr. Kerec and Fr. Sing to return the printing machines Fr. Majcen had sold as well as the gold, arms and ammunition which (they alleged) Fr. Rubini had hidden.

Fr. Sing was jailed for several days, was released, and arrested again, and on the first Sunday of Advent he was freed back to the school where he became an English teacher, but by the wish of the students, he was humiliated to become a servant. After becoming a rice seller for some time, he was arrested again and was sentenced to a 30 year imprisonment.

After Fr. Sing's imprisonment, the cleric Ho left Kunming for Beijing where he became a footballer.

He embraced the cross in his life. He kept with him two expiation rods, one for use, the other for substitute. But his essential mortification was his total dedication to his children day and night, offering them spiritual and physical foods. He did not overlook his commitment to the young through his activities in the groups such as Boy Scouts, Young Christian Students, and his service to the intellectuals, etc... Moreover, we can list here four types of cross that Fr. Dupont had to bear:

The first cross was his life isolated from his superiors. Fr. Braga, his provincial, was always on the move, from Macao to Hong Kong and Shanghai, while their correspondence was often delayed, sometimes even lost. After Italy joined World War II, Fr. Braga was almost isolated in Shanghai and could no longer communicate with Macao.

A second cross came from the person who otherwise should have helped him most, and in fact he really wanted to do so, but life is often a paradox! It was Fr. Petit, a 27 year old Salesian. After completing his military service, Petit worked as a secretary in Africa for two years, finished his philosophy studies and practical training, then studied theology in Bangkok, Thailand. He was ordained priest in 1939, stayed in Thailand for two years as a teacher and missionary, then went to Shanghai for one year, and by the end of 1941 he was sent to Hà Nội to help Fr. Dupont. His collaboration was good in the beginning, but with his rigid character, he later became a thorn in Fr. Dupont's flesh, as we said above. Fr. Dupont himself admitted: "This is a saint with whom I find it difficult for an apostolic cooperation." He hated Fr. Dupont's taking care of other apostolic activities by his extreme zeal; he complained about Fr. Dupont's over-hospitality, and was not pleased with his over-generosity and tolerance towards guests. As for Fr. Dupont, in spite of so much difficulty, he was always yielding and complying with Fr. Petit's desire.

and leisure walk. With the Rector's help, they could destroy their impurities and above all take heart in their prayers.⁷

On Eastertide, he had recollection days for the children and select those who showed signs of vocation among them. By his zeal, he led the boys to a good spirit, and at least most of them were ready to receive the Salesian education.

At his side there was only one Salesian, Fr. Petit, who took care of their studies and discipline. In collaboration with him, there were a Frenchman manager who was responsible for finance, some teachers and assistants or 'moniteurs', and lastly, in 1942 there was Mrs. Rigaux who was later replaced by Mrs. Dubois who stayed with the Orphanage until the end. These women took care of the small children and were responsible for their meals and laundry.

Fr. Paul Seitz, MEP, a zealous priest who later became a bishop, often came to the orphanage for their confession.

Managing the orphanage was a real cross, nay, a series of crosses, that was put on Fr. Dupont's shoulders. He got up at 5.15 am, then meditation, holy mass, prayer, and breakfast with the children. His favorite breakfast was milk-coffee not bought from outside but prepared by the Sisters. Then there were three classes, lunch, one Latin class for the boys who had a sign for a vocation, then three other classes from 2.00 pm to 5.30 pm. Then recreations, a bath and dinner. In the evening there were also vespers, Eucharistic adoration, etc... and he watched over them to have a goodnight. He usually taught 7 or 8 hours a day, added to his other engagements such as teaching catechism at home and outside, looking for benefactors to improve the children's meals. He was really an educator who forwent his fame, his rights and his popularity to devote all his time to his children.

In the first months of 1952, the Sisters of the Hospital in Chaotong and Dr. Janez together with the Camillian Fathers and Sisters came Kunming.

On April 15, Mgr. Kerec and the Slovenian Sisters left Kunming on a truck and came to Hong Kong on May 15.

Thus Mgr. Kerec, the first Salesian to come to Kunming, was also the last to leave the city.

⁷ Cfr. the report of Jean Dialmas in *RPFDP* p. 140.

**PART TWO: FR. ANDREJ MAJCEN'S MISSION
IN NORTH VIETNAM**

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MISSION
IN NORTH VIETNAM**

There was no chapel in the orphanage, and Fr. Dupont was not at rest until there could have the Mass celebrated at home. So he purchased a portable altar and found a place where he could say Mass twice a week to his children, and he felt very happy when there were regularly 20 children to take holy communion in the Mass he said for them.

He soon managed to change a classroom into a small and nice chapel with an altar, the crucifix, the statues, candlesticks and flower pots, all given by his friends. He also had the crucifixes hung in each classroom, and there were short prayers to be recited in the morning the evening, and at meals, and he told them stories about Don Bosco. He loved to talk a lot about Don Bosco whom he took for his example. Later, when his senior students read Don Bosco's story of Fr. Auffray, they were happy because they had been taught so much about Don Bosco by Fr. Dupont.

Every Thursday and Sunday the students could learn catechism and have a homily. There were songs and music during Mass, morning and evening prayers. A woman and one of the head of Hà Nội City Hall regularly came to teach music and songs to the children.

Many children who came to the orphanage were non-Christians. Those who wanted to be baptized, he taught them catechism, then also found pious and well-off godparents for them.

Fr. Dupont was gentle and generous, but never indulging unchaste lifestyle of his children. He did not permit them to compromise with sins. Playing by hand touch was prohibited. Children were not allowed to hug in the dark. Fr. Dupont took part in the children's conversations to avoid bad talk. Consequently after a few weeks, the children could discover the virtues of righteousness, honesty, respect and promise keeping. They could value work and study. They could display joyfulness in the games

contract. The Salesians were responsible for the education and moral of the children, the teaching staff, and could use their preventive system of education. They could moreover open trade classes, have board and accommodation and also health care. As for the Association, they were responsible for the financial administration, had ownership of the land and building, and were responsible for the maintenance and development of the houses, as well as provide the children with their necessities (food, clothes, etc...) and the care of the economical life of other non Salesian staff. The Association's director governed the general economy of the work and had an economer to assist him. On the relation between the Salesians and the Association, the contract regulated three things:

- 1) There should be a consent of both parties in all the construction or modification of the building;
- 2) There should be a consent of both parties in the admittance or dismissal of the children;
- 3) The Salesians should be well informed of and act conformably to the statutes of the Association.

These terms in the contract in reality took away the Salesians' freedom of action, because without the consent of the Association, they could not do anything when they had to deal with "hard head" members that did not mind reasoning, or when they had to admit or dismiss a student, etc... However, with Fr. Dupont's prestige and skill, the situation was not bad.

Although not all students were Christians, Fr. Dupont managed to get them recite night prayer and have a goodnight talk by the Father of the family, an essential formula of the Salesian preventive system, and in the meanwhile there were catechism classes for the children who wanted to be baptized, and he himself had the happiness to have baptized a number of them.

A. A SOJOURN IN MACAO AND HONG KONG

After his arrival to Hong Kong on September 15 1951 with his co-missionaries, Fr. Majcen was kept by Fr. Braga, Provincial, for some time in Shau Ki Wan for a rest and recovery, especially for lessening his wounds in the heart. The Provincial asked if he wished to return to his country to live with his mother and sisters. After due consideration and seeing the situation in Yugoslavia of that time, he decided not to return but to stay with the Chinese province. Fr. Braga sent him to Macao to serve the Don Bosco School there, asking Fr. Giacomino, Rector of the school, to receive and take care of him with fraternal love. The good Rector allowed Bro. Marongiu to come with him to Macao where they also visited historic religious places. Centuries ago the missionaries had come here as by a threshold to enter the territories of the Celestial Emperor. The most famous of them was Fr. Matteo Ricci, a Jesuit priest. There were also other Slovenian Jesuit missionaries such as Fr. Mesar and Fr. Halenstein. Fr. Majcen had a visit to the Salesian School, the first Salesian house erected in 1906, from which years after yearsthe Salesian works spread all over the Orient.

Through the concern of Salesian confreres in Macao, Fr. Majcen was soon granted permanent residence and the Ordinary also granted him confession faculty. Fr. Braga quickly appointed him confessor of the school and this forced him to learn Portuguese

and Cantonese. Macao's school department quickly admitted him as a teacher of French, because with good will, he could speak French very well.

A serious illness

About mid-May, Fr. Majcen had a stroke while saying Mass. He immediately was taken to hospital as an emergency case. The diagnosing doctor knew he was choked by bronchi blocking. He was immediately carried into the operating room. Fr. Giacomino gave him absolution and the anointing of the sick, then stood praying at his bed for three hours.

Three weeks after leaving hospital, he was taken back there again to undergo an operation of the other inflammatory bronchus. It was during this hospitalization that Mgr. Kerec together with the Slovenian Sisters and Dr. Janez went to visit him, after they had just come from Kunming. They had been carefully preparing for the first Mass of Fr. Pavlin with the presence also of Fr. Geder, although it was a pity that Fr. Majcen could not be present. Fr. Braga made a visit and proposed that he and Fr. Ferrari go to the Philippines to open a Town for abandoned children in Cebu. To this request, Fr. Majcen answered that his actual health could not permit him to assume so heavy a task.

Vietnam destination

In a second visit shortly after that, Fr. Braga said he had sent a letter to Fr. Ferrari telling him that he was not to go to the Philippines; instead, because Fr. Majcen could speak French, he could be sent to Hà Nội where the Salesians had just accepted a work for the service of the young that was founded by Fr. Paul Seitz, a priest of the Missions Étrangères de Paris who had just been consecrated bishop of Kon Tum, Central Vietnam. So Fr. Giacomino was appointed Superior, and Fr. Majcen his helper. When he handed the obedience letter to Fr. Majcen, Fr. Braga

3) The First Salesian Work in Vietnam (January 3 1942)

It happened that at the end of 1941, Mr. René Robin, founder and director of the French-Vietnamese Orphanage bearing his name, died. After his death, the Association for the protection of Eurasian children of this orphanage insisted that Fr. Dupont should assume the direction of this orphanage. He wrote to Fr. Braga and the latter accepted. Mgr. Chaise, Apostolic Administrator of Hà Nội, permitted the setting up of a religious house and Fr. Dupont signed up a contract with the Association and the Management of the orphanage. Then on December 24 1941 he made a visit to the orphanage, met the children there then left the orphanage until January 3 1942 when he came to formally assume its direction. Later, Fr. Braga visited the orphanage and promised to send Fr. Raimond Petit from Thailand and also other Salesians. Unfortunately the war prevented this and consequently apart from Fr. Petit, no other Salesians could be sent to Hà Nội.

The René Robin Orphanage was erected with the purpose of supporting French-Vietnamese children and was under the administration of an Association for the protection of French-Vietnamese children of Indochina. The orphanage was a nice building standing in the center of Hà Nội City. There were more than a hundred children, as many as the building could accommodate. The children talked with each other in Vietnamese and with their superiors in a not very fluent French. Most of them followed elementary or secondary classes while some of them worked outside. With higher classes students, they were either sent to further their studies in Dalat, or join the army, or work outside.

The contract signed by Fr. Dupont on November 18 was not really optimal, because it seemed advantageous to the Salesians on one hand, but on the other it bound the Salesians to an Association whose management kept money in their hands and did not let the Salesians freedom in their activities as was conceded in the

Fr. Dupont's apostolate during his military service

Apart from his job in the army as an interpreter in Hải Phòng in 1940 and then in Hà Nội, Fr. Dupont did not fail to commit himself to the priestly ministry. A security inspector, Mr. Lefèvre, reported that in his free time, Fr. Dupont used to engage himself in the apostolate now in Hải Phòng, now in Hà Nội, sometimes at one place in the morning and at another in the evening. In the beginning he was a chaplain to a religious house in Hải Phòng and a French-Vietnamese youth association in Hà Nội.⁶ In the beginning of 1941 he carried out his ministry in St. Anthony parish in a variety of roles: as chaplain of the Boy Scouts, the Young Christian Students, Young Christian Workers, editor of the *Responsables* Magazine, animator of parish activities, and preacher of spiritual retreats. In Hà Nội, the Presentation Club invited him to give at the City Hall a presentation on the hot issues of the times regarding the national, religious, moral and spiritual aspects. On December 11, in the presence of Governor Decoux and other high officials of the capital, Fr. Dupont developed this theme: "There are things that die, there are things that are generated and come to a new order, to prove to the audience of this colony that unless we return to the spiritual values with a sense of discipline, we cannot regain our former strengths."

In his free time and after completing his military service, he zealously performed his priestly ministry especially among the young in Hà Nội. He was much respected and admired by the Bishop of Hà Nội.

By his qualities and zeal, Fr. Dupont was respected and loved by laic and religious officials. Many distinguished figures of that time were his friends, including Fr. Seitz, Dean of Hà Nội Cathedral and later bishop of Kon Tum, and Mr. René Robin, founder and director of Eurasian Children Orphanage.

⁶RPFDP p. 102.

added a famous saying: "I send you to begin the Salesian work and promote the first Salesian vocations in Vietnam."

Fr. Majcen had frequently been to Vietnam on his way to Kunming. He remembered a characteristic of the Vietnamese people was to wear brown clothes and most Vietnamese women usually had their teeth blackened to look lovely. They were a new people, quite different from the Chinese. That was the people he now had to offer his apostolic life. With all these thoughts in his heart, he went to the Salesian School and prayed in the chapel of Mary Help of Christians. He bade farewell to the Macao confreres, and left for Hong Kong with Fr. Giacomino.

**B. TWENTY YEARS LIVING WITH THE GOOD
VIETNAMESE PEOPLE**

"Dear Mario Rassiga, Salesian missionary of the diocese of Shiuchow, China,

I have written and sent you my autobiography on the house of Kunming that Don Bosco kept in his heart since 1884-1886, and on the Salesian apostolate that was completed there in the years 1935-1951 (52).

I am happy to continue writing to you, according to your wish, and I will write with all my love and as far as possible with the same zeal of Fr. Braga, who brought me to Kunming after crossing North Vietnam in 1935, and it was he again who sent me to Vietnam for a second time in 1952, to work in Hà Nội in the service of abandoned children.

For the first period (1952-1954), I will write about my life in North Vietnam, at the *Thị Xã Kitô Vương* (Christ the King Town) amidst the agitation of the war. That was the Indochina War, a name of that time, with one side being under France's commander Marshal De Lattre who founded the Vietnamese Army, and the other side being Ho Chi Minh's army under the command of

General Vo Nguyen Giap, who won the decisive victory on May 7 1954.

In the years 1951-53, together with the MEP Fathers I implemented as far as possible a systematization of an education according to Don Bosco's spirit at the Theresa Family, and then in 1953-54 I continued to work there as Rector of a Salesian house canonically erected by the Rector Major, with a team of Salesian confreres.

Since you yourself have written a very good proto-history of Salesian works in Vietnam, I will not repeat it in this autobiography. Nevertheless, it is my earnest desire that my readers carefully read your Vietnamese Salesian proto-history.

C. VIETNAM

Vietnam is a country covered for the most part with mountains and forests, but it has vast plains, especially in the Red River delta in the North and the Mekong delta in the South.

Vietnam borders China to the north, the Pacific Ocean to the south and east, and Laos and Cambodia to the west.

Vietnamese people

The earliest Vietnamese people belonged to the Malaysian clans, but later when other people came, they went up to the high lands to form native clans whom the French called *montagnards* (mountain people). They were primitive people of the common era but they avoided mixing themselves with the *Kinh* who accounted for more than 80 percent of the Vietnamese population. The Vietnamese were an undaunted people who were steadfast in preserving their autonomy and independence in spite of a thousand years under the Chinese domination and more than a hundred years under the French colonialists. They always tried and successfully got rid of foreign domination and regained their independence.

Pétain's government should close the Sino-Indochina border gate and set up Japanese control there. Indochina's governor Catroux conceded but at the same time demanded support from the Americans and the British. Consequently France President Pétain replaced him by Admiral Decoux who became new Governor General of Indochina. Under Japanese pressure, Decoux still successfully maintained France's protectorate for 5 years, due to his skillful dealings with the then winning Japanese. By his uprightness and moderation, the interpreter Dupont got confidence of both French and Japanese sides. He worked in this post until 1942. In the role of an interpreter in Hải Phòng, Fr. Dupont occasionally had conversations in the night with Odagiri, the Japanese chief commander who, in one instance and under the influence of alcohol, warned him of the shadows covering the future of the French-Japanese relations in Indochina: "... Many heads will be cut off, except Mr. Dupont who is a good officer; it's a pity he is a feeble priest!" In playing his role as an interpreter, he occasionally went alone with governor Decoux to a Japanese ship to talk face to face with the Japanese commander. This commander also trusted Dupont and was very friendly, and whenever he got stress, he often came to him to relax. The high commissioner of the French Police also acknowledged that Fr. Dupont was very informed about the situation, and he thought that the Japanese invasion of Vietnam marked a very serious episode for the French army. Fr. Dupont's mission as an interpreter was really dangerous for him in the reluctant co-habitation between the French and the Japanese in Vietnam, but Fr. Dupont contributed much to neutralize many disagreements between them.

On March 9 1945 the Japanese apparently attacked all the French bastions, imprisoned even Governor Decoux and declared independence for Vietnam under the rule of the pro-Japanese Tran Trong Kim government.

2) Fr. Dupont, the first Salesian to work in Vietnam⁵

Francisque Dupont was born on September 14 1908. Having lost his mother at the age of 6, he and his younger sister were raised by their aunt in a Christian atmosphere that was very pious, with a great devotion to the Rosary and the Eucharist. He was educated at St. Louis Gonzague School initially run by the Brothers of the Christian Schools and then by the Salesians. In a letter to his sister he admitted: "In my first communion, God called me and I said Yes!" After studying philosophy for one year at the Lyon Seminary, he got a call to the Salesian life in 1924 after a meeting with Fr. Dudant, president of the Association of the Salesian Past Pupils, and he wanted to give his life for the care of poor youth. At 17, the young Dupont organized a Boys Scouts group called 'The Camels' to practice perseverance, bravery, initiative, that were very congruent with Don Bosco's spirit which he would later assimilate. He did his postulancy for one year, became a Salesian in 1932 and in 1933 he went to Turin to collaborate with the magazine "Youth and the missions".

Fr. Dupont's coming to Vietnam

Being called up for military service, Fr. Dupont had to go back to France, but the continuous fighting between the Chinese and the Japanese had prevented this, and he could only go to Hải Phòng where he was mobilized on the spot and became a corporal in the French army. He was appointed an interpreter for the French governor in his talks with the Japanese officers. The Sino-Japanese War had begun in 1937, and the Japanese reproached the French government for secretly delivering weapons to the Chinese. After France was defeated by the Nazi, the Japanese requested that the

⁵ The book Révérend Père FRANCISQUÉ DUPONT, missionnaire salésien, martyrisé et assassiné à Ke-So (Vietnam) le 10 août 1942 à l'âge de 37 ans," still kept by Fr. Dupont's family, contains a great number of witnesses. In our account, from this point on we will refer to this resource as "RPFDP".

Culture

Vietnam has its proper culture, although it is also strongly influenced by Chinese culture, especially by the Confucianism and Chinese writing. Since 1627, the Jesuits Buzomi and Alexandre Rhodes created a new writing called *Chữ Quốc Ngữ* using the Latin alphabet and this was very beneficial to the popularization of the culture. Since then, the writing with Chinese characters was limited to the classic literature or used as ornaments and decorations in the pagodas, temples and tombs.

Vietnamese history

Through ages, Vietnam has been divided among the lords and princes fighting one another for territories. In the last few years before the French invasion, Vietnam was split into two kingdoms governed by the Lord Trinh and the Lord Nguyen.

The missionaries' coming in Vietnam and the religious persecutions

In 1615, a Jesuit Father named Buzomi (Italian) and Carvalho (Portuguese) together with two clerics Joseph and Paul (Japanese) came to Hoi An, Danang province. They built a provisory chapel for the use of the Catholic Japanese residents and European merchants in the place where a new missionary horizon was open for Vietnamese people. In 1624 a French Jesuit Father named Alexandre de Rhodes came to South Vietnam, then called *Dàng Trong*(Cochinchin), and with his talent in languages, he created the *quốc ngữ* using the latin alphabet, greatly facilitating the widespreadliteracy of the Vietnamese. He wrote the *Dictionarium Annamiticum Lusitanum et Latinum*, the *Phép Giảng Tám Ngày*, a small catechism in Vietnamese, and started the formation and training of the *thầy giảng* (catechists) and the local clergy. In 1626 he was called to Macao, but after a few months he left for North Vietnam, then called *Dàng Ngoài*(Tonkin), where in March 1627,

his ship was swept to Cửa Bàng (Thanh Hóa) on March 19, Feast of St. Joseph whom he took as the Patron of *Đàng Ngoài*. In 1630, being expelled from *Đàng Ngoài*, he went to Macao again. In 1640, after ten years' evangelization in Macao, he came back to *Đàng Trong*. Between 1640 and 1645, Fr. De Rhodes was expelled four times and still managed to come back to *Đàng Trong*, and finally in July 1645 he left Vietnam forever.

The persecutions

The fast expansion of Catholicism in Vietnam created hatred and envy in the lords and kings who consequently carried out series of persecutions during the three centuries 17, 18 and 19, resulting in the martyrdoms of between 130,000 and 300,000 faith witnesses, including 117 martyrs who were canonized in June 1988, the proto-martyr being St. Andrew of Phu Yen, a 19 year old young man. Of the foreign missionaries who were canonized, 11 were Spanish Dominicans and 10 were French MEP missionaries.

In spite of the persecutions, the Church grew stronger and stronger because the first missionaries had wisely prepared not only the *thầy giảng* (catechists) but also no few local priests, with a view to having future local bishops. In these conditions, the formation of the clergy was done in a unique way: to avoid being detected, seminaries of that time were simple boats going to and fro on the rivers of the Mekong delta. Grand seminarians were sent to Uruthia in Thailand in the years 1668s.

A great contribution to the missions was the creation of the Seminary of the *Missions Étrangères de Paris*. It was from this Seminary that legions of missionaries volunteered for the missions, including Bishop François Pallu, Apostolic Vicar of Tonkin, and Bishop Pierre Lambert de la Motte, Apostolic Vicar of Cochinchin.

Salesians to open a vocational school in his diocese. In a second letter, Fr. Giovanni Casetta, who was a Salesian and secretary of the Nuncio for two years 1926-27, wrote in the name of the Nuncio to insist on this work by presenting favorable conditions; but among these conditions there was one specifying that the superior must be a Frenchman. Fr. Canazei had to turn it down because of a shortage of personnel in his province, and because there were only two French confreres available, one in Shiuchow and another in Shanghai. Another proposal was presented to Fr. Braga from Mgr. Nguyen Ba Tong, Apostolic Administrator of Phat Diem diocese. Mgr. Nguyen Ba Tong was the first Vietnamese bishop who had been consecrated by Pope Pius XI in Rome in 1933. The same bishop also asked to have French or French speaking Salesians come to run his small seminary, to teach, to take care of a parish, and to open a vocational school, etc... Not content with simply answering that he cannot satisfy the bishops' desire, he also commissioned Mgr. Kerec to visit Vietnam, and he even personally visited Vietnam. Fr. Braga had a great desire to begin Salesian works in Vietnam, but the condition of that time did not permit him to make his dream become true. On the other hand, our Superiors did not want to satisfy those requests with the imposed condition that the Salesian to be sent should be of a specified nationality.

The Salesians' desire to come to work in Vietnam was increased by their frequent transit across Vietnam on their trips to Kunming, that is by the routes Hong Kong-Hà Phùng-Hà Nội and then Hà Nội-Kunming, on arduous travels climbing to the heights of 2,000 meters above sea level. The dynamic Fr. Braga and the eloquent, even "talkative" Fr. Kerec, had left unforgettable impressions in all the places they had been to.

— In 1935, Fr. Braga² on two occasions sent the first Salesians to Kunming via Hải Phòng-Hà Nội-Lào Bao, including Fr. Majcen and the Rector Fr. Kerec in particular. Some months later, in 1936, Vietnamese workers came to build the “Wisdom School” in Kunming. It was during this time that Fr. Majcen could know better the Vietnamese characteristics, their customs, their capacity to build a school, which until now, in 1986, still stands up beautifully and is the pride of its maker. It was from that moment, as Fr. Rassiga said, that the dynamic Fr. Braga and the eloquent Fr. Kerec managed to open Vietnamese's hearts to cooperate in the works of Don Bosco.

Later, Fr. Majcen made several other trips to Kunming via Vietnam, especially in 1935, 1937, 1940.

In 1940, Fr. Majcen conveyed to Fr. Braga the desire of a French military man, Fr. Francois Dupont, the founder of the work for the Eurasian orphans. This work came from the initiative of Fr. Braga and was implemented by Fr. Dupont and Fr. Petit, and has described in the book of Fr. Rassiga.³

The First Salesian Work in Vietnam with Fr. Dupont and Fr. Petit

1) The Vietnamese's desire to have the Salesian presence⁴

As early as in 1926, the Apostolic Nuncio in Indochina, Mgr. Costanti Aiuti who had residence in Hà Nội, wrote a letter to the Salesian Provincial in China, Fr. Canazei, notifying the desire of Mgr. Ruiz de Azua, Apostolic Delegate in Hải Phòng, to have the

² Mario Rassiga, *Don Andrea Majcen*. See the section on the “Salesian History in Kunming”.

³ See Mario Rassiga, *L'Opera Salesiana nel Vietnam*, Hong Kong — A.T.S., 1984, pp. 3-12.

⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 1-12.

The persecutions ended by the French army's intervention, with the signing of the treaties and pacts in the years 1858, 1859, 1884 between the governments of Annam, France and Spain.

French colonisation of Vietnam

The French intervention in favor of their missionaries in Vietnam was by no means disinterested, for France saw this a very good pretext and opportunity to occupy Vietnam. As early as 1886, Napoleon III of France incorporated Sài Gòn, the Mekong delta and the whole Cochinchin into France, making it a French colony. In 1887 he sent 400 legionnaires to take Tonkin, making it a French protectorate. In the same year, he sent 600 legionnaires to take Annam (Central Vietnam) and made it another protectorate, though still retaining Bao Dai as its emperor yet placing beside him a French protector official with greater authority. Vietnam was under French colonial rule during 92 years (1862-1954) until the Geneva Accords of 1954.

The progressivist governments of the French Republic did not see as wise their export of anti-clericalism to their colonies: this would only bring disadvantageous results. That was why the Freemasons could not do in Vietnam all the evils they had done elsewhere. In those times, the colonialist government was very watchful against different political parties who all more or less extolled patriotism and fought for their country's independence.

The political situation

Of the political parties that lasted longer or shorter, one eventually emerged that took the upper hand with a more than persuasive weapons resource: the Communist Party that was led by Ho Chi Minh. This was a multifaceted figure: He first cooperated with the government and then split off. He disguised himself as a patriotic in order to attract the people's support. In the meanwhile he set up guerrillas forces, made them an real army, fought and

won the French and then used tricks to fail the US Army in South Vietnam.

Japan initially invaded Vietnam with the intention of an advising party then turned out to occupy the whole country, but after just a few months they surrendered to the Allies and ended their occupation.

During World War II, especially between 1945 and 1950, the French colonialists weakened. They somewhat recovered in the years 1950-52 when General de Lattre set up the national army and organized defensive forces in the villages. Their fatal end came on May 7 1954 when they fell after a long heroic resistance at Điện Biên Phủ, and the French cause definitely ended with this total failure. The Geneva Accords, signed on July 20 1954, divided Vietnam into two parts: the North above the 17° latitude was under the control of the Vietnamese Communists with Hà Nội as capital, while the Vietnamese Nationalists took control of the South below the 17° latitude with Sài Gòn as capital.

In 1955 Emperor Bao Dai was dethroned and Ngo Dinh Diem was elected President of the Republic of Vietnam. He was reelected in 1961 and in 1962 he signed an agreement with the Americans. The American intervention could have eliminated the communists but unfortunately this tragic and bloody war failed, the Americans eventually had to withdraw. Without the support of the American, South Vietnam's Army could not stand the overwhelming attack of the North Army abundantly supported by huge ammunitions of China and the USSR. South Vietnam completely collapsed and the North took hold of the whole country without much difficulty.

D. AN INTRODUCTION TO MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY ON VIETNAM

— 1926, The Apostolic Nuncio, Mgr. Costanti Aiuti, on behalf of the Bishop of Hải Phòng, asked the Salesians to come and open their schools in Hải Phòng.

— 1927, our Salesian Father at the Nuncio's secretariat insisted that a French Salesian should be sent, but there was none to be sent.

— 1928, the bishops and priests spoke much about the coming beatification of Don Bosco. (Probably because Mgr. Corostarzu in Kunming had spoken himself, as well as other priests who personally knew Don Bosco).

— On June 1 1929, Don Bosco was beatified by Pope Pius IX. Right from the beginning, Don Bosco was a saint who was very popular to the Vietnamese.

— 1930, the year of the glorious martyrdom of two Salesians, Mgr. Versiglia and Fr. Caravario. Other distinguished Salesian figures included Mgr. Canazei who was bishop of Shiuchow, and Fr. Braga, to whom the great project about Don Bosco was always dear to his heart, and who became Provincial of the China Province and was preparing for the future Salesian works in Vietnam.

— As for Fr. Majcen, as a theology student in Ljubljana, he had already been greatly interested in the Salesian history in the whole Orient by reading articles on the *Bulletino Salesiano* and through the news from Fr. Kerec.

— In 1933, Pope Pius XI appointed the native bishops from the missions, including Mgr. JB Nguyen Ba Tong, the first Vietnamese bishop of the largest Catholic diocese in North Vietnam (Tonkin).

**CHAPTER 9: THE BEGINNING OF SALESIAN
WORKS IN VIETNAM**

**A. FR. CARLO BRAGA, THE INITIATOR OF
THE SALESIAN MISSIONARY PROJECT IN
VIETNAM**

My Superior was Fr. Carlo Braga who initiated Don Bosco's Missionary Project in Vietnam and who infused Don Bosco's spirit in me and in others.

How Don Bosco's spirit got in Vietnam before 1952?

As I have said earlier,¹ I am convinced that Don Bosco in the years between 1835 and 1838 knew well the story about Vietnam (then called Annam or Indochina) and he saw the young people from India and China among the native clerics. Vietnam was seen on the route from Beijing to Africa, as was shown to him by the Personage of the dream.

Fr. Braga was a friend and advisor of Mgr. Versiglia with whom he also discussed the project of setting up Don Bosco's works in Vietnam, although the project at that time was not mature enough to be carried out. In this section I want to highlight some more coherent chronology of the events.

a) During my stay in Macao, every week I used to go from Don Bosco Secondary School to the Immaculate Conception School to make a confession with my confessor Fr. Favale. But in September 1952 my heart beat faster and the thoughts of my new obedience letter kept hanging about in my mind. As I had done in 1935 when I passed by Vietnam's land to go to Kunming, now in September 1952 I also knelt down before the Tabernacle and Mary Help of Christians' altar in Mgr. Vergsiglia's chapel surrounded by his sanctity's fragrance. I asked Our Lady to give me her blessing, advice and support so that I could work in the midst of all the agitations of a bloody war, and her help in order to—as Fr. Braga had recommended me—work for the poor, abandoned children and for the vocations of Vietnamese young men who in the words of Fr. Braga were very very many... In Fr. Braga's great heart, he truly left his testament to this region: a beginning for the Salesian works in Vietnam... Wasn't this just a will-o'-the-wisp? In such uncertain conditions?

b) On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of my departure for the missions (1935-85), I recalled that in my first missionary steps when a French aircraft named "Paul Doumer" landed on Hải Phòng port, Fr. Braga then explained to the French customs officer that this was the missionary departure of 5 Salesians for Yunnan mountainous region to open an art and professional school. For the first time I was impressed by the Vietnamese women and men, who it was said characteristically wore brown clothes and had their teeth blackened by a special substance. They chew betel pepper leaves with betel nut and lime and from time to time spat its red quid out right on the floor. In fact this was a people with a characteristic custom completely distinguished from the Chinese.

In his book *Salesian Works in Vietnam*, Chapter 1, pp. 1-6, Fr. Rassiga has skillfully presented a history of the one Vietnamese people separated by the 17^oparallel and swimming in the same Pacific waters.

¹ See Mario Rassiga, Ch. I, pp. 4-18.

**CHAPTER 8: TOWARD RECEIVING NEW MISSION
IN VIETNAM (9/1951 — 10/1952)**

The total population of Vietnam in the 1950s stood at approximately 50 million. Before 1952, they were known as the Annamites or Indochinese. On September 20 1977 Vietnam officially became a member of UNO.

This is a very hardworking and intelligent people. This I had experienced since my first months in my missionary life, as early as 1935. Our Fr. Kerec had managed to build his “Wisdom School” by the hands of Hà Nội’s supervisors and skillful workers. The construction in ferro-concrete and timber had been completed wonderfully and it still stood up as an artistic work to beautify Yunnan city until 1950 and even later.

c) Our dear Fr. Rassiga presented the Salesians missionaries’ evangelization in Chapter II, pp. 7-11. But I cannot help highlighting the valuable work of the Jesuits Fathers, including Fr. Buzzoni and others, especially Fr. Alexander de Rhodes, in their creation of the *Chữ Quốc Ngữ* for the Vietnamese language... thus setting a beginning for the modern national literature. Fr. Rassiga also spoke of the bloody persecutions. As early as 1835, Don Bosco as a student and young priest had read the Lyon missionary magazine, he certainly knew of the martyrdoms of St. Venard and many bishops, priests and laic Christians in Vietnam. On July 5 1862 Vietnamese Court was forced to sign with the French rulers a treaty of religious freedom. Our Lady of Lavang eventually triumphed. It was in Lavang where the Catholics took refuge, and it was there that Our Lady made her apparitions to comfort her children. It was at that time Don Bosco told our future Cardinal Cagliero that we had to promote the devotion to Mary Help of Christians. The readers may refer to Don Bosco’s *Biographical Memoirs*. I will speak later about the Lavang Cathedral where there was the blessing rite of the statue of Mary Help of Christian, a statue brought from Spain on the occasion of the centenary of Our Lady’s apparitions in Lavang. Many Vietnamese Catholic families still keep the relics of their martyred ancestors, and their blood is

**CHAPTER 10: ACCEPTING THE INVITATION
OF THE NEW BISHOP PAUL SEITZ**

truly the seed giving birth to the Christians. This had been frequently mentioned by Fr. Braga and others.

d) In Chapter II, pp. 11-13, Fr. Rassiga spoke of the French occupation of Vietnam and in Chapter IV of the Vietnam war for independence, especially with the role of Ho Chi Minh and the communists from pages 4 to 15. I, Majcen, came to Vietnam exactly in 1952 when Vietnam was still under the French rule until their decisive defeat Dien Biên Phu on May 7 1954. After the Geneva Accords on July 20 1954, Vietnam was divided into two parts: the North and the South.

They took us in a very large dining room and introduced us to the guests. An ovation burst out to welcome the Salesians. Around 200 guests stood up to greet us... And as we had not eaten, they brought out some dishes for us, because the party had just ended before we came and there was nothing left. Mgr. Seitz stood up and solemnly made his speech: "Today is really a very happy day for me because I have been waiting and prayed for many years that the sons of Don Bosco come, and today this has become true." Then he introduced Fr. Giacomino then me as his old acquaintance. Several guests have previously known me personally. And eventually a champagne was opened to celebrate the coming of the Salesians. Fr. Majcen would soon have several friends among the bishops.

After the meal, we had a nap in the heat of Hà Nội, and at 4.30 pm Mgr. Seitz came to us. We got in his car and made a tour of the city, on the route Hà Nội – Hadong leading to the suburb area called Thai Ha Ap where there was a pagoda near a pond. We entered a small road and came to a house of the mayor⁶ opposite the Viceroy's palace that is now used by us for a school.⁷ Our car went past the pond. A panel was seen with the words "St. Theresa Orphanage" and then another that read "City of Christ the King." At some steps further, we were in front of the Truc Lam villa where there was the office of the Orphanage's Director with a number of big orphans standing around, and then the elementary school and the kindergarten.

In front of the Truc Lam villa, which is the official office of the Orphanage, 450 children were standing in lines, including the kindergarten children and the bigger ones, with a brass band of 80 players in their colorful uniform. The band played the *Welcome* song, then all the children sang out a song in honor of Don Bosco.

⁶ Fr. Majcen wrote "sindaco" (Delegato).

⁷ "adesso in nostro uso per le scuole."

He tried to create good spirit in the Orphanage. He told his children: "Dear sons, I am responsible for educating you with the method of Don Bosco. This method is not complicate. It is thus: From now on, I give you my heart; and in your turn you also should give me your heart, and you'll see everything go on wonderfully!" He also considered organizing the Associations of Past Pupils and Cooperators.

After three years of hard work in the Orphanage, Fr. Dupont was almost exhausted. His face became thinner, his eyes blackened after sleepless nights.

In 1943, he sent to Fr. Braga worrying letters in which he presented his difficulties, his complaints about receiving no replies. He also asked for more confreres and said that unless the conditions changed, we had better not extend the contract when it expired. But poor Fr. Braga was in such a situation that he was locked in Shanghai and could do nothing even for Hong Kong and Macao, still less for Vietnam. Even in Shiuchow, Bishop Canazei also complained about not receiving any letters from the Provincial, while on the contrary the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians could still receive letters from their Superior who was then in Shanghai. This was really a mystery about the postal system in time of war!

In 1943, the war situation grew more and more serious. American aircrafts from their bases in Kunming, Guangdong, made heavy raids in Indochina, while the Japanese increased their raids in Guangdong and South Vietnam. As for the land forces, they had occupied Sài Gòn on June 6, but their expansion was about to stop. Under American pressure, they began to withdraw from the Pacific.

Hà Nội was among the cities heavily bombarded by the Americans, and so the René Robin Orphanage was hit too, and in

December 1943 our two Salesians had to take the children to Ke So parish, where there was a small seminary for the Vietnamese. The place was 70 kilometers from Hà Nội. When they came there, they were granted a block to live in. There was no sympathy between the seminarians and the Eurasian orphans. Imbued with xenophobia, they did not dare to show any reaction when the French and the Japanese were still in power, but now that power had been transferred to the anti-French and anti-Japanese revolutionaries, anything might happen... It was for this reason that after a while, Fr. Petit took a group of children back to Hà Nội, while Fr. Dupont remained in Ke So with most of the children.

4) A report on Fr. Dupont's martyrdom

On August 10 1945, at noon, Fr. Cantaloupe notified Fr. Dupont that both of them were threatened to be killed because they were against the independence of Vietnam (then called Indochina). An anonymous person from Ke So had revealed that their fate had already been decided on). Fr. Dupont called his pupil Robert Orsini and Mrs. Dubois into his room and said: "I said this on oath: I was threatened to be killed together with Fr. Cantaloupe, because they considered me as against Vietnam's independence." Fr. Dupont and Fr. Cantaloupe therefore intended to go to Phu Ly to ask for the Japanese's permit to go to Hà Nội.

At the Orphanage, he was also recommended to leave right away for Hà Nội or at least for Phu Ly. He eventually took decision and told us: "I'll go to Phu Ly this afternoon. I'll try to ask the Japanese's permit to go to Hà Nội and I'll be back tomorrow (i.e. August 8 1945) with some trucks.

At 2.00 pm, he left after recommending us not to tell the children so as not to frighten them. Fr. Dupont arrived by bicycle in Phu Ly before Fr. Canteloupe, and went directly to the Japanese, but he was told to wait for the next day, so he came back to Ke So. He encountered Fr. Canteloupe who was on the way to Phu Ly. Fr.

In other words, present in Hà Nội that day were the whole Conference of Bishops of Indochina and the General Commander of the French Army, and we should know that at that time the Vietnamese only ranked second in importance in that regime.

Arriving late

Our airplane landed in Hà Nội at around 12 am. No one at the airport to pick us up because they forgot Fr. Braga's telegram. We therefore called a pulling cart with two seats and also a place for our luggage. This historic moment of Salesian life in Vietnam would later be dramatized on many occasions in our houses of studies.⁵ Fr. Majcen ordered the driver to take them to the "évêché". The driver answered "I know" but in fact he did not understand what Fr. Majcen meant. After a while, as I (Fr. Majcen) realized that the route was much longer than I used to take previously, I questioned him... At last we stopped to ask a policeman, he said "Tôi không biết" ("I don't know"), but I did not understand his Vietnamese either. Finally we came to the police center where a French showed the driver the true address of the Nhà Chung Hà Nội (Mission Catholique).

Upon arrival at Nhà Chung, we met Father economer and I told him that we were Salesian priests. We wait for a moment, then we saw coming Mgr. Seitz with his beard, Mgr. Khue, bishop of Hà Nội, and Mgr. Dooley. We introduced ourselves to them, and told them we were sent by Fr. Braga to take over the Orphanage. Mgr. Seitz asked for our names, our nationality and where we had been.

⁵ Original text: "Questo momento così storico della vita Salesiana ne hanno molte ripetutamente drammatizzato in tempi dei nostril studentati." The meaning is not very clear.

3. Fr. Giacomino, Rector, and Fr. Majcen, Vice-Rector of St. Theresa Orphanage

Going to Hà Nội

Early in the morning Fr. Giacomino and I celebrated Mass. It was St. Theresa's feastday, Patron of the missions, of Vietnam in particular, because she herself had wished to come to Sài Gòn as a Carmelite nun, to pray for the missions in this famous Carmelite convent.

Fr. Braga wanted us to come to Hà Nội before 10 am to attend the consecration ceremony of Mgr. Seitz in Hà Nội Cathedral, but due to some trouble with the airplane, we had to wait from 7 to 10 am for the plane to take off.

Therefore, being unable to get in time in Hà Nội for the ceremony, we had to fancy it as best as possible with all its solemnity. The very artistically decorated Cathedral would be full of guests standing outside and a procession inside, with the Altar servers group, about 20 bishops from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia and all the Vietnamese and French priests, making a 'corona aurea'⁴ for Mgr. Seitz. The consecrators would be the Nuncio Dooley, an Irish and Bishop Trinh Nhu Khue of Hà Nội. In the meantime the Orphanage's brass band would play the music superbly because they greatly loved their father who was about to become the Bishop of Kon Tum.

There certainly would be the presence of the MEP Fathers, because Mgr. Seitz was a confrere of this Society, with Fr. Pancolet just being appointed their new Provincial. There would certainly be the presence of the General Commander of the French Army and other generals, including Sir Binh, the Tonkin governor who was a Caodaist.

⁴ "Corona aurea": Fr. Majcen's meaning is not clear here.

Dupont appeared to be concerned because he had not asked permit for the Phu Ly's parish priest as well as for Fr. Canteloupe. That was why he let Fr. Canteloupe continue his way to Phu Ly to ask permission for himself and for Fr. Coste de Saint-Etienne, the parish priest. For safety's sake, Fr. Canteloupe wanted to persuade Fr. Dupont to accompany him to Phu Ly, but Fr. Dupont replied: "Go alone, because you are not responsible for the children. As for me, I have to stay with my children." When he was back to Ke So and the children reproached him for going back, he told them: "I am aware that if those who wanted to kill me don't see me here, they may take revenge by harming you; moreover I only do good, I preach concord between the French and the Vietnamese. Come what should come! I've done my best to save myself... Everyone dies just once... My conscience is at peace, and Our Virgin Mary will protect me!..."⁹

And Fr. Dupont was assassinated on August 10 1945. His death has been described by several witnesses in this way:

"That night Fr. Dupont decided to stay the night with his children. As usual, the senior boys took turn two by two to keep guard during the night. Suddenly at 11.00 pm, they came to wake him up because they were alerted by flashes. About 20 armed people intruded to overwhelm him. One of them kept watch over the children with a machine gun while another pointed his revolver at him. Fr. Dupont prayed the contrition act loudly. The killers accused him for liaison with the Japanese and ordered him to hand them money. They stuffed a piece of cloth into his mouth then bounded his hands with bamboo strings that cut into his flesh. He claimed innocence but in vain. They led him down to the ground floor and began their investigation. After that, they dragged him barefooted in his pajamas for two or three kilometers across the

fields. Then they led him to a riverside where they killed him and threw his body in water. In the next morning, people found out that his body had been thrown in water, and after a long and difficult search, they managed to take his body to the bank, after he had been drown in water for a night and a morning. There were one or two shot holes in his forehead and several deep cuts in his flanks.

In the meanwhile, at 50 meters from where Fr. Dupont was taken away, the killers also came to the quarters of the MEP Fathers in search for Fr. Canteloupe. Not finding him, they killed Fr. Baron who weekly came to the Orphanage to hear the children's confession, then left his dead body on his bed. They also searched through the clothes and linen and took away 2,000 dollars of the MEP.¹⁰

The two lamented Fathers were buried the next day, on a Sunday, in a very solemn funeral ceremonial. The assassination occurred close to the independence event. In those disturbing conditions, it was likely that those killers were armed gangs who wanted to take the credit by destroying those who they thought were against Vietnam's independence. As Fr. Dupont did not do politics, they alleged him as pro-Japanese, making him a victim of their personal ambition. Calling them bandits is not an overstatement, because they not only kill but they also rob.

After Fr. Dupont's death, Fr. Petit took over the care of the children till 1947 when he accompanied 30 orphans to France where they were admitted in the Salesian houses in Nice and Marseille.

On some day in 1940, Fr. Dupont wrote to his sister: "We should make propitiation for the sins of the world. Can a beautiful world emerge from the atrocities of the war? As Christians, we do

¹⁰ Robert Orsini, Orphanage's past pupil in RPFDP, p. 121.

prayed a great deal,² I prayed Mgr. Versiglia to help me, and asked for his intercession to Don Bosco and Mary Help of Christians as he used to do. In the school library I found a life of St. Stephan Venard, a martyr in Vietnam. I read it earnestly and meditated on it, taking resolutions to make the Saint's life the Salesian ideal in Vietnam.

7. On September 30 1952, Fr. Giacomino and I went to Hong Kong to prepare for the journey. We had to get the visa, an Air France ticket to depart on October 3 1952. The reason was that Fr. Braga, since he left Turin for Hong Kong, was always at our sides, optimistically telling us about the new work, the vocations, the poor children and the episcopal consecration of Mgr. Seitz in Hà Nội Cathedral on October 3, feast of St. Theresa, the young saint and missionary Patron of Vietnam.
8. On October 2, on the eve of our departure, Fr. Braga gave us Frs. Giacomino and Majcen the blessing of Mary Help of Christians so that we could work as Don Bosco did. On the ferry Hong Kong-Kowloon, we met Fr. Mario Acquistapace. He just came here from Beijing after he was called by Fr. Ziggotti to become the new provincial of the China-Vietnam Province. Fr. Mario told us, "I haven't known about your going to Vietnam yet, but I wish you bon voyage..."³

² Don Rassiga, *Andrej Majcen*, p. 8.

³ Don Rassiga, *Andrej Majcen*, pp. 122-123 or pp. 12-15 of Ch. II on the History of the Salesian Works in Vietnam.

return to Hong Kong, he showed me the report which made me very impressed because it was very optimistic and encouraging, although Fr. Roozen did not hide the fact that Vietnam was in a very dangerous situation of war and politics.

- c) In the meanwhile the Salesian Bishop Caretto in Thailand also wrote to the Rector Major Fr. Ziggotti encouraging the acceptance of Mgr. Seitz's orphanage as a very typical Salesian work and had been carefully prepared. Mgr. Caretto often told me that he would exhort the Rector Major to accept this orphanage of Mgr. Seitz.
4. On August 18 1952, Fr. Ziggotti answered Mgr. Trinh Nhu Khue, bishop of Hà Nội, that the Salesian Congregation accepted Mgr. Seitz's works in Hà Nội and commissioned the Salesian Provincial of China (then becoming the China-Vietnam Province) to make arrangements for the sending of the first Salesians. Of course the Rector Major had previously had an agreement with Fr. Braga on the agenda.
5. Fr. Braga had a meeting with Fr. Ziggotti in Turin, and on September 15 1952, Fr. Giacomo received a letter from Fr. Braga saying that, with the consent of the Rector Major, Fr. Giacomo was sent to Hà Nội as Superior-Rector and Fr. Majcen as vice-rector due to his experiences and knowledge on what was necessary there.
6. Thus at the Macao Secondary School, I prepared myself for this letter of obedience. The results of my operations on May 13 and in June were very good, my health improved. I

hope so. Can we make a beautiful world out of the sufferings and blood? Let us pray for this difficult emergence..."¹¹

Thus ended the first Salesian works in Vietnam.

Though this Orphanage was a first Salesian work in Vietnam, it was not intended for the pure Vietnamese children but for Eurasian orphans, that is for children having a French father and a Vietnamese mother.

In a letter in 1946 to Mrs. Dupont, Fr. Dupont's sister, Jean Dialmas, one of Fr. Dupont's past pupils, explained the significance of Fr. Dupont's work in Vietnam in these notes:

"First of all, there were Eurasian children who wanted to live as Vietnamese but enjoying the rights and privileges of the French in a colony. These children often became corrupted, scorned by the French, while they themselves were unable to love the French. Fr. Dupont took care of these abandoned children just because he loved them. He wanted the Salesians to help him. Even with the aid of Fr. Petit alone, the benefits surpassed all other helps from the secular people. That was why he wanted the Salesians' coming to develop Salesians works in Vietnam. By deciding to stay with his poor Eurasian orphans until death, he proved his love for the Eurasian children, and now that he is in heaven, he desires that the Salesians also continue taking care of these children. He moreover hopes that, with his death as a spring board, the Salesians would be launched into thisservice for these Eurasian children in Don Bosco's spirit."¹²

As we have said earlier, the Salesians later came to Vietnam in 1952 to take over Fr. Seitz ('Cha Kim', in Vietnamese) works.¹³ It

¹¹RPFDP, p. 109 (quoted in *Bollettino Salesiano*).

¹²Jean Dialmas's letter to Mrs. Dupont, 1946, in RPFDP p. 159.

¹³Mario Rassiga, *Fr. Andrej Majcen*, pp. 113-115.

was Fr. Dupont's martyrdom blood for the service of poor children in Vietnam that was a real blessing for the future development of Salesian works that were taken up by Fr. Andrej Majcen through innumerable sufferings and trials. Fr. Majcen himself admitted this in a letter to Fr. Dupont's sister.

On the meaning of this death, we give here some of the most trustworthy witnesses on Fr. Dupont.

5) Some witnesses on Fr. Dupont

Governor Decoux's letter to Mr. Durget (Fr. Dupont's brother-in-law)

Normandie September 18 1955

Dear Durget,

Through the Minister of Naval Affairs I timely received your letter dated May 5 notifying me of the body of your memorable brother-in-law, Fr. Dupont, SDB.

Due to serious reasons (my long absence and my wife's bad health), I was unable to reply to thank you for the moving information in the letter.

I was a close acquaintance of Fr. Dupont, who greatly helped me with all his strength, his intelligence and his heart, from 1939 to 1945, during my entire office term as Governor of French Indochina.

He acted as my interpreter in my talks with the Japanese and above all when I commissioned him Director of the boarding school for Eurasian children in 1942.

He was a saint and a great Frenchman. His death was worth his life: a martyrdom.

- a) First, I (Fr. Majcen) want to relate the historic meeting, at least for me, with Fr. Braga at St. Genaro's Hospital in Macao. "How are you?" Fr. Braga asked me happily and somewhat solemnly. "Fine," I replied. "The operation of my folded spleen was successful." Fr. Braga said at once: "Very well. So I have decided and will write to Archbishop of Cebu that you are not going to Cebu as I told you, but you will go to Hà Nội. Fr. Seitz, an acquaintance of yours, and who has just been appointed bishop, has asked us Salesians to take over his orphanage." And Fr. Braga continued: "I think I will send you and Fr. Giacomino to Hà Nội, because you know the priests and bishop of Hà Nội, and you speak French quite well, and especially you know there are many vocations there. Therefore try to have Salesian vocations. Now we have to wait for the Rector Major's answer. For the moment do not say any word about your new obedience... I'll nominate Fr. Antonio Giacomino as your rector, the first Salesian rector in Vietnam. As you are still very weak, please be Fr. Giacomino's helper... Well, let us keep the matter between ourselves... No more comment is needed..." And I could do nothing but thank God.
- b) On the other hand, Fr. Braga sent Fr. Roozen, a Hollander and provincial economer, to go to Hà Nội to draft a report. Before going, he asked me about some characteristics of Hà Nội's life... And Fr. Roozen made a report of several pages (now kept at the Pisana Archives) in which he presented a brief history of the Ba Vì Orphanage and on its transfer to Thai Ha ap, on its site, its children and its financial situation as well as the project to hand it over to the Salesians. On his

boy Joseph Nguyen Van Tho who later became a Salesian lay brother. Another alumni of Fr. Seitz's orphanage was the boy John Nguyen Van Ty who later became a Salesian priest and then became Rector Major's Delegate in Vietnam from 1975 to 1986, having responsibility for about 100 Vietnamese Salesians.

At this point we can conclude the proto-history of Salesian works in Vietnam. Before 1952, that is from 1935 onward, Salesians only passed through Vietnam, and I have followed the Salesian itinerary in Vietnam mainly through the accounts of Fr. Kerec and Fr. Braga, in particular in what concerned the Salesian works and the martyrdom of Fr. Dupont, who shed his blood to lead Vietnamese works through difficulties: that is what I am convinced of. Yes, it was from 1935 to 1951 that from the distant Kunming I began to be involved in the Salesian life in North Vietnam.

2. Fr. Giacomino and Fr. Majcen's acceptance of Mgr. Seitz's invitation

The new Bishop Paul Seitz invited the Salesians to Vietnam, while Fr. Braga was ready for the acceptance and sent Fr. Majcen and Fr. Giacomino to Hà Nội. The things evolved as follows:

1. On June 16 1952, Fr. Seitz, director of the Theresa Orphanage, was appointed bishop of Kon Tum, a highland province in Central Vietnam. He had cherished the dream to have the Salesians take over its direction and he presented it to his superior, Fr. Pancolet, the newly appointed Provincial of the MEP, and it was accepted. Mgr. Seitz then consulted Mgr. Trinh Nhu Khue, bishop of Hà Nội, and got the bishop's consent.
2. On July 13 1952, Mgr. Khue asked Don Renato Zigiotti, Rector Major of the Salesians, to take over Mgr. Seitz's Orphanage and to send his Salesians.
3. Fr. Zigiotti consulted Fr. Braga who made the inquiry in relation to these 3 points:

I would be very happy if you could share Fr. Dupont's impressions on Indochina, and other information about where and when his burial could definitely be done.

Should it be necessary to reinter his body in France? This in my opinion should be discussed. As for me, I would rather our dear missionary rested in the very place where he died for his faith and for his patriotism.

In my own case, I have decided that my cherished wife who died in Indochina on the Epiphany in 1944 be buried in Dalat definitely.

I no less desire to know Fr. Dupont's interment place (perhaps in Tassin)¹⁴ where I will come some day to see you and to pray before his grave.

Please convey my greetings to all the members of Fr. Dupont's family, and be assured that I remain

Most devotedly yours,

DECOUX

A Memorandum written by Fr. Petit, Fr. Dupont's collaborator in Vietnam

FR. DUPONT: A MISSIONARY

Many of us already know and love Fr. Dupont, but to help our young confreres know him better, I will quote some research articles of TERESIO BOSCO on the Salesians' works in Indochina. Fr. Dupont has played a primary leadership role. His experience is worth being re-actualized.

¹⁴ Fr. Dupont's native soil.

Pearl Harbor: December 1941. Japanese occupation of Indochina after 60 years of French presence. Among the Movements for national liberation there emerged in 1941 the Vietminh Movement as the most organized forces, under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh and also with the participation of the Catholics. The armed troops were chiefly communists, under the command of the history professor Giap.

It was at that date that the first Salesian came to Vietnam. He was Fr. Dupont, a Frenchman. Finding no ship to return to France, he was kept in Hải Phòng where he was a friend of Fr. Seitz, MEP, who took care of the abandoned children, the “children of war.” A distinguished orator, Fr. Dupont was also a good organizer. Knowing that he was available, the Bishop of Hải Phòng asked him to open an Orphanage for the French-Vietnamese children who were abandoned in those disturbing days. With the help of another priest, Fr. Petit, he engaged himself in this mission: Within a few months he managed to gather about 250 children and set up classes for them.

On November 11, 1941 Ho Chi Minh organized a total guerrilla war. On August 15 1845 Japan surrendered the Allies and the whole of Vietnam was under the rule of the Vietminh. The communists grew more and more hostile to the foreign missionaries. They accused him for being an imperialist cadre, hiding weapons, and destroying dikes leading to the famine. Still, he was accused for destructive activities such as burning the churches and attacking the monasteries. He was often threatened with death.

One night a gang came on trucks and intruded the Orphanage. With machine guns they ordered the children to freeze, then took Fr. Dupont away before their eyes. They dragged him across the fields then took him to the riverside. In the morning, Mrs. Dubois and the children went out to search for their friend’s body. They

personnel. Being in Turin at that time, Fr. Braga wrote to Fr. Giacomino Minh and the letter arrived on September 15, in which he was ordered to get ready to become a Rector in Vietnam and to take Fr. Majcen along with him.¹

That was the beginning of the Orphanage work in Ba Vì, with the moving of the children to Son Tay, at the school Lacordaire, a seminary that had been ruined by the bombardments, then to another place called Thai Ha Ap (Thai Ha Fief), near a pagoda built on the relics of the Chinese soldiers killed by King Quang Trung Nguyen Hue at Dong Da Hill. The palace of Viceroy Hoang Cao Khai (1850-1933) was also located there.

Thai Ha Ap and Fr. Seitz’s Orphanage

Thai Ha Ap and its context. — On the 5th day of Ky Dau lunar New Year (1789), Nguyen Hue (King Quang Trung) in the battle at Dong Da hill defeated 200,000 Manchu soldiers under Ton Si Nghi’s command and liberated Thang Long citadel. On Dong Da hill (Thai Ha Ap, Hà Nội suburb), Manchu’s corpses piled up as a hill. After this spectacular victory, every year the Vietnamese have an anniversary celebration at Dong Da, and by their compassion, they also offer incense on Dong Da hill to pray for the souls of the defeated.

Thai Ha Ap (Thai Ha Fief) was located in the land of four villages: Thinh Quang, Nam Dong, Khuong Thuong, and Yen Lang. It was called “Ap” (“fief”) because it was granted as a “reward” by the French colonialists to the Viceroy of Tonkin Hoang Cao Khai for his service. The Viceroy had a palace built in this “Ap”.

Fr. Seitz later borrowed Hoang Cao Khai’s palace to bring up the orphans. Among the children brought there by Fr. Seitz was the

¹ Mario Rassiga, *Fr. Andrej Majcen*, pp. 115-117.

chief district of Son Tay and were received in the Seminary. Fr. Seitz came to their aid, then accompanied them to find a new abode. They had to move several times, because where they believed they could stay longer had become dangerous. They eventually stopped at Truc Lam, not far from Hà Nội, and they lived at the former palace of the Viceroy of Tonkin named Hoang Cao Khai. This had once been an aspirantate of the Redemptorists but they had moved to another place. Fr. Seitz then invited the Sisters of the Lovers of the Cross in Hà Nội to come and entrusted them with the care of a kindergarten, a maternity school, then an elementary school and all the rest. To fight the communists, government aircrafts bombarded all those areas where the communists were suspected to have their shelter. Consequently the Ba Vì camping site was also bombed and destroyed. Later, Fr. Majcen, who was heir of Fr. Seitz in the possession of this site, was paid 1,000,000 dong for war indemnity.

In 1950 Fr. Seitz enlarged the land with the purchase of rice fields, then with Fr. Vacher Vuong, his chief helper, he set up there a boys-town in the model of the American vagabonds boys-towns and changed its name to the City of Christ the King, though still retaining its former name of Theresa Orphanage. For many years he had cherished the dream to entrust this work to the Salesians. On June 18 1952, after he was appointed bishop of Kon Tum in Central Vietnam, he immediately asked permission from his Superior, Fr. Pancolet, and his bishop to transfer the direction of the City of Christ the King to the Salesians. He got their permission and on August 13, Mgr. Trinh Nhu Khue wrote a letter to Fr. Ziggotti, Rector Major of the Salesians. The Rector Major wrote a letter to Fr. Braga. Fr. Braga at once sent Fr. Roozen, provincial economer, to come for an inquiry. Fr. Roozen on his return wrote a very nice report. It was sent to Turin and the demand was granted. On August 18 1952, Fr. Ziggotti wrote a letter to the bishop to make the arrangements with Fr. Braga on

found his body floating on the river with wounds in his forehead and in his flanks. He suffered martyrdom by his love for his abandoned children.

A few years later... Fr. Seitz, a friend and collaborator of Fr. Dupont, purchased a large plot of land and created a "boys town" in the American model of Fr. Flanagan, where 450 children could live in peace and joy. Appointed Bishop of Kon Tum in 1952, the new bishop was not sure who he would hand these children to. He prayed to Don Bosco, and wrote a letter to the Rector Major of the Salesians. And two Salesians who had been expelled from China came to Vietnam. And other Salesians have come to Vietnam since then.

Overcoming so many tribulations, the sons of Don Bosco in Vietnam have written a great story in the footsteps of Fr. Dupont.

A homily by Fr. Micolon, Fr. Dupont's old friend, on the 40th anniversary of Fr. Dupont's death

Forty years have passed since Fr. Dupont risked his life for his children whom he refused to abandon by running away from Ke So. Two of his pupils have told me the detailed story of his death in the night of August 10 1845.

Fr. Dupont's family and Fr. Galard have wanted me to present the figure of this young religious.

Fr. Dupont died at 37, very young. In that space of time he has covered a longer way than what we can do by our very long life. What strikes me most in this dear friend is that he has willingly chosen for himself the way of self-denial full of hardships and sufferings, the way of the cross Jesus himself has taken, a unique way that bears abundant fruits: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

When he was still very young, Dupont already had clearly discovered his natural inclination which he should not let himself fall in, a temptation which he should courageously deny: pride. With his companions, he wanted to control them and he had true leadership. He had the ability to inspire by his eloquence and persuasion, and an attractive writing skill, all those extraordinary gifts he was aware of. He expressed it by the motto: "Become a value to be able to serve others well!" It implied a search for vain glory and honor for himself, instead of searching for God's glory only. This dangerous temptation was very soon detected by him. He therefore chose for his life the proverb taken from the *Imitation of Christ*: "Love the way of not being known!" "Love that others ignore you!" (*ama nesciri*). "Love to be without fame" (*et pro nihilo reputari*). This was the way that Jesus, our great brother, had chosen in order to save the world: "Christ Jesus Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And ... he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"

All Dupont's life was a journey against his natural inclination. That was the thread that ran through all the episodes of his life.

When he was in the Grand Seminary, he did not decide to become a religious of a great Order leading him to high position in learning, but he chose a small, little known congregation with the sole purpose of serving the poor and abandoned youth: the Salesian Congregation of Don Bosco!

His superiors soon discovered his gifts, and they let him work under Fr. Auffray, a biographer of Don Bosco, and be trained by him. A very promising writing career was ahead him!

But once more, seeing this as a danger, he asked to go for the missions. With this, he no longer worried to be tempted by becoming famous with his literary skills, because the Japanese

**CHAPTER 10: ACCEPTING THE INVITATION
OF THE NEW BISHOP PAUL SEITZ**

1. Mgr. Paul Seitz and his Works

Fr. Seitz (Vietnamese: *Cha Kim*), of the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris (MEP), came to Vietnam in 1930. After he had mastered the Vietnamese language, he became Dean of Hà Nội Cathedral. By his zealous service to the French-Vietnamese children, the Bishop entrusted him with the care of the Catholic schools. In 1940, in need of a space for religious activities of the young, he bought a large plot of land in Ba Vì, Son Tay, at a nominal price of 1 dong. On this hilly land at 800 m above sea-level, with the help of benefactors, he built a camping plot with board and lodging, a chapel, meeting rooms, kitchens and store-rooms, then took the young there for summer holidays, camping and retreats.

In 1941 war spread to the countryside, the young became destitute and had to go to Hà Nội to find a job. Those who were jobless wandered in the streets to ask for alms, or became thieves. The professional criminals took advantage of this situation to gang up, creating a serious problem for society that the police could not know how to solve.

Moved by pity, Fr. Seitz engaged himself in the education of these poor youngsters. He took to Ba Vì eighty of these poor boys who had become thieves. Thus the camping site of Ba Vì became the Theresa Orphanage. In the following years, the communists managed to occupy many areas, including Ba Vì. Some of the boys were taken away by the communists, while the others fled to the

will know in heaven. Yes, what matters all the rest? At times my mind was filled with proud dreams; but at other times I desired to be forgotten, to be humiliated, to suffer martyrdom!

From a letter to a priest friend, September 23 1935

I have parted from my Christians in deep sadness and pain. What a great sacrifice! All of them love me and I loved them. Until I return safe after the war, every month they will attend a Mass on the day of my departure. I am also willing to offer my life to them and to all my beloved, if God wants it. If I die, please notify my Christians that I have offered them my life. I earnestly ask this of you. I will keep my words.

*From a letter to his sister when he was mobilized, from Tokyo
September 11 1939*

A Prayer to Fr. Dupont

O God, you enkindled
in the heart of your servant Francisque Dupont
the fire of a living faith, a burning charity
and a tireless zeal.

Give us the grace to follow his example.
We earnestly pray you to show us
his merits he had in you,
through your heavenly gifts.

O God, accept our prayer
that in your benevolent design
your humble servant be glorified
by Mother Church whom he always loved
with his whole heart. Amen.

language he had to learn was too difficult for him to speak it fluently! Then the war broke out. Dupont was mobilized in Indochina. Thanks to his Japanese, he was appointed by Admiral Decoux as his interpreter. He frequented the French upper class in Hà Nội and was successful with his discourses and sermons. Thus he once again encountered the danger of pride, so he dropped it to dedicate himself entirely to the service of the poor Eurasian children who were abandoned by society.

Fr. Dupont has always followed this direction, this I do not overstate. In 1935 my friend Dupont wrote to me: "Nothing matters if my whole life is a humble missionary with little success in this world, but I could save as many souls to eternity!" Yes, nothing matters! Please listen to this confession: "There were moments when I was overwhelmed by dreams of pride, but there were other moments I only loved to be forgotten—I loved to be unknown (*ama nesciri*), that I was seen as nothing! And above all, I loved martyrdom!" God has accepted my dear Dupont's desire. If you had lived longer, you could have become a bishop as Fr. Seitz did! You did have the qualities! But God wanted to give you another crown: the martyr's corona.

Fr. Dupont prepared himself by burying himself in the lowness of an orphanage. It was during this time that he soared as fast as an arrow. A profound interior transformation was completed in him! Let us compare his two photos: one when he first entered the congregation, and the other at the end of his life! Yes, in this latter, his eyes reflect interior depth: from a man in command, he became a good man; his face was so serene, his forehead radiant, and all his figure became spiritual.

He was ready to give a witness to love at its peak: giving his own life for the ones he loved!

"Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."¹⁵

A Letter of Fr. Majcen from Slovenia to Mrs. Durget, Fr. Dupont's sister¹⁶

Ljubljana, September 14 1987

Dear Mrs. Dupont,

On August 10 every year, I never forgot you and your brother, Fr. Dupont. The face of this Salesian apostle always appeared before my eyes, just as when I saw him in Hải Phòng. After 42 years, his face still shines radiantly before the Church of Vietnam.

I am convinced that his martyrdom is an eloquent proof that now in heaven, our dear Francisque Dupont and Mary Help of Christians always protect a number of approximately 100 Salesians in Vietnam... I experienced his protection from the years 1945 to 1954, then in 1967,¹⁷ and from 1976 to 1976, when the "Damocles's sword at the neck"¹⁸ was about to tear down the Salesian presence in the North and South Vietnam.

Now in 1987, there are 100 Salesians in Vietnam distributed into 14 groups or parishes. The most important group was in Dalat with 20 clerics waiting to be ordained. Until now only one among my friends has been ordained and two other non-Salesians in Dalat and BaoLoc.

It was truly a miracle when we are about to finish building a Salesian church in Bathon near Sài Gòn and have completed the

¹⁵RPFDP, 190.

¹⁶RPFDP, p. 202.

¹⁷ Fr. Majcen referred to the Mau Than attack that was prepared from 1967 and broke out in the beginning of 1968.

¹⁸ An imminent danger.

I know I'm loved by so many people. This however should not stop the beating of my Christian heart that has heard of God's call... Yes, I'm determined to go for the missions.

From a letter dated September 11 1934

The call to missions

I should go to Japan... I understand the pain of my beloved. But I cannot resist God's call, the call for a harvest from that far land. I must remember the words of the Master: "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me..." Now I feel very lonely. It should be so at the turns of our lives. Please therefore pray for me, especially for my beloved... God will bless our sacrifices.

From a letter to a priest friend, September 23 1934

May my name be humbly written in the list of the Near East missionaries who have glorified their country and their Faith!

From a letter on his ordination day June 29 1938

An aspiration for martyrdom

I dream of the mission lands, of the arduous apostolate in these wild, unexplored regions. Even Russia attracts me... I want to come to these young atheists, to bring Christ to them in the prisons, in the exile, and to suffer and even die there.

From a letter to a priest friend, December 24 1933

I am convinced of God's call. This is the deepest reason of my departure. In addition, there is an expiation ideal, a desire to live a harder and holier life... even though I remain in all my life just a humble missionary, perhaps with no much success on this earth, provided that with my holy life I can save forever many souls that I

A vocation is a set of so many unknown, silent and far away actions, so many hidden prayers and unexpected sacrifices. It is the reaching point of so many lives that find their meaning in the summit of this Cross, at the top of this altar where a young priest can say: This is My Body!"

From a letter on his ordination day June 29 1938

I'm going to be a priest on June 29 1938... I'll offer myself as a holocaust... so that I won't betray the friendship of my God and my Master, the expectations of the souls whose cry for mercy and whose sufferings awaken in me the desire to dedicate myself in their service... I don't want to betray the trust of the Church and the Congregation. My heart feels so small and weak before so many graces God has given me. I feel as if I were in ecstasy before the pinnacle Christ wants to lead me to, in order to drink his chalice and offer the Calvary sacrifice to his Father.

From a letter on his ordination day June 29 1938

We should make propitiation for the sins of the world. Can a beautiful world emerge from the atrocities of the war? As Christians, we do hope so. Can we make a beautiful world out of the sufferings and blood? Let us pray for this difficult emergence...

In any case, I find myself lonely, but as a priest, I'm close to Christ, close to my God. I have Our Lady, the Mass. That's absolutely great, and that's all!

From his last letter that reached France during war

The farther I am from my country and from my beloved, the more I miss them, love them, live with them and be united with them.

From a letter from Tokyo, March 24 1935

construction of Our Lady Help of Christians church near Giakiem. In May we have been able to gather the Salesian Family including the Salesians, the Daughters¹⁹ of Mary Help of Christians, the Past Pupils and the pupils, including the alumni of Mgr. Seitz, a great friend and collaborator of Fr. Dupont. Both Mgr. Seitz and Fr. Dupont have worked for the poor and abandoned children in the Vietnam war and now they are enjoying happiness with God and we are confident that they are really together in heaven. If there is any publication on the two persons (Fr. Dupont and Mgr. Seitz), I would be very glad to receive one.

Fr. Provincial Peter De in Xuan Hiep has written to me that he has collected all the important materials for a History of Salesians Works in Vietnam so as to hand it on to the young Vietnamese Salesians. The glorious history of the Salesians in Vietnam was born from the blood of an apostle of Vietnamese youth.

My health is not good enough to come to visit you and to contact those who had some relationship with Fr. Dupont and many other Salesian friends of mine.

Excuse me for not being able to write in French.²⁰ My best wishes especially for your good health, together with Our Lady's blessing.

Fr. Andrej MAJCEN

¹⁹ The French translation reads "frères de Marie Auxiliatrice", but probably it should read "filles de Marie Auxiliatrice," or "Daughters of Mary Help of Christians".

²⁰Fr. Majcen wrote this letter in his Slovene.

SOME TRAITS OF FR. DUPONT'S DELICATE HEART

Others have given me life and I am grateful, but you, my dear good aunt, you have given me an atmosphere in which my vocation has been able to germ and flourish. You have given me your sacrifices and your life, your heart and your happiness, so that I can soon ascend to God's altar, thanks to your affection, charity and all your dedication.

From a letter to his aunt, May 1938

At thirty, if we look back, nothing is more beautiful than contemplating the souvenirs of a pure friendship in youth. Nothing richer or more pleasant than this. It probably is the only souvenir that lasts forever.

From an article to the Young Christian Students, February 1941

I am very happy in my vocation, because the Most Holy Master appears to be more and more gentle, affectionate and visible to his missionaries. This does not mean he sometimes let us alone facing our own thinking, with our heart of flesh, but at that cost we save our soul!

From a letter to his brother-in-law

How wonderful the world of pure hearts! How good it is to be a Salesian! This vocation is the mission of introducing God into those souls that are not possessed by Satan, of having a fragment of the sky, of bringing an ideal into the small hearts. O God, I thank you for calling me.

From a letter to a priest friend

May God bless your husband, your home, your children. May he transform you into a saint, a wife and mother of an exemplary

family, an apostle, an exemplary Christian. May he keep you in his grace, all the days of your life, and may all we see each other again in heaven, where we can love each other more than when we are on earth, and never part from each other!

From his Spiritual Testament, a letter left to his sister before his departure for the missions, September 2 1934

I can't love by halves! This is why I have to part from you. I can't love God, love the souls, love my beloved by halves. That is my suffering this afternoon, as it is yours. But it will be our joy and glory tomorrow. Let Jesus bandage our wounds.

From a letter to his sister

The soaring fits of his soul

Oh! How beautiful our portion is! How splendid our life is! Let's also give ourselves wholly to our good Jesus, to our King of love! Please remember that you can be a greatest missionary behind the bars. I'll soon reap fruits; I'll speak, act, but it is you who plays the role that merits the salvation of so many souls, and then throw them in my poor net. From this moment, you and I, we'll sow seeds.

From a letter to his aunt in the Visitation Congregation

I can't forget it. They may reproach me of my big mistakes, but I have a heart. God will be pleased to receive me because I love him. I spread my wings to soar up. My going to missions is a soaring fit. The more we accept parting on this earth, the more we will be reunited intimately in our Father's house. That's for sure!

Quoted from a letter

works in Vietnam in his role as Provincial between the years 1952 and 1958, and then as Provincial Delegate until 1974, and as an apostle of Mary Help of Christians he established the charismatic foundation to the Vietnamese Salesians. Mary, you always are our Mother and we pray to you, dear Mother of the Vietnamese Salesians.

On the feast of Mary Immaculate Conception in 1952, Fr. Mario announced to Mgr. Khuê that he was coming to Vietnam. He came on December 13 and was solemnly welcomed. Then he had talks with Mgr. Khue, Mgr. Seitz who came from Kon Tum to see him and with the Superiors of the MEP. In these talks, Fr. Mario reaffirmed all the decisions that had been taken previously on the running of the Boys Town, that is, the works would continue as before. He said that the "Salesianization" of the works would be done gradually.

The necessary permits

Since they were not of French nationality, the Salesians needed special permits from the government in order to work in Vietnam. There was no difficulty in obtaining permits from the Ordinary. Mgr. Seitz suggested Mgr. Khuê to invite the Salesians to come to Ha Noi (July 12 1952), then Mgr. Khue permitted them to open their monastery (October 12 1952) and immediately asked the Holy See to approve it and it was approved on November 8. On December 18, the Bishop handed over to the Salesians the papers relating to the properties. His particular generosity offended the MEP because the Salesians were not of French nationality. But Mgr. Seitz and Mgr. Khuê answered them: "They must become greater, but we must become less!" On the other hand, obtaining permits from the government was more difficult. To obtain this, therefore, Mgr. Seitz wanted to hold a solemn ceremony for the handover of the Orphanage to Salesians, to take this opportunity to

Mgr. Seitz introduced us to the St. Theresa Family staff, then we got in the car again amid the music and firecrackers. Our car crossed a small bridge to come to the boys-town, passed by the workshops blocks and came to the small houses for the "12 families" of the children (30 children per family). When we entered each house, the eldest of the family greeted us, then the chief cook, the chief cleaner, the chief order keeper, the chief gardener, the chief storekeeper, etc... In each family, the children took care of their own management under the supervision of the Orphanage's supervisor general. There were both bigger and smaller children in each of these twelve families. Apart from the houses for the children, there was also a house for the (MEP) priests and the Salesians. Mgr. Seitz's educational system as he presented it seemed good but not fit for us, and we felt somewhat disappointed.

After going on the main road of the City of Christ the King for half an hour, we came to a large yard with a cemented monument in honor of St. Theresa at one side of a big church that could contain 500 people. On the steps of the church, a boy delivered a speech in Vietnamese to greet Mgr. Seitz, and another one made a speech in French to welcome the two Salesians. The name of the latter boy was Tuong, who later became a doctor. Among the children, some also studied at a Lasalle school, in a French program. In his reply Mgr. Seitz said that he had prepared everything for the coming of the Salesians. "Now that they have come, I can go peacefully." Then Mgr. Seitz introduced his staff: The director and economer of the MEP was Fr. Faugère and Fr. Vacher respectively; the supervisor general was Teacher Tran, a very capable person in keeping discipline, Sister Lucia and other nuns responsible for the kindergarten and the maternity school. He also introduced Mr. Ho, the principal and other teachers for the primary and secondary schools, then Mrs. Dubois, the treasurer,

and some other important people including Teacher Khac, who continued to help me as a secretary and office manager.

Looking back at this historic moment, I cannot help making some comments on the country's situation, on the important person for the birth of the Salesian works in Vietnam, Mgr. Seitz, and on my first collaborators. I am giving here also some notes about some of my pupils who now have higher or lower positions.⁸

Then all the families gathered before St. Theresa's statue on her feast day, thanking her who had led their founder to the

⁸ (1) First of all are some French and Vietnamese government officials. In those two years (1952-53), Vietnam was under French rule, and consequently the Salesian works had to get their approval and their financial support for the orphan children. Then the role of Vietnamese officials who worked for the French such as Governor Tri and the Director of Social Affairs who distributed the aids given by the French government, and other legal entities acknowledged by the French. Mgr. Seitz wanted me to be registered as a Number 2 person ("che sono iscritto sul numero 2") so as to be member of the friendship meetings and to get necessary information and support...

(2) It should be highlighted that even after 1952, Mgr. Seitz was still acknowledged as a charismatic founder by his educational system, as he himself said it was to "do as Don Bosco did", and until now (1986) his alumni still see him as such. They keep memory of him, respect him as their founder and we will speak more of him later.

(3) I also mentioned the names of my first collaborators in the years between 1952-54. Without them, I could do nothing, especially because I neither comprehended Mgr. Seitz' system nor did I know the Vietnamese language and the government officials and other benefactors. I will mention them as my principal helpers.

(4) Among the pupils of the time, there will emerge very important persons in the future: Fr. John Ty, Delegate of the Rector Major for Vietnam Special Delegation; Fr. Marc Huỳnh, Economer and Councilor of the Delegation; Bro. Joseph Tho, among the first pupils of St. Thérèse Orphanage; Mr. Khang, ex-Salesian; Mr. Ton, President of the Association of Past Pupils in Texas, US; and many other doctors, teachers and lecturers (as Mr. Chính...)

thank them for their songs; then he said "cam on" again, bowing to the brass band players while pretending to play the instruments, to thank them for their music. At his every "cam on", the children clapped their hands louder and louder. Fr. Fougère later said he had never heard a speech so simple and so clear! On that day everybody had chicken on their table and Mrs. Dubois also provided chocolate for them. No better overture of the Immaculate Conception's novena was ever made!⁵

**Fr. Mario Acquistapace, Provincial of China-Taiwan-
Philippines-Vietnam**

The first Provincial for Vietnam was Fr. Carlo Braga in the years 1942-45 when Fr. Dupont was Director of the Eurasian Orphanage. The dynamic Father with a heart as immense as sands in the seashore during the years 1934-45 had sowed Don Bosco's charisma in Vietnam, and this charisma still remained. Then between October 3 1952 and December of that year, Fr. Braga began Don Bosco's works in Hà Nội.

His successor, the second Provincial, was Fr. Mario Acquistapace, a figure in the 1886 dream of Don Bosco on Beijing that had become true during the years 1947-52 by the opening of a Salesian house in Beijing, and then it was brought to Ha Noi on December 13 1952. Fr. Mario had a great impact on the Salesian

⁵ Fr. Majcen's writings have been organized by Fr. Rassiga, and Fr. Majcen has written to Fr. Rassiga to thank him wholeheartedly. On February 15 1986, Fr. Majcen announced the sad news on the death of Fr. Guerrino LUVISOTTO in these words: "Today I would like to announce a sad news about the death of our missionary Fr. Guerrino Luvisotto on the recent Vietnamese Tet festivities. According to the news from our veteran missionary in Vietnam, Bro. De Marchi, who wrote from Verona, Fr. Luvisotto died at the hospital Pordenone on February 6 1986. Fr. Majcen also send his greetings to Fr. Massimino and his thanks to Fr. Tohill for a letter referring to an important page in the history of the Salesians in Vietnam.

Our car passed the French posts where the soldiers were armed to the teeth and by night they could shoot when they heard any noise around. We came to Ba Thá, and were welcomed by the parish priest and Fr. Giacomino. Many old people came and brought bananas and beers on the table for us. They said: "Very reverend Father, what's your name?" Being told that we had very limited time, they ordered the families around to prepare a meal. That was a very good habit of the faithful because they understood that their duty was to feed the passing missionaries. After a while, a woman brought in a dazzling copper tray full of food. She humbly invited the guests: "We only have a frugal meal for our guests!" After lunch, Fr. Majcen and Fr. Giacomino went in the church to confess to one another. Then someone came to warn that we had better not delay here but be back to Ha Noi soon, because from 3.00 to 4.00 am it was the Vietminh who took control in this region.

The first Patron Feastday for Fr. Majcen in Vietnam

The good Father Faugère Cao wanted Fr. Majcen's feastday to be solemnly celebrated and also to be used as the opening of the novena of the Immaculate Conception which is traditionally celebrated by the Salesians with an Eucharistic adoration and a short homily.

Fr. Majcen presided over the Mass and after the Mass, in front of the church, he was greeted by all amid the sounding ovation, the music of the brass band and the song of the "Boys Town". Then Mr. Thủ òng (a pupil who later became a doctor), gave a fluent speech in French, and Fr. Majcen was invited to reply in Vietnamese. He wanted to adroitly excuse on the pretext of his poor Vietnamese, but as the children started clapping their hands he could not but handle his situation in a unique way. He said "cam on" ("thank you") while bowing his head toward the choir, to

episcopate, and welcoming the first two Salesians of Don Bosco, and they were sure that Mgr. Seitz would continue to help them for some time.

The church's bells rang, inviting all to come in, whether they were catholic or not, to sit on their benches and read on the wall the Vietnamese inscription hanged near Jesus's statue: "LOVE EACH OTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU". Yes, it is enough to be near Jesus. It is truly a life program, a meditation and it should always be a life program for the pupils and Salesians alike. Mgr. Seitz gave the Eucharistic blessing to all, then in his Vietnamese he thanked Mary Help of Christians for her precious gift that was the Salesians to the Orphanage, and he entrusted everything to Mary with all his filial confidence in the uncertainties of this bloody war.

After leaving the church and getting in the car, the Fathers returned to Truc Lam Villa. There was a sumptuous dinner for the children that day. The bishop entertained his staff, his collaborators, the two Salesians in particular, in a warm atmosphere. All exchanged with each other the wishes for good health, drinking the toasts and talking about so many events that had occurred during the past nine or ten years in Ba Vì until now.

After dinner, the actual economer, Fr. Vacher, took two Salesians back to their house for rest. Fr. Majcen went to his room near Fr. Vacher Vuong. As it was very hot, he had to open all the doors and windows for the wind. The bed was without mattress, with only a bamboo bed-plank covered by a sedge mat. Unable to sleep, he had to lie on the floor hoping to be fresher and more comfortable, but then he was attacked by the ants. He went up on the bed trying to sleep, but suddenly he heard the gunfire and cannons roaring. He looked out under the moonlight and saw the opaque water surface with thick bamboos chain reflecting themselves on it, and farther were rice fields with a few thatched-roofed houses in the dark. Fr. Vacher Vuong was awakened. He

went to Fr. Majcen and encouraged him: "Don't be afraid! They are from afar and shoot towards us. But they are too far to touch us." Fr. Majcen got back in his room, still unable to sleep, keeping revolving in his mind the words: "They are there!" And they kept harassing us with gunfire and cannons, taking away the tranquility of the night. These conditions are extremely important matters to be remembered, and future generations should not forget them.⁹ These are not just horrific descriptions, they are conditions of life. From that first day and for two years we have been living in a country suffered by a bloody war that grew more and more appalling. By night the Vietminh controlled the suburbs and around the French camps and during the day they hid themselves at least in the periphery of Hanoi with gunfire and cannons while the French soldiers with their aircrafts retaliated by bombardments... and so destruction and fire of war rose up. That was the life that we Salesians shared with the Vietnamese people.

And the following days

Mgr. Seitz remained in Hanoi from October 4 to 31 to help the two Salesian Fathers with the Orphanage's takeover, including:

a) getting contact with the staff, to help them gradually understand his educational system... and especially understand his works. Yesterday I roughly described Mgr. Seitz's Boys Town with 12 families. Today's schedule will be the visit to the palace of the Viceroy of Tonkin who had let the Orphanage use it. We got in the car and set off from the Truc Lam Villa with rows of green bamboos alongside a very beautiful pond, near a small but historically very important pagoda.¹⁰ And there we were in the Palace's yard! We first visited the kindergarten with Sister Lucia as Superior and the Sisters of the Lovers of the Cross who were

⁹ "e sommamente importante, da non dimenticare".

¹⁰ To understand this interesting note of Fr. Majcen, see Figures 13, 14, 15 and 18 in his document.

servant... then became a Salesian...He later studied in Italy, and eventually became a Provincial in South Vietnam...⁴

Among the boys admitted in the Orphanage, some were so weak that the Sister only had time to take care of their souls, opening Heaven to them by baptism. Others were of the kind of swindlers, pretending having good will to be admitted. Once admitted, they lived to their wish, stole things and went off. But most of the boys were good. They lived honestly for many years in the Orphanage and eventually got a good job. Fr. Majcen and Fr. Faugère Cao once came to visit one of them working in Haiphong. He appeared to be very pleased. He used to spare his money to be able to spend the Tet at home. Home for them means the Orphanage of Mgr. Seitz in the past, and the Salesians currently were his parents whom he wanted to show his gratitude.

A visit to Fr. Giacomo Minh

Accompanied by Madame Dubois (a very energetic French woman of mixed parents who was responsible for the food and laundry of the Orphanage), Fr. Majcen went to visit Fr. Giacomo. Driving the car, Mme Dubois told him her whole life. She had married a French legionnaire of Italian descent, and had been abandoned. Fortunately she was received by Fr. Dupont to take care as an economer of the orphanage of Mr. René Robin. She served Fr. Dupont very well until the latter was killed as a martyr. It was she who recounted the last hours of our martyred confrere in Nam Dinh. After Fr. Dupont's death, Mgr. Seitz invited her to the Orphanage where all the children showed her a great admiration for her driving skill and for her getting so many gifts for them, especially on the feasts.

⁴ Fr. John Nguyễn Văn Ty, currently Delegate of Vietnamese Special Delegation of the Rector Major, following Don Majcen's memories. But probably his admission to the Orphanage was by Mgr. Seitz during the years 1948-50.

because of the bombing and they were also sick, got fever and I immediately send them to the infirmary.

Another boy in a basket

The Director of Social Department phoned to me: "I'm very pleased to know you. Can you receive a boy in your Orphanage? His father died in war, leaving his mother and small children. His mother is always sick and cannot earn anything, so their condition is very miserable. It's a good family that has lost their father and all their property because of the war." I at once received the boy named Marco, but his younger sister in a basket was sent to the nuns.² Later on in the South, the boy became a good pupil, admitted in the Salesian novitiate and eventually became a very good priest,³ while his sister became a Sister of the Assumptionists in London.

A French officer greeted me: "Bonjour mon Père"

"Bonjour mon Père!... I bring you a very nice boy. Last night our soldiers attacked a house at the other side of Red River opposite Hà Nội because the Vietminh had a gathering there. All had been killed. This morning I only found a boy who survived, I neither know his name nor his birth. He only cried, but I saw him very smart." I (Fr. Majcen) sent him to the kindergarten and Sr. Lucia taught him catechism. He was baptized, became a Mass

guided by the spirituality of the Oiseaux Sisters under the rules of St. Augustine. There were about 100 orphans who entirely depended on the care of the Lovers of the Cross, including sleeping, drinking and eating, studying and all other necessities. Then we visited the school principal, Mr. Ho, who was responsible for both the elementary and secondary grade, with the teaching staff who were not in Fr. Majcen's responsibility yet. The school was not well maintained and was half damaged both by bombs and rains. In the middle of the Palace, the Viceroy had a place for the cult of Buddha and ancestors, with beautiful and queer statues.

Then we visited the living room and office of Mrs. Dubois, a French of mixed parents. She supervised several houses, had under her direction about 20 girls washing dishes, mending clothes and doing the laundry... as well as taking care of a large farm with cattle and pigs...

b) After lunch, it was decided that there would be a first meeting on October 4 1952 with Mgr. Seitz, the two Salesians, Fr. Faugère, Fr. Vacher, Teacher Trần and Teacher Khắc and some others, including Mrs. Dubois who currently belonged to the direction board. The meeting was held at Truc Lam Villa, headquarter of the Orphanage. I would like to say a few words about this place where I have been working for the two first years in Vietnam. In a corner there was a small reception room with a board hanged on the wall on which were listed all the students with their dates of birth or graduation, and whether and where they were studying or working. We had then more than 500 children including those of the kindergarten.

Secretary Khắc welcomed guests and invited Fr. Majcen to contact all government and ecclesiastical authorities, the pupils, the bishops or civil guests. The secretary hand over to Fr. Majcen all the records written in French or in Vietnamese relating to the process. From his window Fr. Majcen could see all the movement

² "Ho ricevuto Marco... e la sua sorella messa a Cambot con le Suore": the text is not very clear.

³ Fr. Marco Huỳnh, a Provincial economer for a long time, and Sr. Bắc, an Assumptionist.

to the direction of the Boys Town, as well as the movements of those who went out from there. The room next to his was for a Vietnamese priest, Fr. Phan, who was studying at university but who could also help Fr. Majcen in some delicate issues. Opposite the house that formed a U, there was the Superiors' refectory, with the woman cook humming all day long Vietnamese prayers and the question-and-answer catechism lesson of Pope Pius X. This was really a pleasant and pious atmosphere.

c) As for Mgr. Seitz, he was deeply concerned about how to explain the spirit of a bishop in which there was both the spirit and the system that he had created. He often repeated to me that it was Don Bosco's spirit. He saw in the birth of Don Bosco's Oratory an event very similar to his work.

Actually the bishop applied the Boys Town model of the American founders in which the orphans helped each other to educate themselves. It was the children themselves who were responsible for their own training, under the supervision of an assistant and of Fr. Majcen himself whose reception room was put in the middle of the administrative and educative center. This was an educational system in war time (Don Bosco's educational system also emerged in the same way). The bishop insisted that "my system is one taught by the Holy Spirit in all moments, according to the necessity of each moment.

I believe this system has been admired by all, of course with ideas indisputably attributed to Don Bosco. But the acceptance of such a system before Vatican II raised a problem regarding the loyalty to our Salesian tradition, to our rules. Fr. Majcen had a more flexible style, while Fr. Giacomino was more rigid.

I all at once realized this was a problem of allegiance to our Father Don Bosco, and so I wrote to Fr. Bellido, General Catechist

admitted in the school, or to Fr. Vauchère to learn a trade in the workshops. The principal rule was that they should be received as a real family member, not just as a student, and to be received in the way of a father receiving his children and to have a living standard of an average family, even to be able to study and go up to university. When they later became past pupils, they often came back for a visit to the Orphanage as to visit their own families on the New Year or summer holidays. No longer having their natural parents, their true parents now were Fr. Majcen, Fr. Giacomino and Mgr. Seitz.

Here are some episodes revealing us something about the miserable conditions of those times.

A professional thief with 18 times in prison

One day Fr. Faugère took me in his truck that daily transported the children to work in the factories in the city. As I sat among the boys, I at once recognized one of them. "Why are you here?" I asked him. "The police brought me here." "So you are among those boys...?" "No, Father, I am from a good family, I do not steal. But I've lost my parents, I had to go begging but no one gave me anything. So I had to steal at the shop. Since I do not know how to steal, I was caught by the police. My companions have stolen more often than me but they haven't been imprisoned as often as me."

Teacher Khắc said to me: "Father, you have a phone call!" "Listen, Father, are you Mgr. Seitz's successor? We have got here three boys in this prison for stealing. We cannot punish them, but are trying to help them... They just escaped a bombing, and now they have nowhere to sleep. It's raining and they have to sleep at people's door and steal things to eat." I answered: "Please bring them here at once!" In fact the boys appeared to be very frightened

**CHAPTER 12: FR. ANDREJ MAJCEN
AS PILOT DURING THE YEARS 1952-54**

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DURING THE YEARS 1952-54¹**

After Mgr. Seitz left for Kon Tum and Fr. Giacomino went for his Vietnamese learning in Ba Thá where there was a good French parish priest, Fr. Majcen remained alone to direct the Orphanage with Fr. Faugère's assistance.

On November 4 1952, Fr. Cucchiara announced that Fr. Mario Acquistapace was appointed Provincial of the Province China-Taiwan-Philippines-Vietnam. On November 8 1952, the Nuncio Dooley notified Fr. Majcen that the Sacred Congregation Propaganda Fide had approved the erection of a Salesian religious house in Hà Nội for the service of the orphans.

Since Mgr. Seitz and Fr. Faugère during the previous years had arranged for quite a great number of big boys to work in the factories, Fr. Majcen now could have more rooms to receive many orphans in the Orphanage. The boys who applied for admission would first be inquired by Teacher Khắc who by his name ('Khắc' means strict) was very strict and who was very careful in his interrogation. Then it was Fr. Majcen who decided on the admission and put their names on a list to be presented to the Social Department to receive allowances. Fr. Faugère then had the boys to take a bath and to have a medical check if necessary, then he assigned each of them to a family. On their entering a family, they were all happily received in a feast-day atmosphere, as Mgr. Seitz wanted. Then they were presented to principal Hồ to be

CHAPTER 9: THE BEGINNING OF SALESIAN WORKS IN VIETNAM

of the Congregation, asking him what to do.¹¹ Fr. Bellido replied that the works would not become Salesian by a revolution through changes but by patience and EVOLUTION¹² of the current system within two years. And that was my agenda during my two years in Hà Nội.

My first concern was to grasp the school administration under different aspects, namely:

- a) The selection of abandoned children;
- b) The financial system;
- c) The planning on the workshops and construction;
- d) The planning on the kindergarten run by the Lovers of the Cross Sisters;
- e) The planning on the printing shop and library;
- f) The planning on the MEP and SDB staff, as well as outside personnel, and planning on the transformation and adaptation of the works to fit the Salesian spirit.
- g) And last, the plan I had to immediately proceed was my contacts with the government authorities, with the Franco-Vietnamese Social Affairs Department for aids.

These were among the most important matters, because this was the AGENDA that should be made and achieved¹³ within the next two years.¹⁴

In that time, we discussed the future of the work in several meetings. The proposals of these meeting should be approved by the Sino-Vietnamese Provincial. But in the meantime there was the hand-over of the provincial's power in the Province which had to

¹¹ "quid faciendum".

¹² EVOLUZIONE.

¹³ "iter faciendum et obtainendum".

¹⁴ See MPI (Don Majcen's Memoirs kept in Pisana), 4 vol., Ch. IV, pp. 29-51.

¹ Don Rassiga, *Don Andrea Majcen*: pages 128-155

accept the co-presence of both provincials, the outgoing provincial and his successor.

As an outgoing provincial, Fr. Braga did not want to make any important decisions. As for Fr. Mario Acquistapace who was appointed provincial on October 7 1952 by a decree announced by Fr. Cucchiara, he would only assume the office after making the oath on November 4 1952 and would go to Vietnam on December 13 1952 for the administration in Vietnam and he would stay in office until the end of 1958.

Mgr. Seitz wanted that as late as November he would go to Kon Tum to assume his new episcopate. He therefore put forth this solution: Fr. Giacomino would assume Mgr. Seitz's position as Director General in what regards the more important matters, the feasts in the Boys Town, the relations and visits of higher government and ecclesiastical authorities. In the meanwhile he could have more time for learning Vietnamese in some village. Fr. Majcen becomes a Vice Director together with Fr. Faugère Cao, MEP, who would initiate him in the tasks and the educational system of Mgr. Seitz. Consequently Fr. Majcen would be installed in Mgr. Seitz's Director office so as to be always present among the children and be responsible for the admission, the discipline, the time-table, as well as the financial matters and the relations with the Bishop, in brief, responsible for everything and occasionally report to Fr. Giacomino. Besides, Fr. Majcen would cooperate with Fr. Vacher Vuong, the economer, to find financial resources.

All the current staff (except the school's employees) would be under the direction of the two Vice Directors Fr. Majcen and Fr. Faugère Cao, who worked very harmoniously.

I think Mgr. Seitz's solution was optimal and necessary, because at the time I did not know Vietnamese, I had no money, and was not knowledgeable about the children and the war

Mgr. Từ, Bishop of Phát Diệm. The two bishops were very happy because this is the first time two non-French missionaries came to work in Vietnam. The two bishops would become close friends of the Salesians until 1974. As early as in 1937, the first Vietnamese Bishop Nguyễn Bá Tòng had wanted to have the Salesians to work in Vietnam but under the condition that they should be of French nationality. They had got everything ready but the project was not realized. Later on, there were also several visits from other bishops including Mgr. Trương Cao Đài and Mgr. Hoàng Văn Đoàn, bishops of Hải Phòng, Mgr. Mare whom they had known in Kunming, Mgr. Piquet, MEP. A booklet on Don Bosco was also published at that time.

There was also a visit of Mgr. Caretto from Thailand. He recommended our Salesians not to make a revolution by sudden changes, but to proceed step by step to get a gradual transformation. At that time the directive letter of Fr. Bellido also arrived with his instruction to avoid any haste in the process for fear of grave failure. Finally there was the farewell words of Mgr. Seitz.

After a familial party on October 30, Mgr. Seitz set out for Kon Tum.

After the inaugural ceremony, the guests were invited to visit the houses of the families, then all gathered at a large workshop that was changed that day into a great hall. There, after the song “This is Christ the King City”, Mgr. Seitz personally and in the name of the Bishop of the diocese solemnly declared the handover of the Orphanage to the Salesians. Then he presented its history from the times in Ba Vì up to the present.

— The first Orphanage was erected in Ba Vì, 300 km from Hà Nội, which was later damaged by the war.

— In 1950-52, the Orphanage was erected in Tháy Hà Áp, under the name “Christ the King City”.

He then introduced the two Salesians, Fr. Giacomo Minh as Director and Fr. Andrej Majcen as Vice-Director, without forgetting to recall his memories of Fr. Dupont. In his conclusion, he asked for the blessings of Mary Help of Christians and of Don Bosco on the Orphanage, and wished for a promising future to the Orphanage.

In his speech, Fr. Giacomo praised the work that had just been handed over to him and he assured Mgr. Seitz, the works' founder, that the boys of Christ the King City would have him in their heart forever. He promised that the Salesians would never abandon their children and would always work for the poor youth... Then he greeted and thanked the Vietnamese and French authorities and so many benefactors, asking them to continue with their aids. Finally, with Don Bosco's heart, he greeted all his beloved children.

And champagne was opened amid the music of the brass band concluding the ceremony. Innumerable photos were taken for a souvenir.

In the following days Fr. Majcen received several distinguished guests, including Mgr. Chi, Bishop of Bùi Chu and

situation in Vietnam. And also because we did not have the Salesian personnel who we expected would come in the 1953-54 school year. Someone rightly expressed: “We'd rather assume a work from a zero than an existing one that was not Salesian, especially at the moment of the Salesian Congregation that was traditional (or conservative).¹⁵ Yes, it was. We had before us an existing environment that we had to gradually understand, then at some favorable moment we had to set it on the Salesian track, according Fr. Bellido's instruction.

Our new Provincial, Fr. Mario Acquistapace, eventually accepted this “modus” of action for at least one year.¹⁶ In a meeting, Mgr. Seitz, Mgr. Khue of Hà Nội and Fr. Pancolet, Provincial of the MEP decided on the “modus vivendi” for the members of the MEP at the time the Salesians took over the direction of the Orphanage; then they discussed other matters regarding the estate, the financial supports to receive and to find, and the way to fully hand the works over to the Salesians. As regard the style of work, Mgr. Seitz insisted that it was not wise to make a radical change in a time that could result in a catastrophe for the Salesians.

Thus in collaboration with Fr. Faugère, the two Salesians Fathers carried out the experimental way of this transition, called “modus vivendi for the moment”, in particular for the two Vice Directors, Fr. Majcen and Fr. Faugère.

Although I am writing this as an Autobiography, I also want to express all my fraternal love toward my former Rector in Macao and currently Rector here in the first year in Hà Nội. With his black eyes and curled hair, and with his characteristic smile, he

¹⁵ “la Congregazione traditionalista salesiana”.

¹⁶ “modus ad tempus per almeno un anno”.

was held in high esteem by all the children and the authorities as well as by the staff of the Orphanage.

According to Mgr. Seitz's will, Fr. Giacomino was at once assigned the role of Director General of the Orphanage, and was introduced to the French-Vietnamese government. But his chief task was to learn Vietnamese well, and so he went to the villages, more precisely at the house of a parish priest near a black river¹⁷, then he spent several months in Bui Chu with Mgr. Chi, who was also studying for the creation of a work there. He often went to Thai Ha Ap to say Mass, especially in the Orphanage and on the visits of Mgr. Seitz and Fr. Mario Acquistapace, and in particular on the 10 anniversary of the Orphanage (1943-1953). He also went there on other occasions to learn driving car which Mgr. Seitz insisted as very necessary.

He had a different nature from Fr. Majcen, but the two complemented each other very well. Fr. Giacomino was strict, scrupulously faithful to the religious rules, and wanted to change every thing in order to set the Orphanage on Don Bosco's track. Fr. Majcen, on the contrary, approached the direction in Fr. Braga's style, namely following the signs of the time and patiently wait for God's hour, and gradually made changes in his reform process... Any way, both of us have the same great love for Don Bosco, a saint so much loved by the Vietnamese, and especially for Our Lady Help of Christians, who did everything. We spoke about Mary Help of Christians and found ways that she could have a place in the hearts of the Vietnamese, in spite of the fact that the title of Mary of Perpetual Help, or Mary of St. Luke¹⁸, had occupied the first place through the promotion of the Redemptorists.

¹⁷ "fiume negro". The context is not clear.

¹⁸ "la Maria di San Luca". Why this title?

children to be grateful to Mgr. Seitz and to receive the Salesians as their new Superiors with the mission of continuing the works.

Then Fr. Giacomino blessed all the houses, accompanied by the supervisor general, teacher Trần, together with Mgr. Seitz, the children's commander-in-chief. That was all the external demonstrations of the handover of ownership.

At noon, there was the farewell lunch for Mgr. Seitz. Among the guests were Fr. Gastin, seminarians and a great number of the Orphanage staff, and all the inhabitants of Christ the King Boys Town.

At 4.00 pm came the ecclesiastical and civil authorities. Among these were Mgr. Khuê, Bishop of Hà Nội, the Nuncio Dooley's delegate, the Redemptorist Fr. Marchi, many Vietnamese and French priests of the MEP, the seminarians, the nuns, and the Sisters Lovers of the Cross in particular.

The government authorities included the Honorable Merlo, High Commissioner of France, the Major General Lamarque, representative of General Limares, the directors of the Social Department, and a great number of benefactors, friends, French and Vietnamese journalists of local and foreign newspapers, Mr. Giai, commissioner of Hà Nội Trade Union, and Mr. Phuc, Prefect of Hoan Long District. Sitting in the middle rang were Mgr. Seitz, founder of the Orphanage, Mgr. Khuê, Bishop of Hà Nội. Fr. Giacomino Minh and Fr. Majcen Quang also were among the front rank.

The last arrival was the most important person, the Honorable Phan Văn Binh, governor of Tonkin. Amid the solemn welcome of the brass band music, he cut the inaugural ribbon and officially declared in French and in Vietnamese the opening of the Boys Town.

Then they went to register at the police office. Security police came to investigate and talk with us for a while, especially because this was the first time they met foreigners who were not French. They wanted to know who we were, what ideas we had, whether we had communist ideas, or whether we were dangerous for national security. It appeared that if we were more intelligent and cunning, we could overcome the interrogation and got other permissions from the government.

With Fr. Giacomino who came from Brazil, there was no problem at all; but with Fr. Majcen the matter became a little more complicate because he came from Yugoslavia, a communist country and still worse, he also came from Red China. But since he had become used to those kinds of interrogation, he knew how to dispel the doubts regarding him personally.³

3. Official hand over of the Orphanage to the Salesians

Mgr. Seitz wanted to officially finish his work and direction of the Orphanage by handing it over to the Salesians before the presence of the highest ecclesiastic, civil and military authorities. This also was a way for Mgr. Seitz to solemnly say his farewell and gratitude to his collaborators and his children. He thanked everybody and heartily recommended the newcomers Salesians to them and to their supports, especially financially.

The pupils cleaned the roads and their small houses, hung on the wall of each house the pictures of Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco, and also a photo of Mgr. Seitz.

At 6.00 that day, after the blessing of the St. Theresa's church, Mgr. Seitz sang the solemn Mass. The choir was the St. Sulpice seminarians, under the direction of Fr. Gastin who was also a St. Sulpice Father. Mgr. Khuê gave the homily, recommending the

Mgr. Seitz gave a Vietnamese name to everybody. I list here also the names of the Salesians who later came to North Vietnam:

- Mgr. Seitz was called Đức Cha Kim (*Kim* means *gold*)
- Fr. Majcen was called Cha Quang (*Quang* means *light*)
- Fr. Giacomino was called Cha Minh (*Minh* means *splendor*)¹⁹
- Fr. Faugère, vice-director, was called Cha Cao (*Cao* means *great*)
- Fr. Vacher, economer, was called Cha Vuong (*Vuong* means *king*)
- Fr. Generoso was called Cha Quâng (*Quâng* means *generous*)
- Fr. Cuisset was called Cha Quí (*Quí* means *precious*)
- Fr. Bohnen, a Hollander, was called Cha Bán
- Bro. Bragion was called Thầy Báu.

On the admission

The admission follows this rule: the children who could pay should not be admitted, because in that case they were not abandoned children. Only those who had no one to take care of them and these were in great number in Hà Nội, because they had fled from bombed villages to the city. Here, to earn a living, they became beggars and often had to steal for survival. They were brought to us by the police or they themselves came to us.

After being admitted, they were checked whether nobody took care of them, then they were registered with their true name or a virtual name. Many did not even know their names, because the terror of the attacks had made them forget it, and had taken their parents' lives away.

¹⁹ “Lume: la Luce che splende Lume”.

³ Don Rassiga, *Fr. Andrej Majcen*, pp. 121-25.

Among the candidates for admission, Fr. Majcen noticed one who was smartly dressed, and he was reluctant to admit him because he seemed rich. The boy explained that in fact he had been rich, but the attacks had destroyed his house and his whole family while he was miraculously saved because he was playing then with his sister in the garden. Fr. Majcen was moved to tears and admitted him.

However, not all the children admitted in the Orphanage would stay for long. Some who had been used to the begging life in the streets would go away some day. Nevertheless these boys would be re-admitted if they returned repentant: only those with improper conduct would be rejected. The boys' soul was also taken care of in this Boys Town: no one should be rejected because of their religion or political opinions: misery was the only card for their admission.

The Providence

In the beginning there was some doubts about financial resource, but everybody soon realized that God never abandoned them: in fact, generous supports and charity from benefactors continuously came to their aid.

In this meeting Mr. Bình (who shortly would succeed Mr. Tri) promised to allow the Orphanage to organize public fairs and tombola to find more money for the Orphanage's activities.

A visit to the Social Department Director

After Mgr. Seitz's commendations for works of the Salesians, the Social Department Director found ways to register Fr. Majcen as a person who could receive aids and other gifts for the Orphanage, together with his assistant, Fr. Faugère, who always accompanied him.

This Director then became a close friend of Fr. Majcen, even later in the South, and he promoted Fr. Majcen to be awarded the 1st Government Decoration with medal for the merit of his 20 years service in Vietnam, both in the North and then in the South.

In order that Fr. Majcen could contact as many personalities as possible, Mgr. Seitz registered Fr. Majcen and Fr. Giacomo in the III ceremonial committee to be invited together with other officials in the Hà Nội government including the ministers, directors of various departments, military officers and other important persons. And I wasnot to wait long to be invited to such important meetings.

Another important visit was to the Major and the Social Department Director. This was not just a diplomatic visit, but also efforts to help the Salesians to stay, work and carry out the contracts in Vietnam, as well as receive aids. Both visits brought about encouragement and promises.

Registered at the authority and ... watched by the police

Mgr. Seitz registered our two Salesians in the ceremonial committee and consequently Fr. Majcen was always invited to the meeting where he could make acquaintance with important persons who helped him greatly.

recounted among us Salesians at a seminary of the St. Sulpice Fathers. In fact we are truly old friends!

2. A Visit to Authority Official: The Tonkin Governor

This was a visit of great importance. As the Salesian Congregation, we need the recognition from the civil government in order to work in Vietnam. This is a country whose custom and law we have to know well. In China, we had access to a law system in the French style. Here in Vietnam we need the approval of the Executive Committee, but we could only be recognized after TEN YEARS living in Vietnam then belonged to Indochina regime. By this meeting Mgr. Seitz wanted us to get an exemption status. With the government approval of the Congregation's presence, we could be able to buy and sell properties, open schools, and receive financial aids. Mgr. Seitz made his best effort that the Salesians could get these faculties before he left for Kontom. The visit was therefore very important.

The Tonkin governor was currently Mr. Phan Văn Bình (and shortly after, his successor, Mr. Nguyễn Hữu Trí, was a great friend of Fr. Majcen and a great benefactor of ours). Although dependent on French rule, the governor had some degree of autonomy. First of all, governor Bình thanked the Salesian Congregation for coming to Vietnam to take care of the abandoned children and the war victims. He promised to do his best ... that is, as I said earlier, to help the Salesian Congregation to be recognized as a legal entity with all its right to work in Vietnam, to buy and sell properties, to receive aids from the government, as well as from other countries, and to work legally in Vietnam.

Mgr. Seitz asked him to support Fr. Majcen who was directly responsible for the administration of the Orphanage, and to allow the Rector General, Fr. Giacomo, to go to study Vietnamese, and after one year, to work without difficulty.

CHAPTER 11: VISITS AND THE OFFICIAL HAND-OVER

1. Visits to the Ecclesiastical Authorities

Mgr. Seitz led the two Salesians to pay their homage to Mgr. Trinh Nhu Khue, Bishop of Hà Nội (later a Cardinal). The Hà Nội Bishop first told them: "You have come to the abandoned orphans who are in danger, please promise never to abandon them¹... Do not do as some others who have then changed their minds and received only well-off children." Then he gave his approval for the Salesians to canonically establish the Salesian house in Hà Nội, at the Thai Ha Ap, Hoan Long District. On the next day he wrote to the Holy See in accordance with the formalities. He also told them he would hand them all the relevant documents and the property, as well as the printing shop and bookstore if they had more staff. Fr. Majcen happily talked about the Salesian works in Hong Kong. Mgr. Khue also introduced them to his secretary, Fr. Mai (who later became Bishop of Buonmethuot) and to Fr. Cǎn, the parish priest of Hà Nội Cathedral, who would later succeed Mgr. Khue as Bishop of Hà Nội and become a Cardinal too. From that day, Fr. Majcen often went to see the Bishop to discuss on his programming as well as to spend summer holidays with him.

A second visit was to Fr. Pancolet, Provincial of the MEP. The MEP working for the Orphanage had legal ownership of all the Orphanage's property, and they would hand it over to us Salesians within these months. Their Provincial also promised to

¹ They kept their promise. In fact, in 1954, they courageously took them to the South, helped them settle and have a secure life.

hand over to us all the money they had received from the French government or from the papal “influzza”² or from the war indemnities sources. It was from these financial resources that the Salesians were able to solve financial problems for at least one year. The Provincial promised to support us and he also invited both of us to have our meals together with the MEP Fathers. He moreover asked the MEP Fathers to help the Orphanage.

On another occasion, the Salesian Fathers went to visit the Lasalle Brothers. As early as in the beginning of the 20th century, the Lasalle Brothers had had their schools in all principal cities and dioceses in Vietnam. A great number of priests and intellectuals had been educated in the secondary schools of the Lasalle Brothers. Mgr. Seitz at a party introduced the Salesians and admired the Salesians for their courage to come here in such a difficult situation. He also admired the great heart of Fr. Braga in sending the Salesians to the poorest children as Don Bosco wanted. Mgr. Seitz continued: “Dear (Lasalle) Brothers, you have abandoned ‘your Founder’, while the Salesians still stayed with Don Bosco even in the most difficult situation! You Salesians, do you promise me that?” On the other hand, Mgr. Seitz thanked the Lasalle Brothers for admitting a number of the Orphanage’s pupils as externs at their secondary schools. It is worth mentioning that some pupils of Fr. Majcen in the school year 1952-54 who later were very successful in their career—including Dr. Tường, Dr. Quát, Dr. Long and some other teachers—had been studying at the Lasalle schools. We Salesians also are grateful to the Lasalle Brothers because their Provincial helped us in the South when he allowed their members to be (nominally) principal of our Salesian School in South Vietnam while we wait to have Vietnamese qualified Salesians for this position, the first of whom was Fr. Isidore Le Huong.

² “influzza”: the meaning is not clear.

Another visit was to the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres. The nuns also had an orphanage similar to ours for the care of orphan girls. Two years after the war ended, in 1954, they also admitted our kindergarten children in their orphanage. Fr. Majcen often came to their hospital to treat his illnesses due to the terrible climate of Hanoi. They took care of him with all their goodness in their hospital.

Another significant visit was to the St. Sulpice Fathers who ran the Grand Seminary. The Seminary’s Director, Fr. Gastin, had been a friend of Fr. Mario in Beijing and the professor Fr. Sutz had once been working in Kunming. Mgr. Seitz took this opportunity to thank them for the liturgical services of their Seminarians in the Cathedral and also in the church of St. Theresa of the Boys Town. Fr. Majcen also asked them to continue their liturgical services as well as their catechism teaching and assistance to our children, and be trainers to our children especially during summer holidays. Both of us, Giacomino and Majcen, were unable to do undertake because we could not speak Vietnamese yet. Fr. Giacomino found it very difficult because he learned an Asian language for the first time. Fr. Majcen, though he could speak Cantonese and write mandarin and that was an advantage, but Vietnamese tones are very different from the mandarin tones and Vietnamese pronunciation is also different, so he had to make a great effort too.

This visit made me happily remember Don Bosco’s visit to the St. Sulpice Fathers in Paris in around 1884. Don Bosco was invited, but he came late. The St. Sulpice Fathers were very punctual and they came to lunch in time, and it was for the first time their Superior made an exception to delay the lunch. During lunch, a theology student made a speech saying: “Don Bosco has done miracles to resurrect the dead, to cure the sick, but today he has done the greatest miracle to delay the meal for some time.” A long applause burst out, and in our visit today, the episode was also

The beginning of reforms

Through the discussions on the new staff, Fr. Mario, provincial of the China-Vietnam Province, decided to make a change in the current educational system. The problem consisted in the utopian system that had been applied so far. But changes could not be made instantaneously. When the number of Salesians increased, the confreres assisted the families with the collaboration of the big seminarians from Bùi Chu Seminary. In addition there were Fr. Phong and teacher Trần as general supervisors. That was the first step. The second, more important and to be made immediately, was to separate the children into families according to their ages: bigger, medium, and smaller ones. Bigger and smaller children living together might create the following inconveniences: the smaller children had to serve the bigger ones and worse still, there might exist dangers in morality. Fr. Majcen had to make this separation after such a case was detected. He summoned all the children, and declared to separate them by their ages. Teacher Trần then explained in Vietnamese on the changes that had been decided, and read the list, setting up new families. The smaller and medium boys were very happy, the bigger one on the contrary were discontented and protested. Fr. Majcen was ready to respond, since this is a matter of life or death. He said loudly: "This is the superiors' decision and it cannot be changed. Who wants to stay, stay, who doesn't, leave!" Thus the discontented boys had to obey and adjust. Some of them had recourse to Fr. Faugère who still longed for the old system. They begged him to find some jobs outside for them and he conceded. On the other hand, the smaller children shouted in happiness and brought their belongings to their new place as instructed by Teacher Trần. Teacher Trần was a wise and considerate man who knew to arrange things well. This was a most decisive and important day for us in general, and in particular for Fr. Majcen, who was responsible for the works. That evening, after the night

talk with the persons concerned in order to make it easy for the Salesians to get the permits. He talked with governor Bình in particular. The governor made big promises without achieving anything. Fortunately enough, his successor, governor Nguyễn Hữu Trí, after reviewing all the procedures, was convinced of the usefulness of the works as well as the necessity for the Salesians to have a favorable status to carry out their works. He made a visit to the Boys Town and felt very interested. He summoned Fr. Majcen to inquire about the Salesian Congregation, especially about the nationality of the Salesians. Fr. Majcen easily explained the international character of the Congregation, assuring him moreover that the Salesian missionaries, after coming to a place, would not only establish the works there but also prepare the local members to continue these works. He explained this by giving an example from Slovenia, his own country, where the Salesian Congregation was established by the Italian Salesians, then was continued by the Hungarian and Polish Salesians, and now it is completely Slovenian under the direction of Slovenian Superiors. The governor was very pleased with this story, because he was a real patriotic, even though as a government official he must depend on the French. Consequently he overcame a great deal of difficulties to eventually approve the Salesian works by a decree promulgated on December 19 1952, a memorable day!⁶ The governor praised Mgr. Seitz's work, congratulated the Salesians and encouraged the children to exercise themselves. This was the permit that in principle the foreigners working in Vietnam could only obtain after 10 years' residence in Vietnam.

This result marked the last imprint of Mgr. Seitz's efforts to get the French approval for the Salesians to become a legal (moral)

⁶ Fr. Majcen emphasized this: "Questa soluzione è stata fatta il 19 XII 1952 di memoranda memoria. Scrivo anche questo anche per i nostril confratelli future prediletti".

entity working for the good of the public, with all the rights to work and develop Don Bosco's Works.⁷ Perhaps Fr. Mario and Fr. Giacomino had not realized yet the importance of this document that was obtained with so much difficulty for the non-French Salesians or purely Vietnamese Salesians. With this legal entity for public good, we were able to organize tombolas and receive pensions. This permit was valid until Ngô Đình Diệm's regime. President Ngô Đình Diệm later also approved a similar document on the base of the previous one. And I want also to mention here the efforts of Fr. Ty later to get permit from the Communists for the Salesians to work in Vietnam. Vietnam is not China; Vietnam government in principle recognize the Catholic Church.

"I'm sure it is not exact"

In order to continue receiving pensions from the Social Department, annual financial reports must be submitted. In fact the reports were presented, but Mrs. Dubois used to spend very lavishly while the good economer Fr. Vacher Vuong made the balance reports in a rather easy way. The Social Department Director asked Fr. Majcen: "Can you be sure these expenses are correct?" "I'm sure it is not exact", answered Fr. Majcen sincerely, and he explained to him that with only three months in office he was unable to take full control of the administration. The Director laughed, and from then on he became a close friend of Fr. Majcen until the end of 1974.

Progress in spiritual life

All of us were convinced that our works were always in difficult conditions and we had to rely entirely on "Our help comes

⁷ "Ente Morale di UTILITA PUBLICA con tutti diritti di lavorare e sviluppare Opere di Don Bosco."

SEPTEMBER 1953

Fr. Cuisset (Cha Qui)

On September 7 1953, eve of the Nativity of Our Virgin Mary, we received a new Salesian priest, Fr. Pierre Cuisset. He is a French Salesian, thin and tall, with a beautiful beard and very young. When he was a cleric, he worked in Beijing with Fr. Mario Acquistapace, the person who came to China in Don Bosco's dream. I am writing these lines on exactly the 100th anniversary (1886-1986) of Don Bosco's dream that occurred in April 1886 and that was about the Salesian expansion from China to as far as India. Fr. Cuisset came to Vietnam to become an economer. He knew mandarin and of course French was his mother tongue. His ideal was to follow Mgr. Seitz's example in the service of the poor children, with a zeal always full of initiatives.

Fr. Cuisset took charge of the lottery ticket sale in Sài Gòn, Nha Trang and Đà Lat. In Sài Gòn, his acquaintance includes Fr. Seminel at the Cathedral, a great friend of Fr. Dupont, an apostle of the young, and who would also become Fr. Cuisset's friend.

But the first close friend he won was Mrs. Carré, a young widow whose husband had just died suddenly. Mrs. Carré would sell us a large plot of land in Thủ Đức at a extremely low nominal price to set up another Salesian work in this area. Mrs. Carré had a French father and a Vietnamese mother. It was here that would begin the Salesian works in Vietnam in 1954-56.

We looked with hopeful eyes to Fr. Cuisse, who was a man more economical than anyone else and who loved the Salesian poverty. Even Fr. Mario and Mgr. Seitz were very hopeful of a better change for the financial matters that had been to wasteful so far.

sign of the Cross, recited the act of contrition then drove at all speed while saying short prayers to pray to Mary Help of Christians. But they could not help trembling while on this very bad and 4 km long road. The next day, in fact, Fr. Vacher got news that on that same day a military car carrying 40 soldiers had been ambushed and all of them had been killed. Evidently the Vietminh had spared the two priests but they had not spared the soldiers... How many soldiers had been killed that way! What we could do was just to pray for the protection of Mary Help of Christians.

Fr. Faugère also went to sell tickets to the French banks, the merchants and other industries. Very often we had to wait in the burning heat of the day... we were continuously asked why we sold the tickets and then received their contemptuous and even insulting acts. In spite of our insistence, they often dismissed us as dogs! Life is not all roses.

Fr. Giacomino's goodnight talks

Our Rector, Fr. Giacomino, from time to time came from Bùi Chu back to the Boys Town. He gave pre-written goodnight talks in Vietnamese to the boys. He prepared it very carefully, but his voice was quivery because he found difficulty with the complex 6 tones Vietnamese. I understood what he said because I was told the meaning in Italian in advance, but for the others, I only heard intermittent soft laughs and murmurs among the naughty boys. Anyway, I had to admire his bravery. Fr. Generoso, on the other hand, was very good at his Vietnamese in his noble Brazilian accent. And Fr. Bohnen was a smart guy who had a true gift for languages, and in addition being taught by the Lasalle students, he was marvelous with his Vietnamese.

from the Lord" and on Mary Help of Christians who did everything. With his great zeal, Fr. Giacomino when working at Thái Hà Ấp introduced some types of Salesian practices including the novena of the Immaculate Conception in preparation for Christmas, and the daily reciting of the Rosary, as well as the monthly celebration of Mary Help of Christians on every 24th day of the month, and the more frequent confession. The school also took all possible opportunities to promote the attendance of the Mass, by attendance first on every Sunday then daily. This renovation did not please everybody, and some priests even considered it as too much. Of course they were not against the practices of piety, they were only afraid of introducing a pious system of a school style. Nevertheless the renovation helped to make Christmas celebrations become more fervent and the *Te Deum* was sung more enthusiastically at the end of the year.

Fr. Giacomino Minh in Bùi Chu

Fr. Giacomino Minh started learning Vietnamese in Ba Thá. On the Tết (February 1953), with the permission of Ha Noi Bishop, he accepted Mgr. Chi's invitation to come to Bui Chu to continue his Vietnamese studies. Bùi Chu was an important diocese for many fervent Christians, with a beautiful church and a seminary full of seminarians. The purpose of Mgr. Chi's invitation was that Fr. Giacomino could go to Bui Chu and establish a Salesian work there. This might be a good idea, but the disturbing political situation prevented the development of this idea.

The Director of the Holy Infancy Society⁸ visited Fr. Majcen

Mgr. Seitz invited the Director of the Holy Infancy Society that had their office in Paris (now in Rome) to visit the Orphanage.

⁸ Direttore della Santa Infanzia.

Mgr. Seitz had previously written to this Society an application for aids with an annual financial report attached, and the Orphanage's needs, and explained that the Salesians would come to take over the Orphanage. The Director promise to help because he knew the works of the Salesians of Don Bosco. In particular he was interested in the children of the kindergarten and the small orphans by the war, who were the majority of the Orphanage's children. I have received this Society's aids for the orphans every year until 1974.

One intervention leading to another

Mgr. Seitz wanted to make a family of both big and small boys living together. This was a good idea in its presentation, but I noticed that this kind of family was in reality not the kind of natural families with a father and a mother, but a mixed family with big and small boys sleeping in the same dormitory, and some of them had been victims of evil, and of abuses from the bigger ones, not only by obliging the smaller ones to serve them, but also by making the smaller ones victims of immoral acts. When he noticed an immoral case happened, Fr. Majcen ordered Fr. Faugère and assistant Trần to investigate and eventually dismiss the abuser. This intervention encouraged Fr. Majcen to find other better arrangements and applied them after consultation with the Provincial.

A visit to Sơn Tây city

Ba Vì is a big mountain range of soil and limestone covering an area of 5,000 hectares including three districts Ba Vì (Hà Nội), Lương Sơn and Kỳ Sơn (Hoà Bình), about 60 kilometers from Hà Nội.

A semi-public lottery

The semi-public lottery officially started with the governor Trí granting us permission to sell the tickets. It was important that the tickets sold could bring us the money we needed for at least one year. Governor Trí promised oblige all civil servants to buy the tickets. General Cogny ordered and promised that we could sell tickets to the soldiers in their camps. This was what Fr. Majcen and Fr. Faugère did. And the MEP Fathers also helped to sell the tickets at the request of Mgr. Seitz to the faithful in parishes. Knowing Chinese, Fr. Majcen sold tickets to the Chinese merchants in Hải Phòng and other places. Fr. Cuisset took charge of the sales to French people in the South. Mrs. Dubois distributed the tickets to the boys to sell in the streets with a 10% commission. This was really a big business and almost extraordinary for us Salesians... and thanks to this, we could contact the people and spread the idea that Don Bosco was an apostle of the poor, abandoned and homeless children. This was so onerous a task that I would never venture to undertake it for a second time... but everybody knew that this was only in behalf of the poor children, and so much money had come into the hands of Mrs. Dubois without being recorded. The money was handed to Fr. Vacher for him to pay all the constructions and salaries to the workers who were innumerable in our Boys Town.

A narrow escape

The tickets selling threw all the world in activity. One day, Fr. Majcen and Fr. Faugère went together to sell the tickets at a military camp near the road midway Hà Nội – Hải Phòng. Seeing them, the commander colonel was astonished because they had come alive. Then he explained that this road was very dangerous because of the ambushes in the rice fields that often blew up the cars in traffic. Our two Fathers told him they only came to send tickets quickly then go back. On their way back, they made the

CHAPTER 14: AUG – SEP-DEC 1953 IN HA NOI

AUGUST 1953

The Workshop Heads

We had the need and also the desire to have the heads for the workshops. But it remained a mere promise for months, because in those big workshops, the children actually did not learn anything. Although Fr. Vacher had several advisers and skilled artisans, they were not true craft teachers... Some learned a trade with some Catholics in the neighborhood, others at the Renault garage. A few boys went to the Lasalle Brothers' secondary school. Realizing that our Salesians could not well prepare the boys for their lives, Mgr. Seitz managed to have some of them going to university. As a result, among the orphans, there were some who became doctors, such as Dr. Tường, Dr. Quát, and two other doctors,¹ and some also became teachers like teacher Long, some even became colonel.

We always emphasized that our Aberdeen School in Hong Kong would send mechanics teachers as we wanted. In fact, in November, Bro. Andrew Bragion (Thầy Báu)² came to us. Late, on the celebration of the 50th anniversary of Aberdeen School, I had the opportunity to thank the school for this gift. We also had a head for the sewing workshop who was a past pupil and who worked for us until 1975.³

¹ Fr. Majcen forgot their names.

² Bro. Bragion died in 1986.

³ Fr. Majcen said (after 1975) this man accused us Salesians to the revolutionaries (Communists) but perhaps this was not exact.





Ba Vì has several mounts, the most famous of which is Tân Viên (also called Ngọc Tân Sơn or Phượng Hoàng Sơn). Tân Viên is 1,281 m high, tapering near its top but spreading at its summit to form an umbrella (that was why it was called Tân [傘], meaning spreading). There is a Ha (Lower) Temple at its foot, a Trung (Medium) Temple in the middle, and a Thượng (Higher) Temple at its top dedicated to Sơn Tinh (Tân god). At the mountain foot is the Đà River, and an artificial lake called Suối Hai 7 km long and 4 km large with 14 islets that actually are small hills emerging from the water.

Fr. Majcen had for a long time taken notice of the badge on the childrens' shirts on which were printed the words: Christ the King City 1943-1953 with the Ba Vì (three-top mountain) image and a star on top, symbol of Our Lady of Ba Vì.

Fr. Faugère's jeep took us across a large beautiful field with small villages, stretches of bananas and coconut trees, with thatched houses scattered here and there. We stopped before Sơn Tây City, a city founded by King Minh Mạng whose persecutions killed a great number of our martyrs. I read on a stele names of innumerable men and women who had offered their lives for their

The Mass Servant group

Fr. Generoso Bogo all at once organized a group of Altar servers taken from among the best boys, including Joseph Thọ,¹⁰ John Ty,¹¹ Marc Huỳnh,¹² Joseph Mỹ who later was ordained priest and was a composer, Tôn,¹³ and a boy who later entered the Thủ Đức aspirante, originally son of an employee of the printing shop in Hà Nội.¹⁴ The diocesan cleric Bảo¹⁵ also came to Fr. Majcen and wanted to become a Salesian, but only later, after becoming a priest, has he become a Salesian.

We also had an interim Chapter of the Vietnamese Provincial Delegation in the presence of the Provincial, Fr. Mario, to start having some changes in the practices of piety according to Salesian usage such as preferably daily Mass, night prayer accompanied by goodnight talk. Fr. Phan and Teacher Trần, the assistant, helped to implement these practices. In addition, many boys agreed to recite daily Rosary... But the French priests thought these changes inappropriate and they had an argument with Fr. Majcen.

¹⁰ Later became a lay brother, originally a real "Garelli", orphan, vagabond.

¹¹ Later became the first Vietnamese Salesian Provincial after having been a Special Delegate of the Rector Major.

¹² Once provincial councillor and economer of Vietnam.

¹³ Once president of the Association of Past Pupils in USA.

¹⁴ Now a Salesian past pupil, living in USA.

¹⁵ Later became parish priest of Phước Thành, Đồng Nai diocese.

JULY 1953

Fr. Generoso Bogo (Cha Quang)

On July 4, 1953, Fr. Generoso Bogo arrived in Hà Nội. By his unique character and personality, he all at once got the sympathy of both the children and Superiors. Fr. Mario Acquistapace himself came to appoint him catechist to take care of spiritual matters. His outgoing, open character soon won everybody's heart, both of the teachers and the children. His French with an Brazilian accent made the Bishop, priests and the governor as well as other civil officials and the consulate staff very impressed. They were very enthusiastic when seeing the Salesian community staff increase day after day with confreres of various nationalities including Italian, Hollander, Yugoslavian, Brazilian, Argentine, and later French, who lived in Don Bosco's family spirit and who were working in a very difficult episode for the good of poor and orphan children.

The first Salesian aspirants

During the summer holidays, the first Salesian aspirants came to help the Salesians. The Bùi Chu Seminary's Director himself introduced to Fr. Majcen the new aspirants Lê Hướng,⁵ Tiệm,⁶ Sủ, and Phúc.⁷ Later also came others: Hoan,⁸ Joseph Hiên,⁹ and Thành (who later entered the Salesian Province of Paris under the new name Đường).

⁵ Now parish priest in a parish of Ban Mê Thuột diocese.

⁶ Later became parish priest of Thanh Bình, Đà Lạt diocese, and now has become bishop of Bùi Chu diocese.

⁷ Sủ and Phúc were ordained priests but now have been secularized.

⁸ The lay brother Hoan, once provincial councillor.

⁹ Fr. Joseph Đinh Xuân Hiên SDB, parish priest of Đức Huy, Đồng Nai diocese.

faith. With a sense of devotion I went with Fr. Faugère to a grassland nearby, where the Vietnamese martyrs had shed their blood. I knelt down, praying the Lord to give me strength and faith. We looked up to the mountain where the Vietminh currently had their camps, and we fancied that it was there the Salesian works in Vietnam had begun. Fr. Faugère continued explaining that there had been a church, dormitories and small villas, all had been built by Mgr. Seitz but had then been destroyed by French bombings. Mgr. Seitz repeatedly told us that we would receive 1 million dong (a very big sum) for indemnities. Walking along the plot, I noticed a location called Thanh, where there had been a Japanese airbase wherefrom they sent their aircrafts to bomb Kunming. There were here buildings with one-meter roofs to shelter the aircrafts. A little farther, I saw the ruins of a village that had entirely been rased to the ground by bombing, except a lonely church of Son Tay that still stood superbly like a Cathedral! There was nearby a parish with a French parish priest who was loved so much by the Vietnamese, because he used to give medicines to their sick. Christ's charity does not discriminate this side or that side: it is only concerned with those members of Christ who suffer. It was from here, amid the ruins of war, that the Christ the King City had gathered the children of the victims of destructive wars, including Bro. Tho, now a Salesian lay brother, who had been abandoned here after his parents were killed, together with some other boys who worked as shoepolishers on the streets of Hà Nội for a living.

Feasts of St. Francis of Sales and St. John Bosco

On the feast of Don Bosco, Mgr. Khuê came to celebrate the solemn Mass. The children cleaned the places, decorated the houses with flags and banners. They were exhorted to clean their hearts by making confession. On feastdays, every child was given a new suit, a pair of shoes and a hat.

On Têt holidays, the children did not go to school. They enjoyed catching fishes, eels or turtles to improve their meals. Since a cease-fire was declared by both French and Vietnamese governments, we had a few calm days without gunfire or airplane's roaring during night. On Têt days, Fr. Faugère Vuong got some money from government officials or benefactors who came to wish him Happy Vietnamese New Year. Mrs. Dubois drove her truck to the military camps to take everything she could be given and brought back to the children, which made them very happy.

Mgr. Seitz also recommended Fr. Majcen to give the children on Christmas and Têt a gift in cash called "lì xì" so that they would not steal, because on these occasions they felt the need of using money. And so Fr. Giacomo had the opportunity to go among the children to distribute small envelops of "lì xì". By now Fr. Giacomo had been able to say a few Vietnamese sentences he had learned in Ba Thá. On these occasions, we needed a 'mountain of money' because we had very many children, not only the actual pupils but also the past pupils who came back to visit their dear Orphanage. Fr. Phan, the catechist, also published the Trúc Lâm Bulletin, a magazine that all the children liked very much because on that bulletin they could read articles written by the past pupils and the news on the Orphanage.

Charity fairs

On their visit to wish Happy Têt to the governor, Fr. Majcen and Fr. Faugère presented to the governor the Orphanage's needs. The governor therefore had the initiative to open a charity fair to help. In front of a big pagoda not very far from the City, there was a large empty space called the historic Đống Đa hill, and rows of kiosks were set up there. Everybody went there to enjoy themselves. On this occasion, the children also celebrated the feast of Hai Bà Trưng, the two sisters who had killed themselves for

JUNE 1953

Salesian literature

To welcome the Salesians, Mgr. Piquet, bishop of Nha Trang, ordered to reprint the booklet on Don Bosco of Fr. Luke Lý, to make Don Bosco's Sons known to the people. For his part, Mgr. Thuc, bishop of Hué, had his seminarians publish the booklets on Dominic Savio, on the Preventive System, on the Dreams of Don Bosco, and other writings on the Salesians.⁴

The Lottery

According to the project of Governor Trí, a Caodaist, Fr. Majcen asked for permission to open a semi-public lottery to sell tickets nationwide, starting from June 15 to draw on Christmas day. Before it was permitted, Fr. Majcen had to officially present the prizes. Therefore we agreed with Fr. Vacher, the economer, and Fr. Faugère on the prizes including 100 wardrobes made by our carpenter's shop, 10 sewing machines bought at low price but of good quality, and Fr. Majcen bought from Fr. Coerezza about 100 illustrated catechism booklets in French. The three top prizes were three jeeps. The painter Đại drew the pictures for the tickets to be printed.

Looking for jobs for young worker

Another task was going here and there looking for workplace for the young workers. Besides the Orphanage was always the place to receive them when they were sick, during holidays or in their weddings, so that they could come back as to their parents' house. Fr. Majcen was always willing to follow this system in the role of a father of the orphans, in imitation of Mgr. Seitz.

⁴ See MPI, p. 76.

baptized with her Christian name Mary, and was called Stella Maria (Mai Hoa in Vietnamese).³

Looking for places of work for his pupils

The end of the school year approaching, Fr. Majcen was looking for places of work for his pupils because on completion of their studies, they had to leave the Orphanage. This was a very important task for Fr. Majcen who took the role of the family head for his orphan children. They often came back to this family, especially on the Tét, as well as when they were sick or got married.

The Lottery

Another task in which Fr. Majcen was very busy in June and in the following months was the lotterie drawing suggested by Governor Nguyễn Hữu Trí. In order to open a lottery, one needs to present the prizes or at least give a list of prizes. They were many: 3 jeeps, 100 wooden wardrobes made by our carpenter's shop, 30 sewing machines, some hundreds of the illustrated catechism booklets published in French by the Salesian Catechetical Center in Hong Kong... After having got the permission, we had to proceed with the selling of tickets on the 15 each month. The drawing date was Christmas. All this required the timely printing of the tickets, finding people for advertising and selling tickets.

³ Fr. Majcen called her Princess Stella Maria: Mary the Star. The princess was founder of the convent of Immaculate Conception and was its Superior until her death (see *A History of the Catholic Church of Bùi Đức Sinh*).

Vietnam's independence in the same time when Jesus was still on this earth. The governor also lent his legionnaires clothed in red and leading the elephants and horses to and fro, making the children very happy with these animals. And the big boys also sold tombola tickets under the supervision of Mrs. Dubois. But the financial benefits of the fairs eventually turned out to be zero. The reason was that we did not control the organization, leading to a complete disorder and consequently a great waste of money. This was a real lesson for Fr. Majcen and the Salesians who always valued exactitude and discipline.

A holiday tour with the Bishop

Mgr. Khuê—who later became a cardinal—wanted to know Fr. Majcen and the Salesians better in their interest in the Vietnamese youth and its problems, especially in North Vietnam. He therefore invited Fr. Majcen to enjoy a tour at Hạ Long Bay with him. They went to Hải Phòng by car then got onboard a small boat to Hạ Long, one among the wonders of the world with thousands of islets, and a flora and fauna ecology. At noon we came to Cẩm Phả port and passed by Cẩm Phả coal mine with open coal reserves of first class in the world. We were provided with a beautiful guest house to rest, swim and walk along the coasts. After swimming for a while, the two had a walk while talking with one another. The Bishop proposed to Fr. Majcen to take over the Catholic printing house. Fr. Majcen promised to present this offer to the Provincial, but he also expressed his concern for lack of personnel. The Bishop also wanted to invite the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians to come to work in Vietnam and to entrust them with the running of the Catholic Bookstore as well as the care of poor and orphan girls. Fr. Majcen agreed to write a letter to the FMA Provincial whom he knew well in Hong Kong. This was the first time we asked for the FMA to come to Vietnam because there were many vocations here. But the FMA Provincial later answered

she could not accept the offer at the moment while the war was at its peak. Only until 1961 have the FMA come to work in Vietnam. After his holiday tour with the Bishop, Fr. Majcen always kept a good memory of this simple and saintly bishop. Later on, when the Bishop was created a Cardinal, Fr. Majcen wrote to congratulate him. The Bishop wrote an answer letter, with his memories of the time they worked together in friendship and mutual trust.

I will never forget you, dear little Joseph!

Fr. Majcen narrated: I went to visit a good boy at hospital. I remember having talked with him for a long time while he was in the infirmary in our house under the benevolent care of Fr. Faugère. This was a good, pious boy who had lost both of his parents in a cruel battle and was left alone with a very bad health because of lack of food and medicine for a long time. Before his going to hospital, I gave him some money to buy his necessities. This time he wanted to bid farewell to me, thanking me for everything. He said: "I've made a confession. Please offer me a Mass after I die." Then he searched in his shirt pocket and took out some paper, handed it to me and said: "This is the money you have given me on my feastday, please take it and offer a Mass for me..." and he asked me to bless him with the blessing of Mary Help of Christians, without forgetting to recommend me to pray for him. We both cried. I said: "I will never forget you." Then one morning, the Superior of the Sisters at the hospital phoned me and announced me that the good boy had returned to our Heavenly Father's house. I said a Mass for him... With a fatherly heart, I can

never forget my little son, and I am convinced that praying for him is in fact praying for the vocations, because he himself had wanted to become a Salesian religious.

We prepared for his burial, and not only did we give him a tombstone, we actually looked for a decent cemetery for the

A visit to Bùi Chu Diocese

Fr. Mario Acquistapace came on the feast of Mary Help of Christians. Fr. Majcen accompanied him to Bùi Chu to see Fr. Giacomo who was studying Vietnamese. They made a visit to the Redemptorists and to the Brothers Hospitallers of St. John of God. Here Don Bosco was already known by many through the small story of Don Bosco written by Fr. Luke Lý. They prayed fervently before the tombs of the martyrs bishops and priests of Vietnam in the Cathedral built by the French missionaries. They were very impressed by the ceremony "Dâng hoa" (flower offering) beautifully sung by the girls in honor of Our Lady.

In a great hall, they attended a performance that was interrupted from time to time by gunfire nearby from the communist attack that was soon driven back.

It was here that they had contact with the first Salesian candidates, including the clerics Isidore Lê Huống, Joseph Đinh Xuân Hiên (who later became vice provincial), Phúc and Sứ² ... During the performance there was a communist attack with machine guns but it was pushed back. We then went with the Belgian Fathers to the Grand Seminary. We could never forget the great devotion which the simple faithful here had for the Virgin Mary.

On the way back home, their small airplane stopped for two hours in the burning heat at the airport of Nam Định where Fr. Dupont was killed and buried not far away. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of new Christians. I thought of princess Chiêm, the elder sister of king Lê Thé Tông in Nam Định, who was

² The two latter were later ordained but has now been secularized.

In Hà Nội, May 1953

This was the Mary Jubilee Year proposed by Vietnamese Bishops.

Who would save us from this bloody war with so many deaths and sufferings, if it were not the Virgin Mary, our Mother? Our children were well prepared by the Redemptorist Fathers and by the demonstrations of the great devotion to Our Lady in the neighboring churches.

Every Saturday, all the roads were full of people going to church to pray, make confession, do Eucharistic adoration. Our Lady also opened a path in our children's hearts at Thái Hà Áp. In his frequent visit to our house, the Provincial, Fr. Mario Acquistapace, a great apostle of Mary, brought and distributed holy medals, images and booklets in French. He also gave the blessing of Mary Help of Christians. The good Fr. Phan prepared the children for baptism. This great devotion was blessed by the Virgin Mary by a great grace: She prepared for the Salesians during this month the door open to them in their apostolate.

Mary's gift was the recognition act of the Congregation's legal status

Our Mother brought us an act so much expected: the recognition of the legal entity of the Congregation for the service of public good, which would also be useful later in South Vietnam where we could receive government aids for the children, have right to buy and sell properties, and open schools. However, at a later date, the South Vietnam required us to get a new agreement which the Vice-rector Major and Fr. Cuisset eventually got probably in 1963, two weeks before President Ngô Đình Diệm was killed.

children who died of disease or of war, who were not few in North Vietnam at that time. These deaths were also opportunities for other children to recite the Rosary daily, to make the monthly exercise of happy death as Don Bosco taught, together with an examination of conscience, making confession with the catechist Fr. Phan, and say the prayer for a happy death in community, with a resolution to conversion. This was the key for good moral conduct as Don Bosco taught.

**CHAPTER 13: THE ORPHANAGE'S PROGRESS
IN MARCH 1953**

In the Orphanage, I worked alone with Fr. Faugère. Fr. Mario also visited us. He was looking for new Salesian comers to organize the new school term according to the Salesian direction.

Mgr. Seitz also visited us on the occasion of his consultation meeting with the Nuncio, and he brought us various aids. Although the situation was growing more and more difficult, the Salesians were always optimistic.

Spiritual help from the Redemptorists

The Redemptorist Fathers of Canadian and Vietnamese nationality in particular were an important spiritual force in North Vietnam. Don Bosco had himself drawn on his spirituality and popular devotion from the Redemptorist Founder, St. Alphonsus Liguori. On the occasion of Mgr. Seitz's visit, the Redemptorist Fathers invited him, me, Fr. Faugère and the catechist Fr. Phan for a lunch in their large Redemptorist community. Mgr. Seitz thanked the Redemptorists for their great help to the Orphanage, while I asked them to preach the retreat to our children who also desired a

life transformation under the guidance of the Redemptorists. After lunch, with his glass of champagne in hand and his addictive tobacco pipe on his lips, Mgr. Seitz looked into my eyes and gently said to me: "Dear Majcen, you Salesians with your Mary Help of Christians have lost the battle to win the first spiritual position, because in all the families and churches, everywhere people are very devoted to Mary of Perpetual Help." At this, all the eyes turned toward me as if they wanted to hear my reply in a French mixed with Yugoslavian... I calmly said that we did not lose the battle, because Mary Help of Christians was also Mother of the Church and of all of us Christians, and also the refuge of sinners... I was not even aware how many titles of Mary in the litany that I was listing, and She was the same as Mary of Perpetual Help of the Redemptorists...

A retreat for a spiritual renovation of our children

The Superiors decided to invite the spiritual experts of the Redemptorists to help our children, but they also wanted that the children themselves take initiatives in this matter. Most important was the preparation for them to make a good confession, with firm resolutions to conversion from their wandering lives. Due to my poor Vietnamese language, I could not help much, but Fr. Phan helped a great deal by hearing confession and giving exhortations to them, together with other Vietnamese priests who knew the hearts of Vietnamese children very well. This was also a lesson for myself, so that when the hour came, Christ and Don Bosco would be inscribed in the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people.

The retreat was so successful that after it finished, a confessor brought to Father Rector a trunk of stolen things returned by the boys after their confession, of course with their anonymity as the confessional secret required. The stolen things were of any kinds,

started constructing the Hồ Chí Minh trail that would lead to the liberation of the South.

However, our Salesians in the North at the beginning of 1953 were not aware of the extremely serious situation, and they continued developing the works of the Orphanage tranquilly.

Following the instructions of the Health Department, Fr. Vacher set up a filter system to give pure drinking water to the children to prevent diseases. Moreover, the new prefect of studies, Fr. Bohnen, thought of a playground for the children, because a Salesian house could not be conceived without a playground. And he prepared a playground in front of the pagoda, on the empty plot given by Mayor Phúc. We moreover made an earth bridge across the fish ponds and filled up a rice field for a second playground. The children eagerly helped to make the playground. Mayor Phúc also allowed to have cars transporting debris from Hà Đông (taken from the destructions by bombings). He even supplied the balls, taught the game rules and our children quickly accommodated themselves with the football game.

Mrs. Nixon's visit

In April, there was at the Boys Town a visit of Mrs. Nixon, escorted by a French general. The welcome was very solemn. Fr. Bohnen made an eloquent speech, with many eulogies and congratulations but no money was given. On the other hand, Mgr. Seitz handed to Fr. Majcen 1 million dong for war indemnity to our former Orphanage in Ba Vì. When giving the money, Mgr. Seitz also recommended us to use the money thrifitly because it was got with so much difficulty, but in fact Mrs. Dubois and Fr. Vacher spent it wastefully. Therefore we wished to have soon a Salesian economer who could manage the money more economically, but we had to wait in patience. As long as the money was not in our hands, we could not expect a reasonable management.

to protect themselves from tigers, elephants and snakes, and at night they lighted fire to warm up. Most of them support the French, others lived independently. The Vietminh made frequent invasions into their areas, occupied their places or hid themselves in natural caves, concealed their ammunitions, their hospitals and their camps. From there they launched attacks under the supreme leadership of Ho Chi Minh and general Võ Nguyên Giáp. They took the poppy planted there and sold them to buy weapons and ammunitions from the French. The local tribes and part of the Thais, the Black Thais in particular, had to flee in caravans to Ha Noi together with their families. Consequently our Orphanage began to have new neighbors. The Thai women dressed themselves very smart and decently. Their chieftain spoke French very well. The Thais included Red, Black, White Thais, based on the colors of their women's clothes. It was certain that these Thais were similar to the Thais in Thailand. Because of the consequences of these flights, the governor summoned Fr. Majcen and told him that the multitude of the refugees in the city obliged him to reduce the pensions granted to the Orphanage, but he said he would find other ways to help him.

The Orphanage's progress

In this changing situation of the country, preparations for war grew more and more intense on Điện Biên Phủ plateau, also called the plateau of ancient vases marking the ages old culture of the Vietnamese people. It was here that the fate of the Vietnamese people would be decided, a fact that we must know. It was here that began the protracted war, and it was the place that underwent innumerable bombing and gunfire, where the French were defeated and the Vietnam war ended. To prepare for what would come after the French defeat at Điện Biên Phủ on May 6 1954, the Vietminh

including the sacred objects, even the relics of the martyrs, their ancestors.

Later on, when Fr. Mario Acquistapace heard of this incident, he collected the body parts of the Vietnamese martyrs to make memorial relics of the holy martyrs in Vietnam. It was Fr. Mario's merit to have instilled the devotion to the Vietnamese Martyrs in the hearts of Vietnamese Salesian pupils. We know that now¹ in Macao, many relics of Vietnamese martyrs are still kept.

A visit to the church of Mary Queen of the Vietnamese Martyrs

Fr. Faugère took me on a visit to the church of the martyr Venard in Hà Nội, exactly on the same day in commemoration of this martyr during Lent season (today the feast of St. Venard is on February 2). He showed me the cage in which St. Father Theophane Venard was locked waiting for his execution decreed by the Hue court. The saint was beheaded here, his head was thrown into the river, but in the morning his head brightened and a faithful noticing it secretly took it up and it was later brought to Paris. St. Thérèse de l'Enfant Jésus herself affirmed that the saint was her favorite saint who prompted her to undergo a martyrdom without bloodshed, which was highlighted as a spirituality by Pope John Paul II when he canonized Bishop Versiglia. St. Theresa entered the novitiate in 1888.

Two remarkable arrivals

It was during those days that arrived to the Orphanage the decree for the canonical erection of Hà Nội religious house, approved by the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes and was signed by the Rector Major Ziggotti on March

¹ "now": in 1986, when Fr. Majcen wrote this.

14 1953. And unexpectedly on March 20 1953, a Hollander Salesian, Fr. Bohnen arrived to Hà Nội. He spoke French, English and several other languages fluently, and started to learn Vietnamese. He was a smart prefect of studies and was respected by everybody. As usual, a party was held for the Orphanage's children and the staff, to introduce him and to give him information on what he could do for his children, the victims of war.

Other events

Christ the King City was situated near a French military airport. Aircrafts carrying bombs kept hovering over our roofs before landing at the airport. On the night bombings, almost all were suddenly awakened by these aircrafts. I felt very nervous and could not sleep.

I usually went to watch for the Salesian's dormitory. As for the infirmary where the sick children were taken care of, a big boy was studying to become a nurse to help the sick boys and to give them medicines after consultation with Fr. Faugère. In other more serious cases, we called for doctors or sent the sick to hospital. On the average, the Orphanage had about 20 sick boys per day. As vice-rector of the Orphanage, I also had to adjust for the recidivist sicknesses or for those who had minor illnesses to give them something to do to avoid idleness.

A contract renewal for the Kindergarten

On the other hand, the contract between Fr. Seitz and the Lovers of the Cross Sisters on the kindergarten expired. With Fr. Faugère's help, Fr. Majcen could talk with their Superior to renew the contract, because the Salesians were not competent in the running of the kindergarten, and also because we could not find others who could help. And the Sisters responded positively. They

prepared for baptism to some smaller children while preparing the bigger ones to receive other sacraments. Later in the South, the smaller were entrusted to the St. Paul Sisters in Sài Gòn. Some of the boys eventually entered the Salesian aspirantate to become Salesians.

Holy Week

Holy Week was always very much appreciated by Vietnamese Catholic thanks to the “ngăm đứng”—a kind of standing meditation on the Passion—introduced by the first Spanish missionaries. By a spiritual retreat, our children had more fervor to celebrate the Holy Week. The old catechist Thống daily sang the Passion in Vietnamese that excited deep emotions in listeners. When in Rome, do as the Romans do... God's way is multifarious, fitting the Vietnamese disposition. A meditation of this kind certainly has greater impact on Vietnamese heart than the sermons. I must admit that Easter is a very important moment in religious life.

President Hồ organized the resistance

The famous President Hồ Chí Minh at first had attempted to seize power by democratic means. But in the free election in 1946 he only got success for himself, while his party did not get a majority of votes. He therefore decided to create a real army to conquer the whole of Vietnam.

Hồ's guerrilla war was organized in the forests and mountains to the north, near the Chinese borders of Mao

In these forests and mountains where the tribes lived, there were very few roads. The tribes included the Miao, Black Thai, White Thai, Tày Thành, Sre, Khô, Banar and Già Làng who had very particular ways of living. They lived behind bamboos fences

feared he would be fallen in the jungle and be victim to the tigers or even the communists. Eventually the craft arrived in Hải Phòng, landed safely although fire trucks with ejectors were also ready for any emergency. The pilot then said to Fr. Majcen: "Thanks for your rosaries to have helped us landed safely with the last fuel drop." The children had to wait for another plane from Hà Nội to continue their journey. After the first escape, now the children were onboard with their rosaries in hand. Finally we arrived in Ban Mê Thuột, very hungry. Knowing all that had happened with the boys, Mgr. Seitz comforted them by a sumptuous lunch.

We soon prepared for the following departures on July 5 and July 22.

"Go away, you scoundrels," said Fr. Generoso whenever he thought of the bad boys. Fr. Cuisset and Fr. Faugère looked for the boys' workplace at the Marine workshops where they could learn and become mechanic workers. Mr. Renault also received more of our boys in his workshops.

A period of confusion

No one got news with certainty from anywhere, and the news were often contradictory. This made all of us confused. When people heard that Vietnam would be divided, the number of refugees to the South increased. Even the priests who so far had helped the Orphanage also withdrew and the seminarians who had helped as assistants were also called back. The Sisters Lovers of the Cross also left the kindergarten by their Superiors' order, leaving the care of the children to some good volunteered girls of the place.

On July 9, Bro. Bragion Báu left for Hong Kong, taking along with him the Chronicle of Hà Nội House and other important documents. In Hong Kong, he reported to the Provincial on the situation.

prayer, Fr. Phan gave the goodnight talk, explaining to the children the importance of this decision.

In the next month, there was a common kitchen and so we got rid of the individual kitchen for each family that had resulted in considerable waste both in materials and time.

A boy eighteen times stealing but son of good parents

The French and Vietnamese press talked a lot about streets boys, Mafia-styled robbers among the youth. They broke public order and were dangerous for society. But what was the cause? Chiefly it was the war that had caused the deaths of their parents, leading to their abandonment and terrible consequences. One day a boy was brought to Fr. Majcen.

— How many times have you been in prison?

— 18, Father.

— So you are a professional thief?

— No, Father. I am from a good family, but I have lost my parents and everything, I am hungry but no one gives me anything... So I have to steal, but every time I steal I am caught and brought to jail...

I admitted this boy to the Orphanage, and now Fr. Faugère assured me that this boy was happy in Christ the King City. He became a good boy. He used to look at me lovingly, and until now I seem to see him:

— Can I become a Salesian, Father?

— Yes, you can. Try to live well and if you have a vocation, nothing is impossible...⁴

⁴ Who was this boy? Among the boys sponsored by Mgr. Seitz to follow their vocation in the South, there were the following: Ty, Huỳnh, Mỹ, Tôn, Khang,

OCTOBER 1953

The Month of Rosary

October 1953 marked the Salesian presence in Vietnam for one year.⁵

On the anniversary of the consecration of Bishop Paul Seitz, the feast of St. Theresa, Patron of the City and the beginning of the month of the Holy Rosary, the sons of Don Bosco began a month with special devotion... in particular with the reciting of the rosary and the attendance in the Eucharistic adoration. Fr. Mario sent the medals of Mary Help of Christians and the rosaries for everyone, while exhorting all the Salesians⁶ to promote the Salesian devotions.

On their part, the Bishop of Hà Nội and the Redemptorists around us also had their devotions somehow different from ours, most notable of which was the procession of the Virgin Mary to each family by turn, where all the Christians of the hamlet gathered to pray the rosary until late at night. These devotions actually encouraged us Salesians to honor the month of Rosary in our own way.

Our good rector Giacomino

He had returned to the Orphanage for some time and usually gave the goodnight prepared for him by our good Catechist Fr. Phan. Fr. Giacomino stressed on the Salesians assistance and

Phúc, Sứ... When relating his experiences with the boys who expressed their wish for a religious vocation, Fr. Majcen usually never told their names. But this boy probably was Khang, who later became a Salesian lay brother but eventually left the Congregation.

⁵ Oct 3 1952 – Oct 3 1953: Exactly one year since Fr. Giacomino and Fr. Majcen came to Hà Nội.

⁶ The intended number of Salesians to be sent to Vietnam was almost complete, except Bro. Bragion who would come in November 1953.

had previously done in Kunming. Moreover, the French scholastic system was different from the Chinese. Fortunately his pupils were very diligent, although they were poor and orphans. One day, the children heard the aircraft's roaring over their head: the aircraft hovered over the ground, passed across the Orphanage then crashed on a canal nearby. The children had hardly heard the pilot cried "Mother! Mother!" before he was killed. It was indeed a miracle: If the aircraft had crashed on the Orphanage, many children would have been killed!

Arrangements for the group of 200 children during holidays

How to prevent the children from idleness during their holidays? The best solution was to move about 200 of them into a vacant school near Hà Nội which was lent us by the principal with the consent of the mayor. There, Fr. Bohnen helped the children to have a wonderful enjoyment with song, sports and also some study review. This location was not very safe because it was very close to the headquarter of the communists, but only later was this known to us. Fr. Majcen once went to see them and were happily greeted by the boys with a spontaneous performance and a barbecue.

The move of a second group of the aspirants to be sent to Ban Mê Thuôt

With his priority concern for the vocations, Fr. Majcen made a list of the best boys who aspired to the priesthood and who would be moved to Ban Mê Thuôt. Fr. Cuisset obtained from a good colonel a flight on a two-engine aircraft to carry the boys together with Fr. Majcen to Hải Phòng. All were seated on two benches with safety belts. But when the craft reached the sea, one of the two engines stopped working and the craft lost the altitude. Fr. Majcen did not frighten the boys but asked them to pray, and when the craft could resume its flight to reach the land, Fr. Majcen now

**CHAPTER 18: THE LAST DAYS OF THE
ORPHANAGE IN NORTH VIETNAM (15/6/1954 –
21/6/1954)**

1. June 1954: The last days of the school year 1953-54 in the North

In spite of the tragic situation, the classes in the Orphanage kept going on as usual until June 15 when the school year ended. The examinations were done normally and diplomas were awarded with the stamp of the school department. Although poor and orphans, the students were clever and diligent. Nevertheless Fr. Majcen also met with difficulties: the principal and the staff demanded a salary rise while Fr. Majcen had no money; the Viceroy's relatives requested us to return the two blocks currently used for the school, so that the 450 children did not have a place to go. The houses that were left were deteriorated and needed repairing. In addition, like in China, they kept instilling xenophobic feelings in the mind of the pupils! It seemed that a dark cloud was falling on the coming school year.

Nevertheless our pupils' spirit and piety were still good. The students who followed the French program were studying at the Lasalle school, and under the marvelous instruction of the Lasalle Brothers, they would become the elite intellectuals, both catholic and non-catholic.

Fr. Majcen on his part was studying Vietnamese based on the Chinese characters, but his Vietnamese was not good enough for him to run a school yet, to speak and understand everything well. He could not speak to the teachers or bigger pupils as easily as he

community life in order to sow the Salesian spirit in the children's hearts.

Fr. Generoso Bogo found the most suitable means to promote the Altar servers group, through organizing the adventure excursions, dances during the evening parties, and various saintly "companies" ("pious associations"), gathering the best boys together. This kind of saintly companies was one of the pillars of the Salesian pedagogical system.

Fr. Bohnen was training the sports groups and he once had to explain in his best French the significance of our Salesian pedagogy. Once in a conversation with Mgr. Seitz and the deputy mayor, they asked me whether the Salesians smoked. Of course I asserted that smoking was forbidden to the Salesians. But they insisted: "Isn't there an exception?" I reiterated: "The rule of the Superiors are very clear." Then all the eyes turned to Fr. Bohnen... "But in practice? Perhaps one can." The good Fr. Bohnen said: "In Holland, one may smoke in their friends' company." At this Fr. Giacomin came in my defense... The French priests always had their pipes on their lips, Mgr. Seitz not excepted. Nevertheless it was forbidden to smoke in Lent, and Mgr. Seitz said abstaining from smoking as a mortification was very difficult indeed.

Selling the lottery tickets and the veneration to the martyrs

Fr. Majcen and Fr. Faugère made a pilgrimage to the parishes in Hà Nội and near Hải Phòng. Apart from the selling of lottery tickets, they also visited places consecrated by the blood of innumerable martyrs from the persecutions, including bishops, priests, the faithful and catechumens as well as the Sisters of the Lovers of the Cross in Vietnam. I must admit that I often knelt down before the memorials that had been worn out by kisses, and I was moved to tears. One such instance was when we visited the Dominican monastery and the church in Hải Dương, where we knelt down before the tombs of the martyrs including those who

had been beatified.⁷ I remember when we came to Hải Dương, we had to pass over a very long bridge crossing the Red River. There was a very big church named Kẻ Sắt where there was the memorial of Fr. Messar (†1723), a Slovenian from Gorizia province. The date of his death (1723) immediately followed the king's decree of beheading the missionaries. It was likely that Fr. Messar was one among the martyred missionaries in Vietnam.⁸

In hospital

Fr. Majcen suffered a stomachache by eating coconut jam and fish sauce in all his foods. Still, the Hollander Sr. Francesca was as good as a mother but as strict as a commander ordered him to fast for days, making him to experience another suffering... but after leaving hospital he was cured.

Fr. Majcen added: "Later, in the days after the South was liberated, that is from 1975-76, since there was neither meat nor fat but only coconut cooked in fish sauce, I continued to suffer other stomachache fits..."

In these days we also decided to eliminate the individual kitchen for each family in the Orphanage. Up to this point, every "family" had had their own kitchen cooked by a chef who every morning came to take vegetables, rice and meat, fish... and then some of the boys had to cook for the whole family of about 30 boys. This method seemed best as Mgr. Seitz conceived, but it took

⁷ When Fr. Majcen wrote this, these martyrs have not been canonized yet. The canonization of the 117 martyrs was done by Pope John Paul II on June 19 1988.

⁸ "... KESAT dove lavorava padre Messar (†1723) sloveno di Gorizia ed è morto il giorno dal decreto della decapitazione... Un Martir VN se!" — Fr. Rassiga understands that Fr. Majcen saw the memorial with Fr. Messar's name and his death in 1723, after the king's decree for the decapitation of the missionaries... a fact that led Fr. Majcen to think that this Fr. Messar, his Slovenian compatriot, was also a martyr in Vietnam.

AND THE SURRENDER

youngsters dressed barriers at the seminary to fight against some hundreds of Vietminh soldiers, a risky resistance similar to what Franco had done in Spain. It was a bloody battle and the Catholic young elites fell before the attack that was very well prepared by the Vietminh. The Seminary became a burial site amid the ruins. It was a *Requiem day*.

These bad news however did not discouraged Hà Nội. They kept saying that to lose a battle does not means to lose the war. But the French government were secretly negotiating with the Vietminh to divide Vietnam.

In the Orphanage, life was still rather quiet and calm in spite of some moral agitation. But among the people, the waves of refugees going to the South was increasing. Among these, some Catholic villages evacuated collectively together with their parish priests.

4. The last solemn devotional demonstration to the Virgin Mary

Fr. Majcen still remembered very well the most solemn demonstration of love to the Virgin Mary in this month of May, with a numerous gathering. The girls were dressed in white clothes, the women in their traditional brown clothes, while our children dressed in the choir uniform beside the principal Đô and the brass band. The people sang and prayed for peace, true peace as a gift from God through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Queen of Peace. They prayed as if they wanted to snatched the graces from God for their beloved country Vietnam: O Mary, Mother of Vietnam, Mother of our people!

This was the biggest demonstration of our devotion to Mary that was organized for the last time.

Fr. Majcen took a first group to Ban Mê Thuột by a military aircraft. The plane took off from Hà Nội, flew by the route Đà Nẵng then across the mountainous region to Ban Mê Thuột, near the borders of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Looking down from the plane, Fr. Majcen saw a Banar ethnic on his bike, wearing a shirt and a loin-cloth. We eventually managed to come to the bishop's office and see Mgr. Seitz. He was very concerned about the situation in the North. We also met the French priest who was against the admission of the orphans to be aspirants. He objected this as against the rules. But Mgr. Seitz insisted to admit them against the current rules. Then Fr. Majcen flew back to Hà Nội.

The monsoon

By the end of April, the monsoon brought with it heavy rains preventing the fighters to back Điện Biên Phủ. The Vietminh took this advantage to occupy the military airports around the base and their artillery kept raiding the French posts. From Paris, French government ordered the promotion of general rank to the commander of Điện Biên Phủ base and champagnes were dropped by parachute to celebrate this promotion. Unluckily the wind threw all to the enemy's front.

3. May 1954

The surrender

Without reinforcement and being flooded by the rains, the French could in no way to resist. White flag was hoisted and on May 6 1954 they surrendered.

Still another battle

May 6 1954 marked the victory of the Vietminh, but the 10 June 1954 was a tragedy at the Phát Diệm seminary. The Catholic

a lot of time because the morning class had to finish at 10.00 am for the boys to do the cooking, whilst the others had nothing to do, resulting in a waste of time. Therefore we decided to give up this method and to have a common kitchen instead. This was very advantageous to reclaim up to two or three hours in the morning and in the evening. It was necessary for the smaller boys and beneficial for the bigger ones with regard to their study time. In the meantime, the bloody war was still ravaging.

Changes in staff

The Hong Kong Provincial Council included the Provincial Fr. Mario and other councilors: Fr. Suppo, Fr. Braga, Fr. Cucchiara, Fr. Massimino, Fr. Ferrari, and the secretary Fr. Benato. They had to consider the re-organization of the personnel, but this was not an easy task for them for they only knew the situation through the press that was often unfavorable to Vietnam. Moreover, the proposal for the position of the Rector had to be submitted to the approval of the Rector Major. For the moment Fr. Giacomino had to continue his rectorship to prepare for the 10th anniversary (1943-1953) of the establishment of the Theresa Orphanage of Mgr. Seitz. Based on the decision at the beginning of the year, the MEP Fathers only would help us within a year, then the Salesians had to assume whole responsibility of the Orphanage. Mgr. Seitz reminded Fr. Vacher to complete his current tasks in the Orphanage.

**CHAPTER 15: IMPORTANT EVENTS IN
NOVEMBER 1953**

1. Episcopal Conference of Indochina in Hà Nội

The Indochinese Bishop's Conference was held in Hà Nội in November to discuss the serious situation and the bishops' obligation to stay with their faithful in their dioceses in case the revolutionaries came as it had happened previously in China.

All the bishops from the North, Center and South Vietnam, and from Cambodia and Laos came. At the end of the assembly, they were invited to attend the ceremony of the definite handover of the Christ the King City to the Salesians who had been recognized by the French as a legal entity for the public good.

2. Celebration of the 10th Anniversary of the Orphanage

An historical overview of the Orphanage in ten years

In 1939-40: Mgr. Seitz built an entertainment center for French-Vietnamese youth in Ba Vì mountain. Then war broke out between Vietminh and French forces. Since 1943 it became the Ba Vì Orphanage for the abandoned children.

1951¹: The center was bombed and destroyed, the children were dispersed. They were gathered again in Sơn Tây, like Don Bosco's wandering Oratory, in borrowed establishments such as

¹ Fr. Majcen wrote "1957", but probably "1951" was more correct logically and historically.

In the meanwhile we got news from Sài Gòn that our land in Thủ Đức had become military camps for the French and national army. We therefore decided:

- 1) The land bought from Mrs. Carrée was declared a military zone.²
- 2) The land that later became our Salesian aspirantate were currently full of Vietcong.
- 3) Other places had been illegally occupied by the refugees.

We did not know what to do, except praying to Mary Help of Christians to help us find a solution.

2. April 1954

Our priority was the vocations

Mgr. Seitz once more promised to support the vocations also financially. Fr. Majcen sent a list of the eligible aspirants to Ban Mê Thuột, then to Kon Tum. Among these boys we chose John Ty, Marc Huỳnh, Joseph Mý, Tôn, Khang, Vấn, and Sủ.

Among the candidates for the role of training the pupils, we sent Isidore Lê Hường to Hong Kong, then to the Philippines, and Joseph Hiên to Hong Kong then to Italy.

We should also mention Joseph Ty, a pupil from Ba Vì, and Joseph Hoan, a family head of the Orphanage, who entered the novitiate in Hong Kong together with Joseph Hiên and later became a Salesian lay brother and a provincial councilor for several year in Vietnam.

² In 1955 we sold it to the Jesuits for their Novitiate.

In a meeting, the Salesians deliberated on what to do. We (Fr. Majcen and Fr. Cuisset) first went to the South to ask Mgr. Cassaigne of Sài Gòn to let us go to the land in Thủ Đức that we had bought from Mrs. Carrée. Although the bishop appeared to be very favorable to our Salesian works, he openly refused to receive us because, as he said, “we already have too many orphans and refugees, so we can’t give you permission.” Fr. Majcen and Fr. Cuisset returned to Hà Nội, very sad.

Then we asked Mgr. Seitz to receive some of our pupils who showed signs of a religious vocation, either diocesan or Salesian. He accepted notwithstanding the objections from some of his priests. They thought the orphans could not become priests. But Mgr. Seitz never found any difficulty in receiving his orphans. Because there were still some rooms in the Seminary, Fr. Faugère brought to us a positive answer. We made a scrutiny to assess the eligibility of the candidate for religious life.

In the meantime we also asked the Prince Regent of King Bảo Đại to permit the seminarian Lê Huróng¹ to go to Hong Kong to make his Salesian novitiate there, and then to be sent to the Philippines to assist the novices there.

Then we deliberated on who would remain with the children. It was wonderful that all agreed to remain with the boys in the Vietminh regime. As for Fr. Majcen, because he used to be too nervous when the communists occupied China, all the confreres suggested he had better go to Hong Kong before the communists would come. Fr. Bogo and Fr. Bohnen said to cancel the discontented boys, then tried to take the others to the South. But how and where to go? All were very worried.

¹ Isidore Lê Huróng was the first Vietnamese Salesian.

Lacordaire School, Lasalle School, the Redemptorists' house and in the Viceroy's Tháí Hà Áp.

1951-52: Finally he bought a land where Fr. Vacher built the Christ the King City. The Salesians worked together with the MEP Fathers in this Boys Town between 1952-53 and exactly on its 10th anniversary the Salesians assumed their full responsibility as a legal entity before the Church and the government.

Mgr. Seitz decided to hold this anniversary celebration on November 29 1953 where he bid farewell to the Orphanage's staff and children and recommended and handed everything over to the Salesians.

On November 29 1953 the anniversary was celebrated with all its solemnity. The children wore berets, neckties, and shoes, and kept their houses clean and tidy. In the morning Mgr. Seitz celebrated the solemn Mass. And a big lunch in the afternoon for the children and staff. At 16.00, there was the solemn welcome to guests including church,² civil and military³ authorities, with songs and music, brass band and even dances. First, Father Provincial delivered a speech thanking everybody and promising that the Salesians would continue the works with their best efforts. Mgr. Seitz gave an historical overview of the works from Ba Vì to present. He exhorted the Salesians to work for the poor and they would receive God's blessing. The Governor congratulated the Salesians and promised to continue with his help. After all the

² Including the Papal Nuncio, the Bishop of Hà Nội, other bishops, in particular Mgr. Piquet of Nha Trang, Mgr. Cassaigne of Sài Gòn, Mgr. Mare formerly working in Kunming, two Dominican bishops, Mgr. Đoàn and Mgr. Đại of Hải Phòng.

³ The Honorable Governor Trí, the generals and other Vietnamese and French civil officials.

CHAPTER 15: IMPORTANT EVENTS IN NOVEMBER 1953

speeches, there was a tea and then the guests made a tour and admired the show on the ten year development of the Orphanage.

Two patron feasts and the appointment of offices

The next day was the patron feast of Fr. Andrea Majcen and Bro. Andrea Bragion, who came to Hà Nội two weeks ago. He was a gift given to the Orphanage by the Aberdeen Technical School in Hong Kong. The children surrounded them to offer flowers. On the same day Father Provincial nominated Fr. Majcen as rector, Fr. Cuisset Quí as vice-rector and economer, Fr. Bohnen Bản as prefect of studies in educational and vocational fields, Fr. Generoso Quảng as catechist taking care of spiritual matters of the children, Fr. Giacomo Minh as confessor and Bro. Bragion Báu as head of workshop.

Then Mgr. Seitz announced in Vietnamese a list of the Superiors while explaining each office to the pupils and staff.

In the hearts of the first Salesians and children in Vietnam, Mgr. Seitz remained forever the founder of the Orphanage, a charismatic figure who lived for the poor, abandoned children like Don Bosco did, an implementer, an educator and a father of the orphans.

He continued to help us. He allowed Fr. Faugère Cao to remain with us. Since then, this Father was always an effective assistant to Fr. Majcen in all difficult situations.

As Bishop of Kontum and Ban Mê Thuôt, he helped us during the 1954 immigration into the South. In 1975 he was forced to leave Vietnam, but he continued to live for Vietnam until his death in Paris on February 23 1984.

CHAPTER 17: ĐIỆN BIÊN PHỦ BATTLEFIELD AND THE SURRENDER

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1. March 1954

Điện Biên Phủ: the battle of hell

Fighting burst out on March 13 1954 and lasted till May 6 1954, that is for 55 days. To win the battle, the Vietminh applied the tactics of the Korean war: mass attacks. When the first attack was crushed down by machine guns, a second followed suit, and then a third... until the enemies' weapons became impotent and the attackers sweepingly advanced, backed by artillery from the nearby mountain side.

News of the fighting reached Hà Nội. Br. Bragion Báu said the children had no more heart for study, some who still had relatives wanted to go home. Their blood ties being very strong, they wanted to be close to their relatives in the dangerous or deadly situations. Fr. Majcen therefore had either to allow this boy to go, to give advice to another, or to permit those who wanted to go South with their relatives. All the places on the airplane were full of people with their bags for personal necessities, leaving behind them all other belongings, even their beloved rice fields. Everyone had his/her own life to be saved.

The Holy Week was celebrated as fervently as usual. We kept waiting for Fr. Mario's coming. Nuncio Dooley and Mgr. Khuê spoke of an imminent collapse. The Holy See ordered all the priests to stay at their posts. But the seminarians from Hà Nội and other dioceses were rushing to the South.

CHAPTER 16: FR. MAJCEN BECAME RECTOR OF THE WORK IN HA NOI

parents but as a parish priest of the Orphanage, he also went to the Cathedral and obtained from Fr. Trịnh Văn Căn the permission to administer the marriage ceremony at the Cathedral. A noteworthy fact was that the parish priest Trịnh Văn Căn would later be appointed an Assistant Bishop then a Cardinal Archbishop of Hà Nội diocese.

Fear increased

After the Têt, the war grew fiercer. All the world turned their thoughts to Vietnam. The Superiors in Hong Kong were worried about the fate of Salesian works in Hà Nội. Should our confreres go South and would they be safe there? The house council in Hà Nội had a meeting on February 2 to discuss the issue. All of us agreed to make this official promise: we would not abandon the children, but where should we take them to? And how? And above all how to save the good boys, especially the increasing number of vocations for the MEP and the Salesians? We found the first answer was to keep firm the Salesian devotions.

The French soldiers and the people were very afraid, while the Salesians kept going on with their work... and Fr. Majcen and Fr. Cuisset were looking for solutions.

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1. Fr. Majcen became Rector of the work

By the choice of the Rector Major and the Superior Council,¹

By taking the oath before Fr. Mario as prescribed by the constitutions,

Being introduced by Fr. Mario and Mgr. Seitz to the pupils and staff,

FR. ANDREJ MAJCEN became a Rector responsible for the WORK in Hà Nội on November 30 1953.

First, Fr. Mario Acquistapace summoned all the House Council members for a first meeting. As an apostle of Mary and in his immense trust in Don Bosco's works, he ordered and promoted allegiance to our Father St. John Bosco. The approaching Christmas was also the lottery drawing day. Our aim was always the formation of Salesian vocations. Fr. Bellido, a Superior Councilor, always recommended us to take care of the formation of the Salesian Vietnamese collaborators. To proceed slowly and wisely in the context of the revolutionary events.

While the confreres were discussing in the house, the noise of machine guns and cannons and the roaring of aircrafts were heard from outside. Such was the atmosphere of the first meeting of the House Council.

¹ Now called General Council.

Fr. Majcen officially started his rectorship from this month until August 15 1954. Fr. Giacomino Minh humbly accepted his position as a confessor. Mrs. Dubois, who had first served Fr. Dupont, then Mgr. Seitz and finally the Salesians in the City, now in tears bid farewell to the Salesians to go to Kon Tum to serve Mgr. Seitz before definitely going back to France with so much regret in her heart and also no longer having in handsmillions of dong (to spend).² Fr. Cuisset Quý began to take direct control of the management. Fr. Generoso Quảng and Fr. Bohnen did their best to prepare for the Feast of Immaculate Conception, while directing our vocational candidates to the Salesian education system.

With the Feast of Immaculate Conception, the Jubilee Year promulgated by the Bishops of Vietnam solemnly started over the whole country.

The lottery drawing

Fr. Majcen and Fr. Faugère made their last efforts for the lottery drawing: to sell out all the tickets and to buy 3 jeeps, 100 wardrobes, sewing machines, bicycles and Salesian books...

The lottery drawing took place on the Christmas eve 1953, with Christmas publications on which were printed the ticket numbers won, with the confirmation signature of the government official. Fr. Majcen was responsible for controlling the won tickets of the lucky people.

- Actually it was impossible to control the income from the tickets selling, because too many people took part in this business.

- In fact the Orphanage collected around 1,000,000 dong from the tickets sale. But the money we had to spend for the prizes was also considerable.

² “con ramaricco in cuore ed anche non con tanti million di soldi.”

the communist rule, and he was more flexible. Fr. Giacomino will forever radiate the light of the Salesians in Don Bosco’s time.

However, it is always true to apply the old saying: It is easier to begin from zero than to receive an already formed work. Fr. Dupont also experienced a similar difficulty before.

A ceasefire during Tét

As in the previous years, Hồ Chí Minh and Governor Trí proposed a ceasefire during Tét. On the Vietminh side, their men went home to wish peace and happiness to everybody, while making propaganda for communism in the name of humanity and peace among the people.

A Tét Fair

The Governor Tri, a caodaist, suggested Fr. Majcen to open a Tét fair in the area of the children, that is in the viceroy’s palace. We set up 30 stalls with various games for bigger and smaller boys, and with chance games. Muslim Algerian soldiers in their red uniforms entertained the smaller children with horse-riding and vaulting. The bigger boys liked shooting at the balls placed a little far away and it was not easy to touch. As for Fr. Bohnen, he took this opportunity to drink French champagne. To tell the truth, with all kinds of enjoyment and the generosity of Fr. Majcen and Governor Trí, the fair did not bring much income.

The secretary’s wedding

Fr. Majcen’s good secretary, Teacher Khắc wanted to get married, but his intended parents-in-law did not want to give him their daughter’s hand because he was an orphan and also because of unequal alliance. Fr. Majcen had to intervene as a representative of his deceased parents. He not only got the consent of the girl’s

Preparations for war from both sides

The French army set up in Điện Biên Phủ, near Laos territory, a big fortress that seemed unassailable, with three airports at its three sides and roads to guarantee the supply of food. On the other hand, the Communists on the highland also prepared their strongholds. Both sides were expecting a frontal attack. All was quiet except in Hà Nội where the guerrillas continued their nocturnal attacks.

The departures

Since Fr. Cuisset had taken over the economic administration, on March 2 the good Father Vacher Vương departed for Kon Tum, following Mgr. Seitz's call. Fr. Vacher's departure left an affectionate attachment in the hearts of his children in the Orphanage and a deep imprint of his works there: the big workshops, the houses of the families, the infirmary, the small houses for the priests, and especially the big St. Theresa church, a beautiful and practical construction as if made by a true architect: all this he left to Fr. Majcen. All the Orphanage had a Mass to pray for his departure, then a farewell lunch, a speech in French, and the warmest good-byes of his loving children.

On February 16, Fr. Giacomo Minh also departed: the true reason for his departure was known by Father Provincial only. He himself told us he went to see his mother but he would come back. Perhaps there were other reasons too. Fr. Majcen thought he was disappointed with the Flanagan educative model at the Christ the King City. Fr. Giacomo was a serious and traditional Salesian. He wanted a total and immediate change and the Salesian practices of the devotions, administration and rules of the house. But Fr. Braga, Fr. Bellido and Mgr. Seitz as well as the MEP Fathers repeatedly reminded us to change bit by bit. Fr. Majcen had been used to the adjustment since he worked in China, two years under

- There were some troubling cases such as when a lottery winner came from the countryside taking with him his children. When Fr. Majcen gave him an illustrated catechism book, he insisted that each of his children should also receive one. Another case was about a parish priest from a remote region who had bought many tickets out of which there might probably be won tickets. But his region was occupied by the Vietminh, the parish priest was forced to leave together with his parishioners without taking with them the tickets. The MEP Fathers wanted Fr. Majcen to give him the top prize, but Fr. Majcen resolutely refused: "If he cannot show his ticket, I can't give him any prize." Fr. Majcen later thought in himself: "Shouldn't I have been more generous with the priests in the distribution of this prize?"³

- In reality, at the moment I only thought of how to have money to feed the children,⁴ because the subsidies kept reducing while the children's necessities were increasing, and we did not know where the money could come from... The bishops and the Provincial could give a host of blessings but not money... , as Fr. Braga once commented.⁵

³ "Per i patri potrei essere più generoso??" Fr. Majcen examined himself and could not help thinking that he should have been more generous. While observing the norm to only give the prize to the true winner, he still questioned himself whether he was charitable enough in refusing to give the prize to a missionary who had lost his ticket.

⁴ "Io pensavo solo come tirare avanti: He was concerned above all with the children's necessities, but he still was scrupulous in his rigidly refusing a priest: He truly had a very delicate conscience!"

⁵ "Vescovi e Ispettore possono dare massimamente le benedizioni, ma non denari... diceva sua volta D. Braga."

Christmas 1953

Fr. Cuisset received more resources and could give a better Christmas feast though not as abundant as before. Fr. Vacher only stayed with the Orphanage for a few more days, but Fr. Faugère still remained with us until the end. He has a greater heart than Fr. Majcen's.

Then there were football games, sweets, gifts and prizes as many as we could provide. But the living rule must always be kept: DON'T waste anything, otherwise we could not benefit from God's providence.

Bro. Bragion insisted on the necessity to have a new car for transport, purchased from the Renault... by the money collected from the lottery, from the income of the workshop, ... but that remained merely a dream. Although he could repair the British cars, he was not familiar with the French cars, the repair of which he had to rely on a past pupil for the electric parts. There were in the house 7 cars but all were out of use because their users did not know anything about mechanics; they only made the machines worse!

2. January 1954

Happy New Year and calling for more help

On the occasion of the New Year, Fr. Majcen and Fr. Cuisset made visits to greet a Happy New Year to the governor and the social department director and to call for their help. They also met the generals and the ambassadors. In particular Fr. Majcen presented to General Cogny di Corsica the task of helping the young refugees of war whose number increased day after day. The general promised to let them use military aircrafts whenever they

without a family, victims of the war or of divorced parents, in a society in which homeless children were inclined to fall into crimes and to be victims of criminal gangs or secret societies. Fr. Flanagan wanted to educate their personalities based on their natural dispositions, but he gave priority to an education of their personal, religious and human education.

Among the children, at least 10% had been in jail or criminals, and a majority had been victims of family or social tragedies. Fr. Majcen's children also were in the same situation. As a result of the Salesians' work, most of them became good citizens in society. Fr. Majcen and the Salesians also experienced such cases in Hà Nội (1952-54) and in Taiwan (1977-79) with Fr. McCabe in Central and South Tainan. In the beginning of his apostolate, Don Bosco under the guidance of Fr. Cafasso also worked for the criminal youngsters, and Mgr. Seitz often said he wanted to save Vietnamese youth who were in danger and to imitate Don Bosco in making them worthy members for society (using Fr. Flanagan's system).

This was also an issue to be raised in the situation in Hà Nội in 1954 by Fr. Majcen, Fr. Mario, Fr. Cuisset and the MEP Fathers, Fr. Faugère in particular. But how to solve it? With Don Bosco's heart, we helped to bring them food, work, and a moral, religious and human education, creating a character for them... In a word, to educate them for a better world based on Catholic principles. This was Fr. Majcen's ideal, to get out successfully of the difficult problems of the tragic moment.¹⁴

¹⁴ "Ecco il mio ideale, riuscite problemi insuccessi nella ora tragica.

trust in the Virgin Mary who would realize everything in its proper time, vocations would flourish. A great many children from the Bùi Chu Seminary and also from the Orphanage came to enroll with Fr. Majcen to be Salesian aspirants.

3. February 1954: The Têt holidays

The Têt was not only a holiday month to rest and relax, but also a month for us to evaluate our work and to plan our Salesian programs.

When they came to Hà Nội, the Salesians who were used to Don Bosco's preventive system, one that was traditional in our Salesian houses, had to adjust to the Boys Town educative system of Mgr. Seitz, or more precisely of Fr. Flanagan in USA.

Some of us, like Fr. Cuisset, were very interested in this new system. Others, like Fr. Bohnen, Fr. Generoso, Fr. Giacomino were against it. Still others wanted to adapt and assimilate both systems, like Fr. Majcen and Fr. Mario Acquistapace. Perhaps we Salesians of that time did not have a clear idea of the Flanagan and Mgr. Seitz's Boys Town system which was partly and gradually Salesianized.

For example, we had introduced the daily Rosary, daily Mass, the grouping of the children into families according to their ages—a more natural living together, and the smaller boys were very fond of this renovation. Then there was the model of education by the heart and by loving kindness according to Don Bosco's spirit.¹²

Fr. Flanagan's system was inspired from the educative task for the miserable and homeless children, a problem that still seems urgent now, in the year 1986,¹³ in Vietnam. They were children

¹² See what Fr. Majcen discussed earlier.

¹³ 1986: date of this autobiography.

need to go in whatever location in Vietnam and Laos. In fact we later were in need of this transportation means.

A forester in the South had an interesting conversation with our two Fathers. He said he was willing to give our children a forest to sell its timber and have money to plant coffee trees. Of course the Salesians had to teach them some techniques in planting coffee. By this way the past pupils could have a house for their own family and their property also... It was a pity these very good proposals had no opportunity to be realized.

They also met aid foundations such as the Caritas, the Orphans' Aid Organization,⁶ the Misereor... These organizations later also came to the South and continued to support Salesian works.

It was to be noted that every time the Salesians introduced themselves as working for Mgr. Seitz's Orphanage, they were always warmly welcome.

An interesting episode in 1954

Such visits occurred every month, or whenever necessary. Once Fr. Majcen went to pay homage to the Italian ambassador, a devotee of Don Bosco. He boasted to have a library of 'Liquori'. Hearing the word library, Fr. Majcen immediately thought of books. And about the word 'Liquori', he fancied of the books of St. Alphongse Liguori, and he wondered why this ambassador could have a library of ascetic books. But when the ambassador opened his library, Fr. Majcen was astonished to see so many bottles of the best liquors well arranged under various labels. And he admitted that as a good Salesian of that time, he had never known the name of any of those liquor labels.

⁶ "Infanzia dei Orphanelli".

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Those visits were quite unique to Fr. Majcen and Fr. Cuisset. But their most important concern was to find benefactors for the Orphanage, to apply the saying: when in Rome, do as the Romans do.⁷

Returning the two houses of the Vice-roy

In the land of the former Tonkin Viceroy, Mgr. Seitz had been allowed to use the block for ancestors cult⁸for a kindergarten run by the Sisters of the Lovers of the Cross under the direction of Sr. Lucia, and another block reserved to the housemaids for laundry, sewing, and store room. With Fr. Cuisset's consent, the Sisters decided to sell all the linens to clear the house for its new owners who were the Brothers Hospitallers of St. John of God⁹ from Bùi Chu diocese. They would open there a hospital after the Tét. They came from Bùi Chu, the threshold of the war, and so they hoped to find another safer place in Hà Nội.

Other financial sources

After Mrs. Dubois's departure, the Salesians asked Sr. Lucia to reduce the number of the housemaids as well as the number of the orphans and stopped the pigs raising that proved to be unproductive. The money got from this sale was given to the housemaids with which they could manage to live and build their family when they would get married with our past pupils.

Considering the possibility to go South

In the increasingly dark situation, people who had money found ways to settle in the South. The bishops of Phát Diệm, Bùi

⁷ "Paese che vai, usanze che trovi."

⁸ "Corte reale con Sacrario dei antenati".

⁹ "I FatteBene Fratelli".

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Chu and Vinh bought the land where they built seminaries to eventually send their seminarians there. Fr. Majcen and Fr. Cuisset took a military aircraft to fly to Sài Gòn. There, Fr. Seminel, a MEP Father and old friend of Fr. Dupont, introduced them to Mrs. Carrée who wanted to sell her plot in Thủ Đức at a funnily low price. With the Rector Major's permission, Fr. Majcen on another visit to Sài Gòn went to see the land and bought it. It became a property of the Salesians. The Rector Major not only permitted the purchase, he awarded Mrs. Carrée a certificate of THE FIRST SALESIAN COOPERATOR IN VIETNAM.

Fr. Cuisset again went to Sài Gòn where a parish priest suggested him to buy a land near Thủ Đức which his father wanted to sell. But he could not visit the land because the military commander there prevented him to go after three people had just been killed there by VM snipers from behind the termite mound and bushes¹⁰... Unexpectedly one year later, with general Elly's money, Fr. Cuisset bought this land. Thus from 1955 we began an educational establishment for the Thérèse pupils and then, in 1956,¹¹ Fr. Majcen was officially appointed Rector of the Thủ Đức Aspirantate. The plot was a very dangerous place because it was too close to the Vietminh.

Don Bosco's gift

As Don Bosco's feast was approaching, the Salesians wanted to offer him the fruits of their common efforts. We were convinced that with visits to the Saint Sacrament, confessions, the rosary and

¹⁰ "Sono scadute 3 persone dal fucile di VM..."

¹¹ Fr. Majcen's memories were not exact. Between 1955-57, this land in Thủ Đức was still an educational establishment for the Thérèse Family, that is, the Orphanage, although about 20 children had enrolled to be aspirants. The Thủ Đức Aspirantate only officially existed from 1958-1976.

could relate with the government officials. As for his relationship with Mgr. Caprio, who later became a Cardinal, it remained forever a close friendship.

A visit to Đà Lạt

As he had some negotiations in Đà Lạt, Mgr. Seitz invited Fr. Majcen to accompany him. Sitting by the side of the bishop on a 300 kilometer journey, the two could leisurely talk about the young, and about their hopes and plans. They set out from Thủ Đức early in the morning to avoid the burning heat of the day. When they got into the asphalted road built by the French, they saw at their right, on a formerly empty and spacious land, a beautiful monastery built by the Vietnamese and Spanish Dominicans who intended to make it a studentate of philosophy and theology where our future Vietnamese brothers could study.

Then they passed over the Đồng Nai bridge where the police checked the passenger and where the soldiers kept watch over the new bridge. They saw under the bridge the tidal waves of the river on which several steam boats were carrying goods and fishing people.

Next they got to Hồ Nai, near Biên Hòa city. After a stop for a visit to the beautiful Sacred Heart church, they went to a new and big hospital run by the Brothers Hospitallers that was crowded with patients. Fr. Majcen wanted to see their superior to ask for their help in dentistry to the aspirants in Thủ Đức and Gò Vấp. Along two sides of the road, Fr. Majcen could see new villages created by the refugees from the North, each of which had its own church. Actually it was President Ngô Đình Diệm who had granted these lands to the refugees and given them aids to build their living and make the land valuable. They built their churches similar to the ones they had in the North, with schools, dispensaries and small convents for the Sisters Lovers of the Cross who zealously served there. In those villages of that time, the priest was everything: he

2. A thunderbolt in the blue sky

From Hong Kong the Provincial sent a telegram with an order to give the children back to the Bishop and all the Salesians had to return to Hong Kong.

It was a thunderbolt over our head. What to do now? We had promised to stay with the children to the last moment and we had officially promised it before the Bishop, the Nuncio and the government. Not knowing what to do, Fr. Majcen went to consult the Bishop of Hà Nội. The Bishop grew pale saying almost in tears: "What shall I do? I no longer have my best people, they all have left." He immediately summoned Fr. Mai, his secretary, and also Fr. Trịnh Văn Căn, the Cathedral's parish priest, for consultation. At last he said: "Please wait for some time, I'll give you an answer." A few days later, Fr. Majcen was invited to a lunch at the Nuncio Dooley's office. Well informed of the matter, the Nuncio praised Fr. Majcen for his obedience to his Superior, but added that in this case the Holy Father was the supreme authority and so, in the name of the Holy Father, he ordered him not to leave for Hong Kong before he had made arrangements for the children. When he knew that Fr. Majcen could not have a place to take the children to, he gave Fr. Majcen recommendation letters to present to Bishop Urutia in Hué and Bishop Piquet in Nha Trang for their support, then he took leave of them saying: "Please go and try." Fr. Majcen called in the House Council and immediately sent a letter to the Provincial to report the matters, and told Fr. Generoso to guide the bigger boys to dismount the big workshop framework and to transport the materials by truck to Hải Phòng where they would be kept at the house of the St. Paul Sisters before transporting them by ship to the South, but when and how it was still difficult to predict. Fr. Majcen and Fr. Faugère intended to go to Sài Gòn to try to negotiate with Mgr. Cassaigne for a last time, or to go to Mgr. Thục in Vĩnh Long, but there was no room for

them on the airplane. Mgr. Piquet said he was sorry for not being able to comply: all his places had been full of refugees. He suggested him to go to Hué, but the bishop here was in the same situation as Mgr. Piquet was. At dinner, he mentioned his case to a priest who was about to go to Ban Mê Thuôt, and he was saved. Exactly on the next day a telegram arrived: Majcen to BMT at once. They could easily have a place on the airplane because it was empty, but the plane had no seats at all. So they had to sit on the packages that kept sliding and moving, and they could only keep their balance with much difficulty. Upon their arrival, they at once presented their problem to Mgr. Seitz. The bishop took them on his jeep and after an hour drive they came to a site in the forest where there was a big store house used for drying coffee beans and a beautiful villa where King Bảo Đại stayed in his hunting. The villa could be used by the Father, and the big house could be accommodated for the children dormitory. Not an optimal solution, but at least it helped to solve the minimum necessity: having a shelter. Mgr. Seitz could write to King Bảo Đại—who was currently in Paris—for permission, and Fr. Majcen could consult his council and asked for the Provincial permission. The house council gave their consent and the Provincial in Hong Kong answered that he permitted, but added that once he had finished all arrangements, Fr. Majcen should come to Hong Kong to receive a new obedience. Fr. Cuisset would be an interim Superior in Vietnam.

In the meanwhile Fr. Majcen got another airplane that took him to Sài Gòn to ask Prime Minister Ngô Đình Diệm for rice and other foods for his orphan refugees.

3. Vietnam was divided – The Exodus

On July 20 1954, the Geneva Agreement was signed, Vietnam was to be temporarily divided along the 17th parallel. Within 300 days, Vietnamese from the North could settle in the South and

once had the idea to register Fr. Majcen in the ceremonial committee so as to give him opportunities to contact the people who would help him. It was through this that Fr. Majcen could make acquaintance with the then Nuncio, Mgr. Caprio, who forever remained our great benefactor. He also knew Mgr. Simon Hoà Hiền and had contacts with Frs. Duchesne and Harmeth of Caritas to receive rice and other necessities, and with representative of CARE Organization to receive implements for the workers, then with MISEREOR for German aids. He also have meetings with the Lyon Club⁴ and Mr. Maurao, the person in charge of the rehabilitation of our delinquent youngsters, and received their aids... Fr. Majcen also met the high commissary⁵ of the French police who still held authority over the montagnards and over the immense highland of Đà Lạt, Bảo Lộc, etc... He approached the heads of the social organizations whom he had previously known in Hà Nội, and could contact the military commanders, merchants and also the leaders of the Protestants and Buddhists. For his service to the poor and dangerous youth, he was welcome everywhere. He still kept his Vatican passport which he got when he was in Kunming and which was issued by a Vatican official in Hong Kong. When he asked for an extension of his passport, the Nuncio Caprio showed his special kindness by granting him a Vatican diplomatic passport which he used until 1975.⁶ Through this he was treated with a diplomatic status and

⁴ Fr. Majcen wrote “il Pen Club”.

⁵ “Alto Commissario francese”.

⁶ AM 1956-1958, p. 244: AM 1956-1958, trang 244: Un incaricato della santa Sede a Hong Kong mi dava un Emergency passaporto vaticano che poi usavo sempre fino al 1957. Domandando Mgr Caprio il prolungamento, mi prendeva un nuovo passaporto diplomatico vaticano, come espressione della gentilezza speciale. Questo passaporto usavo fino al 1975, quando mi per paura dei comunisti, un mio fratello di Saigon nascondeva... Fino quel tempo stavo sempre nelle strette relazioni con Mgr. Caprio.

Under Fr. Majcen's direction, all tried to run the house well, being aware that they would make this house an aspirantate then a novitiate in Vietnam.

3. The Gò Váp House

The most complicate problem was with the House of Gò Váp with 60 pupils under the direction of Fr. Cuisset (who usually had to be outside by necessity). Bro. Lục taught them the trades, with the help of a competent Catholic. Not all the pupils learned at home; many had to go to some workshops outside. But these pupils were not content with it, because they still missed the former educational system in the Boys Town where they got more freedom, could eat better and could have some money to spend thanks to Mgr. Seitz who often gave them money. And they wanted that the life in Gò Váp should also be like that in Hà Nội before. Fr. Majcen asked the Provincial to send him professional teachers. But the Provincial had none. Some best teachers had been sent to the Philippines. Only until the years 1957, 1958 had he sent to Gò Váp Fr. Donders, a Hollander with very progressive educational theories. Afte him was Bro. Nardin (Thầy Tiên), a very good brother but who was often ill. Then came Fr. Matthew Tchong, a Chinese; Bro. Ludovico De Marchi (Thầy Mai), who was very successful in learning Vietnamese. In the school year 1957-57 came Fr. Guerino Luvisotto (Cha Lương) from Udine, Italy, a 'bon papa'. He wonderfully succeeded although his Vietnamese was like the language of the Pentecost.

4. Mgr. Seitz introduced Fr. Majcen to his acquaintance in Sài Gòn

As soon as he heard of Fr. Majcen's coming in Vietnam, Mgr. Seitz immediately went to Sài Gòn to see him and to exchange the news on the alumni from Hà Nội whom he loved with all his fatherly heart. As he had done previously in Hà Nội, Mgr. Seitz at

those from the South could settle in the North. When the people knew this, a tremendous emigration took place: French and American ships were available to take all Vietnamese wanting to go south. The Navy provided each emigrant with food and an amount of money. A million people tried find places on the ships or airplanes. They were promised to receive in the South 12 dong per day for each person to buy food and they were also told that rice in the Mekong delta would be plentiful. In an area near Phát Diệm, thousands of people were on an islet waiting for some ships to take them, but there was none. Then a huge tide swept in and all were swept away. Hà Nội and Hải Phòng were in complete disorder. The communists had not expected such an emigration! At first they tried to stop it by propaganda and promises, but seeing all that was useless, they began using violence in open contradiction to the Agreement. There were fighting, killing, arrests and imprisonments. It was estimated that approximately one million had successfully escaped. If there hadn't been such violent preventions, the number would have been two million or more.

The last days in Hà Nội

Those were days full of problems and departures. Fr. Majcen tried to be sure that rice and other supports could come to the Orphanage from the Social Department. But this replied: "When you arrive in the South, we'll supply rice and other necessities, but for the moment with such disorder here, we cannot accommodate." He was also very concerned about the small children in the kindergarten. He arranged with Fr. Cartier, a friend of Fr. Mario Acquistapace, to have the St. Paul Sisters in Sài Gòn receive them, and we would receive their bigger children. To prepare a living in Ban Mê Thuột, Fr. Majcen sent his carpentry students to work there. Finally he went to see Mgr. Khuê and reported to him what he had done and the bishop was very pleased. Then Fr. Majcen asked for the bishop' blessing which the bishop did while also

asking Fr. Majcen to reciprocate. Moved to tears, the bishop said: “You have to go, and I to remain here waiting for martyrdom.” It turned out that the bishop was not killed, but his very life under the communist regime was a bloodless martyrdom. He stayed in his post, sustaining his allegiance to the Holy Father who later awarded him with a cardinal title. Then Fr. Majcen went to say goodbye to the Nuncio and the Superior of the MEP. He affectionately gave the blessing of Mary Help of Christians to his confreres and all his children. Then in tears and with a broken heart he parted by an Air France airline to Hong Kong, closing a difficult mission of obedience and of service to the poor and abandoned children. He prayed the Virgin Mary to be forever their Mother and Helper.

Going in South Vietnam

Before continuing with his 20 year life and service in Vietnam after 1956 when he returned to Vietnam, Fr. Majcen wanted to briefly recall what the Salesians who remained in Vietnam were doing during the time he was rector of Tang King Po School in Shau Ki Wan, Hong Kong.

After Fr. Majcen left Hà Nội, the Salesians decided to move to Ban Mê Thuôt. Seeing the communist violent hindrance to the emigration to the South, Fr. Cuisset tried to hurry up with the evacuation. Thus on August 24, the Orphanage's children gathered in lines, headed by a Salesian and backed also by a Salesian, and went to the airport. Each boy took with himself a small bag with some books and clothes, the bigger boys leading the smaller ones. They also brought along a Tabernacle and a small bell of their church. At the airport 25 airplanes of the Air Force were ready to take 450 children to Ban Mê Thuôt. The boys hurriedly climbed the planes because they heard shooting near the airport.

2. Salesian staff in Thủ Đức – central house of the Vietnamese delegation

At the provincial delegate office in Thủ Đức, we had Fr. Generoso, an eloquent and vivid Salesian, who lived with the boys between 1955 and 1956, and greatly helped them with his natural cheerfulness. But other works had to be developed such as education, opening classes for cultural and vocational students. So far Fr. Majcen had had the help of some trainers² like Phúc, a very dynamic though not always well-balanced teacher and little experienced, who could only fill in the gap for the smaller boys classes. And there were also Dũng,³ Liêm, the seminarian Tiêm among others.

Fr. Mario sent three confreres to help Fr. Majcen: the clerics Attilio Stra, Vellere, and the lay brother Borri. Bro. Stra was very capable, Bro. Vellere was a good and pious man but had to learn Vietnamese. Fr. Majcen allotted them one hour for the practices of piety, gave them a conference a week, and instead of reading a Bible passage per week, they had to learn by heart an ask-and-answer catechism item in Vietnamese. Bro. Stra got marvelous success while Bro. Vellere could not speak Vietnamese. As for Bro. Borri, who had been a bookbinder in Macao and Shanghai, his Vietnamese was mixed up with his Cantonese and Shanghai... But he was truly an infirmarian with a golden heart for the poor and abandoned boys.

Then also came Fr. Musso, a priest with a very particular character. As a confessor, he did not want to involve in any material matters.

² Commonly called “moniteurs”, who had not been a Salesian or a real teacher yet, , but who could supervise the classes, while they themselves had to continue studying in their high school classes.

³ Who had a leg paralyzed, and was nicknamed “Dũng zoppo”.

competence in this. Fr. Cuisset, instead, managed to take it up with the help of the past pupils.

Fr. Majcen as Rector and Provincial Delegate

In Hà Nội, life in the Orphanages was going on very well thanks to the help of benefactors and the government, assuring the boys of an orderly life and opportunities for a cultural and professional education.

After the Geneva Accords, the partition of the country and the emigration to the South was like a bomb that overturned everything. We could not maintain or develop the Orphanage because of shortage of staff at a minimum standard. Perhaps it was Don Bosco's will that, once Mgr. Seitz's system was reduced to a hopeless state, we were forced to begin from scratch. Even the government then could no longer help us because they were busy with the settlement of a million of refugees in the South.

Fr. Cuisset and Fr. Generoso had made arrangements for the boys who moved from Ban Mê Thuột to live in two barracks to enjoy the minimum necessities of education and the Salesian practices of piety. Now when Fr. Majcen came back to Vietnam as a provincial delegate, he also had to realign everything to assure a more orderly Salesian life. Due to a shortage of staff, he asked the Superiors in Turin to send more confreres but he was not granted, because the Superiors was afraid that, on the basis of the Geneva Accords, the South would soon fall into the Ho's hand. But Fr. Majcen, with his personal experiences, was always optimistic and wanted to "act as long as the sun still shines." For us, it was a matter of serving the souls, holding fast to our faith and hope, and having trust in Mary Help of Christians who could do everything. But the solutions for the boys in Thủ Đức was not the same as for those in Gò Váp.

The goods carried by ship also disembarked in Nha Trang to be transported to Ban Mê Thuột, but some were damaged while some precious goods were stolen.

Fr. Faugère organized an orphanage for the bigger boys, and sent the mechanics students to learn with the Navy experts. There was good spirit among the boys. The smaller children of the former Orphanage were taken care of by the St. Paul Sisters, while we received some bigger boys from the Sisters.

In the rubber plantation, Fr. Bohnen organized classes and work, but the boys became discontented because they found it a waste of time: There was a lack of teachers, no desk, no chairs and no books. They could not learn anything.

The transport of rice by trucks was difficult because of the long passage of 300 to 400 km.

There was a disagreement between Fr. Bogo and Fr. Bohnen, due to Fr. Bohnen's frequent and unreasonable slapping on the boys' face. This obliged the Provincial to send Fr. Bohnen to Haiti, but the Provincial's order was not obeyed and we lost a talented confrebre.

In Thủ Đức, Fr. Cuisset began to buy the plot of land in Thủ Đức we spoke of earlier. As regard Mrs. Carrée's plot, it was used as a shooting site for the training of the young Vietnamese soldiers. In addition, Fr. Cuisset also bought the abandoned railways station in Gò Váp and made it a school for the artisans, while the other students studied in Thủ Đức.

In the meanwhile, at the Tang King Po School in Hong Kong, Fr. Majcen was organizing the aspirantate for the Vietnamese boys.

Vietnam was partitioned. President Hồ ruled in the North while in the South King Bảo Đại ruled with Ngô Đình Diệm as Prime Minister.

Then Mgr. Cassaigne resigned and Mgr. Simon Hoà Hiền replaced him as Bishop of Sài Gòn.

In 1956 Fr. Majcen once again was appointed rector of the houses in Sài Gòn and Superior of the Vietnam Salesian Delegation. The political conditions remained unstable while religious parties rose against the government of PM Ngô Đình Diệm in Sài Gòn.

Such was the way of God and of Mary Help of Christians, the architect of our Salesian Congregation who always supported Don Bosco and his children.

b. Fr. Cuisset took Fr. Majcen on a visit to the Gò Váp plot

It was not very far from Thủ Đức and stood next to a dirty market near Sài Gòn river. It was close to the police quarters, and comprised the building of the old railway station and a large storehouse next to it.

The two brick buildings appeared to be more solid than the two barracks in Thủ Đức. Both had been purchased by Fr. Cuisset who could easily find support and aid from benefactors in Sài Gòn. The refectory and dormitory was placed in the building of the former railway station, and new toilets and bathrooms were also added. The storehouse was converted into a workshop for the trade pupils, but there was a shortage of technical teachers. Fr. Cuisset was often away. A lay person tried to teach the boys as much as possible, because Bro. Lục alone could not undertake everything.

Later in Gò Váp emerged another work: the reception of a number of boys taken from the prison with a view to mending their conduct. It was the idea of a good benefactor¹ and Fr. Cuisset and Fr. Majcen with Fr. Acquistapace's encouragement eagerly accepted it. This benefactor had bought a plot in Gò Váp and gave to Fr. Cuisset all that he needed to build a small house of 20 beds, with kitchen, study hall among other things. This was in some sense a return to the former Boys Town in Hà Nội. A number of boys were undertaken to be released from prison and join in a home where they would lack nothing. At the beginning some escaped for want of freedom. But later, being hungry, they returned and was readmitted by Fr. Cuisset who had a predilection for them. Actually Fr. Majcen was also very interested in this apostolate, but he was prevented to take it up for lack of staff and his own limited

¹ Fr. Majcen wrote “Il Presidente del Pen Club”, .. but the group was commonly called the “Lyon Club”.

cleared but not clean yet. Snakes and centipede had for the most part disappeared but occasionally showed up behind the stones of the ancient tombs at the corner of the garden. Other troubles included the dogs of the neighbourhood. At night they used to crawl through the bamboos fences and got in the yard where they noisily played and fought against each other under the moonlight. There still remained some termite mounds that were later leveled by modern bulldozers.

At this point we can clearly see how strenuously Fr. Cuisset had been working while Fr. Majcen was away from Vietnam.

a. Thủ Đức, the first part of Salesian works in the service of the youth in South Vietnam

In Thủ Đức, Fr. Majcen was surrounded by his former aspirants of Hà Nội: John Ty, Marc Huỳnh, Joseph Tho, Joseph Mý, Joseph Sú, Joseph Vân... and the alumni of Bùi Chu Seminary like Phúc, Liêm, and Chuyên, the sewing shop's head. Then there was a brass band directed by Fr. Generoso who assumed two offices of prefect of studies and catechist, supervising the pious associations, sport and morality. Their radiant and cheerful faces helped to attract other boys to the Salesian life. The number of boys was 200 with an exemplary and disciplined life. In the morning and afternoon they studied at home or in the Bắc Ninh seminary or the Mossard school of the Lasalle Brothers. But all took part in the morning occupations, sport games in the afternoon and private studies in the evening, as well as attended the liturgy, Mass and morning and evening prayers. An atmosphere of joy, openness and harmony reigned everywhere.

There were only four Salesians: Fr. Majcen as rector and provincial delegate, Fr. Generoso Quảng as prefect of studies and catechist, Fr. Cuisset Quí as economer and responsible for the Gò Vấp branch, and Bro. Lục who had just come from Hong Kong.

CHAPTER 19: LEAVING VIETNAM, FR. MAJCEN BECAME RECTOR OF TANG KING PO SCHOOL (6/1954 - 7/1956)

1. Fr. Majcen's arrival in Hong Kong: worries and misses

After two hour flight, Fr. Majcen arrived at the Hong Kong airport. Some policemen who were Salesian past pupils hastened the procedures for Fr. Massimino and several Salesians towelcome him. There were also some of his past pupils from the former Don Bosco school in Kunming. At that moment he did not know what his obedience would be. But on returning home, (the Provincial being absent), Fr. Massimino put him on a seat of honor and greeted him as the new rector of Tang King Po School. Personally he only wanted a quiet place to live and hear confession as a few years ago in Macao. Later, he admitted to have been falling from heaven. The thought about his new responsibility and his compassion for the children he had left in Hà Nội made him sleepless.

2. The Tang King Po School in Kowloon

All the confreres in the Salesian China Province knew that this School was named after thewell-knownphilanthropist, Mr. Tang King Po. He wanted to offer to the poor youth here a technical school like the Aberdeen School. He entrusted to the Salesians one million Hong Kong dollars (a big amount) to build the school. Fr. Goffredo Roozen had the construction completed in two years, then he borrowed more money to add a wing for the aspirantate and for the confreres' dwelling. The inaugural ceremony was held

on July 27 1953, though the school year had already started in February. God recompensed Mr. Tang King Po with the grace of faith.

On July 19 1953 Mr. Tang King Po was baptized and christened Peter. The Pope awarded him the Medal of Knight Commander of the Order of Sts. Gregory and Sylvester.

The School is multidisciplinary, including a class in Chinese language, and other classes for trade training: sewing, shoemaking, printing. At the shoemaking shop a group of very good pupils worked under the guidance of Bro. Francesia. He helped them greatly: having a lot of work for them. The school also had an English teaching section which was later abolished as not conformable to the benefactor's purpose to reserve this school for poor children. The school also had an aspirantate under Fr. Geder's direction, and some lay brothers who were following special training courses called the 'magisterium'. The Salesian confreres were numerous, but still insufficient to satisfy the needs of the tasks, although there were also many outside teachers. The workshops were installed on the ground floor; the first floor included classrooms for students and aspirants, and a chapel, offices of the prefect of studies and his secretaries, and teachers' rooms. On the upper floor were the kitchen, the confreres' refectory, the library and the confreres' rooms.

By the Provincial's order, the prefect of studies, Fr. Randi, who was very sensitive in scholastic matters, all at once managed the necessary procedures at the Educational Department for a recognition of Fr. Majcen as "director and principal" of the school. An agent was sent by the Educational Department's office to interview Fr. Majcen who told him about his previous teaching of technical subjects in Ljubljana, then about his being a director of a vocational school in Kunming and then a rector of the Boys Town

resumed its journey to Vũng Tàu where the captain anchored the ship to wait for the tidal rise to continue its journey on Sài Gòn river.

On the river, the captain alerted the passengers about the ambushes along the banks of the Bình Xuyên guerrillas who were opposed to Prime Minister Ngô Đình Diệm.

After so many years, I still keep in my memory the beautiful and vivid scenery of that journey. When I saw the Sài Gòn Cathedral and other palaces and buildings in Sài Gòn – Chợ Lớn where there was a great port, the siren from the ship announced our arrival to Fr. Cuisset Quí and Fr. Generoso Quâng who would see us a few hours later after we finished the necessary check in at the customs.

They took us on their car and drove us on a 10 kilometer road that brought us to Thủ Đức. This formerly sterile area that used to be a refuge for the communist guerrillas, now had completely changed. Not far away a new university village showed itself, and over there stood the Bắc Ninh parish church with a high school where, among other pupils, there were also a number of the local seminarians and of our boys. After a warm welcome by the pupils, we had a snack then we visited the houses that were then designed into two big barracks.

The first barrack which had been transported from Hà Nội after a long journey was reassembled and comprised a gate, the kitchen, the refectory, the sewing and the carpentry shops. The pupils had not yet been split up into different trades. At the farthest end was Fr. Majcen's office and bedroom. The other barrack comprised the chapel, the pupils' dormitory with two stage beds, small cupboards and a few wardrobes that had been transported from Hà Nội. At the end of the barrack were the toilets and laundry. There was a big well dug by the pupils for drinking water and for washing. Fr. Cuisset told us that the land had been

CHAPTER 21: FR. MAJCEN BACK TO SÀI GÒN AS PROVINCIAL DELEGATE AND RECTOR OF THREE HOUSES

1. From Hong Kong to Sài Gòn

Such was the obedience letter. Many people congratulated me. Accompanied by Bro. Mario Lục, a lay brother who also was sent to work in Vietnam, I decided to take the French-Chinese ship to Sài Gòn via the Philippines. On our journey, I thought of the Apostles who after being expelled from a place shook the dust from their feet and went to another. I had likewise to leave Kunming and then Hà Nội twice. In the same manner, the missionary elite both foreign and Chinese had set out to the Philippines and within a few years had established Salesian works with a novitiate where our first professed was the cleric Isidore Lê Huống. I thought of my first obedience letter I received in July 1952 by which I was sent to the Negros Orphanage in the Philippines following the archbishop's invitation but I could not go for health reason. I was happy to see Fr. Braga, Fr. Quaranta, and Mrzel Rafko, then I thought of Fr. Ricaldone, Rizzato, Cliford and other architects of the developing Philippines province. A storm swept through Manila before our disembarkation, making me very uneasy. The confreres who for the most part were my acquaintance greeted me warmly. We visited the Mandaluyong house in Manila and Fr. Braga who was in hospital with a broken leg after an accident... It was a pity I had to embark for Vietnam. The ship

in Hà Nội. The interview was satisfactory and a few days later he got permission from the government to assume these positions.

Fr. Randi was Fr. Majcen's great helper because Fr. Majcen was not well-experienced enough in Hong Kong scholastic system. Here the schools were organized differently from the systems in Kunming, Macao and Hà Nội. Fr. Geder, for his part, also a Slovenian, who had once been a missionary in Shiuchow and a vicar general in the time of the *sede vacante* after the death of Mgr. Canazei and before the appointment of Mgr. Arduino, now ran very well the aspirantate department in TKP School. Besides, he was also very capable to assume other tasks as needed. He had very good spirit and that year Fr. Majcen chose him as his confessor. As for Fr. Lomazzi, beside his financial specialization, he was also a wonderful artist who helped the rector a great deal in the decorations and performances in the house. Fr. Cerrato was economer. He was very good at accounting and knew how to keep all the school accounting very orderly.

Financial problems

Fr. Majcen used to encounter financial problems in Kunming, Hà Nội and TKP School. The annual income of the school was approximately 9000 dollars but it had to contribute 3000 dollars to the Provincial. The remaining funds had to be paid for the debts and teachers' salaries. And there remained very little for other expenses in the administration and for the living of the confreres, aspirants and poor pupils. Although the workshops, the printing and shoemaking in particular, could help a lot, but other financial sources were badly needed.

Spiritual matters

This was the area Fr. Majcen was most concerned, and to do this, he was greatly helped by Fr. Mario Calvi, who had

evangelized for 20 years in the Apostolic Vicariate which later became the Shiuchow diocese. Fr. Majcen and Fr. Mario Calvi were of one heart and one mind: Fr. Calvi taught catechism to the pupils and he also taught the young confreres who were in their specialization training. He animated the practices of piety and through the religious associations he prepared young apostles for school and for life. Baptisms and vocations flourished during those years. Fr. Orlando, a MEP priest and parish priest of St. Theresa parish, whose ecclesiastical authority the school then was subject to, was very content with this spirit. He always admired and encouraged the school.

Goodmorning talks

As many of the pupils were non-Christians, the school had a regular morning talk before the classes began, instead of our traditional goodnight talks. Fr. Majcen, Fr. Randi and Fr. Calvi took turn to give to the young men good thoughts that were suitable both to the pupils and to the teachers, drawing on the teachings of the Rector Major, Fr. Renato Zigiotti.

Dialogues

Dialogue was a concept that was popularized in the post-Vatican period, but with Don Bosco and Fr. Majcen at TKP School, this was not a foreign matter. Initiatives for the promotion of the school were discussed with all the confreres in all their fraternal charity and based on these discussions, Fr. Majcen as rector with acknowledged authority, took the necessary decisions.

Charitable works

As said earlier, although the school was poor, it kept doing charitable works: the school taxes prescribed by the government for the high schools was considerably modified for our school, but in the school, school fees were reduced for not a few pupils: some

After leaving 90 orphans in BMT to the care of Fr. Faugère Cao with the financial support of Mgr. Seitz, the Salesians brought 260 other boys to Sài Gòn on January 15 1955. Of these boys, 200 settled in Thủ Đức, and 60 in Gò Vấp.

In Thủ Đức

As said above, the Salesians had bought Mrs. Carrée plot in Thủ Đức, but it now had become a shooting ground for the South Vietnamese Army and so they could not live there. However, Fr. Cuisset had also purchased another plot near Thủ Đức market, about 10 kilometers from Sài Gòn. It was very hard for Fr. Cuisset to buy this plot, but the good general Ely had given him the money. This was a large sandy land where our boys had to live in tents for a month, and they also dug a well for drinking water. Later, they moved the tents and built a big wooden house with an iron sheet roof, and this was their first living shelter. Other houses would later be built as we shall describe below.

In Gò Vấp

A little far from Thủ Đức, Fr. Cuisset also managed to buy from the South Vietnamese Army a plot with an abandoned railway station next to it. This station linked Sài Gòn with the rubber plantations on the borders with Cambodia. The student workers lived in the building of the station and its storehouses.

Such was our Salesian settlements near Sài Gòn, with 200 boys in Thủ Đức and 60 in Gò Vấp.

be reassembled. In addition, many accessories had been lost on the way. And especially there were no teachers at all.

Although everybody tried to keep the morale on a high level, especially with regard to the practices of piety, all were aware that this situation would not last longer. Because it was in the month of the Rosary, the reciting of the rosary was done very fervently. And Fr. Mario Acquistapace came to celebrate a Mass solemnly. On this occasion he and the house council made the following decisions: a) To send the smaller orphans to the nuns as soon as possible (and this was done as we have said earlier). b) To arrange for the bigger boys of 17 and above to have a job. This could be done through Mgr. Seitz's prestige. c) To send the aspirants to Kowloon to live with Fr. Majcen. d) To send the boys, at least part of them, as soon as possible to Sài Gòn or some other place. This became more urgent after a telegram from Emperor Bảo Đại in Paris said he wanted to take back the plot that Mgr. Seitz had borrowed, because the Emperor wanted to sell it for fear that it could be confiscated. And this fear has become true. Life became more and more difficult and was complicated by the dissension between Fr. Generoso and Fr. Bohnen, so that Fr. Cuisset suggested to separate the two confreres. He wrote a letter to the Provincial. Fr. Mario Acquistapace summoned Fr. Bohnen and sent him to Haiti. That year the Orphanage celebrated Christmas in Ban Mê Thuôt then moved to Sài Gòn.

In Sài Gòn

In 1954, Mgr. Cassaigne refused to receive the Salesians in his diocese. But now he was retiring in Di Linh and was chaplain to a leprosarium, living among the lepers and praying for the Church's communities that were seriously attacked. His successor in Sài Gòn was Mgr. Simon Hoà Hiền, who was always sympathetic with the Salesians.

to a third, others a half, others even was completely exempted. A condition for receiving these reductions or exemptions was good behavior and diligence. In those years, the number of refugees in Hong Kong was quite great. The Caritas organization offered aids by sharing food, rice, oil, etc... Fr. Duchesne who was responsible for the Caritas shared a portion of God's gift to the school with which the school shared to the poor pupils and their families. A great number of shoemaking pupils and some past pupils also benefited of a free meal at the school.

The printing shop

The printing shop was the most important part of the school because it brought to the school a fairly good income. But it was also a cause of so much trouble to Fr. Majcen. A missionary had made a deal with the shop head by which waste paper was to be used to print catechism texts at a low price to distribute to the poor catechumens and the baptized. And the printing shop head agreed. This publication was then reproached by the bishopric office for printing catechetical matters without permission. Fr. Majcen explained that the catechism had already got permission, and this was only a reprint; besides, he was not notified by the head of the printing. But the Ordinary still insisted that Fr. Majcen was responsible for this: another instance of which Fr. Majcen became a victim!

The Oratory

Fr. Calvi opened an Oratory with the cooperation of the confreres in the magisterium period, because they knew how to attract the young by their initiatives. There was plenty of games for the boys in the Oratory, but above all there were catechism classes organized according to the age and educational levels of the boys. Because all the pupils were poor, they often granted some small

rewards or food. The magisterium confreres also visited the families and these visits also contributed much to their formation.

The closing of the English section

In the beginning, Fr. Roozen, the first rector of the school, opened an English section where the learners paid a fairly high school fee by which the poor financial state of our school was improved. But these pupils looked like "gentlemen", resulting in some kind of jealousy. Still, there were some who profited of this issue to force the class to be closed with a pretext of being against the will of the school founder. Consequently Fr. Majcen was ordered to close the section. Many confreres were astonished, leading to a dissatisfaction among the confreres. Fr. Majcen had to report this to the Superiors but he was misunderstood and was rebuked for disobedience. For Fr. Majcen, this was a bitter pill he had to swallow.

The sewing shop

The lay brother Mirzel was running the sewing shop, but when he was sent to the Philippines, it was entrusted to a Chinese brother. He was very competent and the shop quickly developed. Unfortunately, some years later, when Fr. Majcen was no longer rector, he had a crisis and left the congregation, and all the confreres were very sorry for him.

The aspirantate

The aspirants formed a separate department under the direction of Fr. Geder, a very experienced missionary in whom Fr. Majcen could put all his trust. Of the aspirants of that time were Fr. Norberto Che, a future Provincial and Fr. Francis Che, a future rector of the formation house. Of the assistants of the aspirants were Fr. Joseph Zen who later became a Provincial, and Fr. Peter Tsang who later was rector in Tainan for many years. Some

CHAPTER 20: WHAT WAS GOING ON IN VIETNAM WHILE FR. MAJCEN WAS AWAY (1956-57)

Half a year in Ban Mê Thuột

Before speaking of Fr. Majcen's 20 years in Vietnam, it is worth recalling the events which the Salesians who remained in Vietnam were experiencing while he was away.

More than 200 orphans were transported to Ban Mê Thuột where they were greeted by Mgr. Seitz, the assistants and the bigger boys who had come there before. They were led to the Emperor's palace and the coffee beans storehouses where they would live. The plot was in the forest with a number of ethnic tribes who lived there with monkeys and elephants. The site was about 1,400 meters above sea level, very fit for summer camps but with a shortage of food and living conditions. To find enough food for the children, Fr. Cuisset with his jeep had to go to and fro on a 400 km road from Sài Gòn to Ban Mê Thuột and vice versa, through innumerable difficulties and dangers.

The children's daily diet was usually rice and dried fish, leading to under nutrition and cases of beriberi. They dug a well to have drinking water, and every morning the children went to the stream to have a bath, after having driven the monkeys away. Some elephants occasionally came near the streams.

Fr. Bohnen Bân made some rudimentary classrooms for lack of materials like books, desks or benches... The bigger boys ran the classes as assistants. The student workers had no jobs. The machines that transported from Hà Nội had arrived but needed to

he stayed until the tide rose. As soon as he came up to the shore, he saw a shark appear on the same place where he had just left. He at once thanked God because had he stayed there longer, he would have lost a leg!

5. A new obedience letter

A letter of obedience was normally given during a retreat. At the conclusion of the retreat that year, July 15 1956, Fr. Mario Acquistapace, the Provincial, gave Fr. Majcen a new obedience: Going back to Vietnam, and this time in Sài Gòn, to be rector and provincial delegate for the Salesian works in Vietnam which later would see new developments. Fr. Majcen immediately apply for a passport and this time as a Vatican citizen. He bade farewell to Mgr. Bianchi, then handed over to Fr. Suppo, his successor, all the documents relating to Tang King Po School, as Fr. Suppo requested. After bidding farewell to the confreres, he left for Vietnam where he would stay for 20 more years.

months later, a few aspirants came from Vietnam, and with the assistance of a Cantonese teacher, Fr. Majcen could help them learn Cantonese which Fr. Majcen himself was not very good at... In later years, a number of Vietnamese confreres (cleric and lay) also came to Hong Kong for their philosophical formation or for their magisterium, and this had lasted until Vietnam could have its own formation house.

The Past pupils in the shoemaking shop

As said above, the shoemaking shop provided jobs for a great number of the past pupils. That was Bro. Francesia's initiative. He was very kind, and wanted to help many shoemaking past pupils to have jobs because outside there were markets selling ready-made shoes so that the past pupils were unemployed. Since he got orders for shoes making and repairing for the policemen and soldiers, Bro. Francesia opened a shop for the past pupils and this shop had been providing a means of living for them for many years.

A Catechetical Center

After the aspirants moved to Shaukiwan, a vacant place was left. Fr. Coerenza took this for a catechetical center. He had an independent administration and contributed to the school a good financial income.

The school's chapel

The school's chapel was the Eucharistical center of the house. It was here that many Masses were celebrated for the faithful as well as for the newly baptized. Many young and adult Christian made visits to the Blessed Sacrament, made confession and received communion. It was also here that Frs. Geder and Calvi organized the Salesian Cooperators Association. A few years later,

the chapel was enlarged and officially became a public church for the faithful.

3. The visits

Together with Fr. Geder, his compatriot and friend, Fr. Majcen occasionally made visits to some places. They visited the Sisters of the Annunciation Congregation. These Sisters had been expelled from Shiuchow and with Fr. Cucchiara's help, they had found a place to settle in Hong Kong. The two Fathers also visited a merchant ship of the Yugoslavians and were warmly welcome by the captain. It was the first time he had contact with a fellow countryman abroad since 1935. They also went to the Dominican monastery at Rosary Hill where there were Vietnamese seminarians, among whom there was a newly ordained priest who later asked to join the Salesian Congregation: Fr. Hoàng Phú Bảo.

The Rector Major's visit

Fr. Zigiotti made a visit to the school in 1955. On this occasion the school offered him a relief picture entitled "A comedy about Gregory the Great". In his canonical visit, the Rector Major asked to have his trousers repaired. The shop head wanted to make new trousers for him but he resolutely refused. The confreres also suggested him to make an excursion to Hong Kong Peak to enjoy the scenery, but he refused, saying he did not come as a tourist but to see his confreres and so he did not want to waste his time as well as the confreres' time. When seeing that the school was too numerous, he observed that the rector alone could not well run such a complex school with 400 boarders. He said that this could only be a temporary need for a specific circumstance. He therefore recommended to drop those shops with exclusively profit purpose like the shoemaking and sewing shops. In the meantime he made an arrangement for the aspirantate to officially move to Shau Ki Wan. This arrangement had been stimulated by some confreres

who were envious with Fr. Geder. This was a bitter pill for Fr. Geder who realized that this would make a big problem for the province, because Shau Ki Wan house would no longer have room for the clerics who would be sent abroad for their theological studies, while a new house of studies should be built in Cheung Chau for the philosophers.

4. Tang King Po School

Mr. Tang King Po proposed to give his own house to the Salesians after his death to build a school. Fr. Majcen notified this to the Provincial and then he and Fr. Suppo, the provincial economer, drafted a will to give the house to the Salesians for the building of a school. It is now the Tang King Po High School at Kennedy street in Hong Kong.

In his last years, Mr. Tang King Po could no longer see Fr. Majcen: Because all the family members of Mr. Tang were non Christians, they feared that Fr. Majcen would come to ask him for money and so they did not want Fr. Majcen to see him. However, concerned for his soul, Fr. Majcen asked a diocesan priest to come and give him the last sacraments. After his death, a solemn funeral was made with the attendance of the school community. Later on, when his tomb was obliged to be moved, the Salesians asked his relatives to allow his corpse to be transferred to the Salesian cemetery. This Salesian kindness greatly pleased Mr. Tang's family.

Illnesses and the shark

The heat and humidity of Hong Kong caused furuncles which made Fr. Majcen greatly suffered. He had to stay in hospital until he recovered. The doctor recommended him to frequently swim in the sea. During this period, he usually went to swim with a confrere at a quiet beach. He stayed quite long in the water. Once

that plot because it had been used by the Army of the Republic of Vietnam for a shooting ground. When the soldiers left, we decided to sell it immediately. Providence sent us the Jesuits who were looking for a location to settle and open their novitiate.

The plot was sold and we used the money to build the Technical School in Gò Váp on the plot that had been enlarged after our purchase of the bus station and the garage.

7. A visit to Kontum - Ban Mê Thuột

Kontum

Fr. Faugère occasionally went to Sài Gòn to buy food. One day, he invited Fr. Majcen to accompany him to Kontum. Mgr. Seitz's had a desire to establish a past pupils association in Ban Mê Thuột for the orphans who had come from Hà Nội to later have a relationship with the future Salesian pupils. Fr. Faugère's jeep took Fr. Majcen through a 14 hour drive to a region inhabited mostly by the ethnic peoples. Centuries ago, when the more civilized people went deeper into this region to reclaim virgin land, the ethnic peoples withdrew to the highlands to maintain their primitive life. They were humble and quiet people who disliked all troubles and hated living with other peoples. The evangelization to these peoples were very difficult because of their nomadic life, and especially because of their customs that were not very congruent with Christian life.

Their beliefs included a vague concept of creation, of the primitive man, and of the deluge, which was presented in a legendary or mythical way. Sometimes they had a penitential rite in which they confessed their sins, even the hidden and shameful ones, and then made reparation by sacrificing a calf or a sheep.

was a parish priest, a doctor, a judge, and he served the good of his flock, with the help and collaboration of the parish pastoral council. Seeing the numerous Catholic people who were so dynamic, so rich in faith and in their children, Fr. Majcen could quickly fancy a promised future for Salesian vocations that would spring. After Hô Nai was Gia Kiêm, where he also saw thousands of Catholics flock to the church for Mass and prayer. This devotion sprang from their ancestors who had given their lives to the Church, to God and to Mary.

Seeing the aborigines for the first time

The road to Đà Lạt began from Đèo Chuối, a mountain pass that led them through the forests and hills, a very dangerous area in several aspects. At the end of the pass, the two entered the land of the ethnic people. Mgr. Seitz explained to Fr. Majcen that these aborigines were of Indonesian race. In a later period, the Chinese and Vietnamese came to settle here. The ethnics withdrew deep into the forest to live their primitive life. They were animists, undercivilized and illiterate. They wore loincloths. Women, men and children, all alike used pipes. Men had always with them a machete for protection against snakes and to open their way through bushes and thorns.

Before getting to Gia Kiêm, there was bifurcated into a branch leading to Nha Trang and another to Đà Lạt.

After a 200 km drive (from Thủ Đức), they stopped at Blao (also called Bảo Lộc). This was a town where there were plenty of tea and coffee plantations. In this town, there were many refugee families from the North and the Chinese also. In fact, there were Chinese wherever the trade and business flourished. Here there were many churches, schools and monasteries... The numerous Catholic youngsters here made Fr. Majcen consider a future

Salesian community in this town, while Mgr. Seitz thought of a village for his alumni.

In Đà Lạt

Continuing their journey, the two missionaries arrived in Đà Lạt, a small city constructed by the French on the highland to serve as their vacation site to avoid the summer heat of Sài Gòn. Not only was it a vacation site, it also was somewhat of a religious city decked by numerous monasteries, novitiate houses, houses of studies and even a Catholic university. In spite of the war, these still existed. The two missionaries visited many places, including the Benedictine monastery near Bảo Đại Palace that later became summer vacation retreat of President Ngô Đình Diệm. As the Benedictine monks could not stand the noise of an area that had become a tourist site, they sold it to find another quieter place in Cambodia to live their contemplative and working ideal.

Mgr. Seitz talked with the French High Commissary responsible for the (highland) ethnic people⁷ to find some plots of land for the Salesians who, by their technical competence, could break the land to create a village for his alumni. With this project, the alumni's families could assure their future by working on their coffee plantations. It was a wonderful idea, but it might be just a will-o-the-wisp. Realistically Fr. Majcen suggested that with his actual lack of personnel, such a big task cannot be undertaken. His words disappointed the good bishop who was very sad to see his most cherished dream vanish.

5. Fr. Majcen's letter to Fr. Vode dated December 30 1956

"Providence has prepared a bright future for us in this beloved country. Such is our Superiors' conviction. In Đà Lạt we should

⁷ "Alto commissario francese per li altipiani".

4. Enlargement of the Gò Vấp plot

As said above, the Gò Vấp works had been started as early as in the 1954 exodus from the North, with the care for bigger boys from the Theresa Orphanage from Hà Nội. This was later enlarged by Fr. Cuisset and sponsored by the Lyon Pen Club to include the Lyon works whose beneficiaries were the young criminals taken out from Chí Hoà prison. Then when opportunity arose for us to buy more land from the Gò Vấp railway station, we decided to resell the two plots we had previously bought: the first was the Benedictine monastery in Đà Lạt and the second was Mrs. Carrée's plot in Thủ Đức.

5. The resale of the Benedictine monastery in Đà Lạt

The monastery we had bought in Đà Lạt was in a very beautiful location but not suitable for the formation needs of our Congregation. We therefore decided to resell it to have a fund to buy a large garage in Gò Vấp. It was Mgr. Caprio who suggested us to sell the monastery to the Franciscan Missionary Sisters. The sale contract was signed on April 24 1958, and with the money from this sale, Fr. Cuisset could pay to the Director of the Gò Vấp bus station and garage and acquired ownership of this land on May 1. Of course Mgr. Caprio was very pleased with this deal as was Fr. Majcen because he had bought the monastery at the cost of 1,000,000 dong while he resold it for 1,200,000. But what was still happier was that we now had a more spacious land, opening a new prospect for a Salesian Don Bosco Technical School in Gò Vấp, Sài Gòn. As for Fr. Luvisotto and Bro. Nardin, they handed the monastery in Đà Lạt to the Sisters then came back to Thủ Đức.

6. The sale of Mrs. Carrée's plot in Thủ Đức

As mentioned, we Salesians had in Thủ Đức a plot bought from Mrs. Carrée, a benefactor of ours. But we had never come to

care of this house. In the school year 1957-58 he was sent to Đà Lạt to replace Fr. Musso who was sent to Thủ Đức. In Đà Lạt, Fr. Lusisotto started to put everything in place. He was less patient than Bro. Nardin, and wanted to avoid every useless expense, he dismissed all the boys who had come from Gò Váp for their idleness. He supplied them with some money to earn their own living. But the consequence was that he had to apply to himself his own saying: "He who does something by himself has to do the work of three."

3. Trạm Hành

Madame Lelière, a good Eurasian woman who lived near Thủ Đức house, had a large plot of land in Trạm Hành, 28 km from Đà Lạt. There she had a big house and six small and pretty villas which she currently leased to Saigonese on their summer vacations. The land had repeatedly been occupied by the Japanese, the communists, then Bảo Đại emperor and the nationalists, leading to heavy damage. She wanted to sell it and proposed it to Fr. Majcen and Fr. Cuisset. They came and saw it very suitable for a retreat house and novitiate, but they couldn't find any fund for it. Madame Lelière still insisted them to take the land for their use, believing that sooner or later they would buy it, and her belief became true. Fr. Majcen accepted her proposal and sent his confrere to watch over it. In addition to the house and the villas, there was a spacious area around that could be used as playground and recreation space. Not far away there were two parishes: the Phát Chi for Northern refugees and the Cầu Đất for local Catholics. Both parishes were currently taken care by the Sisters Lovers of the Cross who were involved in catechism teaching. There were also two tea plantations from which tea leaves were brought to Sài Gòn for sale and from Sài Gòn it was transported to India where it would be processed to become the lipton tea with an Indian trade mark.

have formation houses such as aspirantate, novitiate, and studentate. But we keep wondering: Who will come to help us? We are short of staff. Right from the beginning we need five or six priests, councilors, catechists, teachers, economers, technicians. We must urgently learn Vietnamese in order to do some service, then we must hear confession, preach, teach catechism. And a great evangelization will be done in the following years."⁸

This letter reflects the soul of Fr. Majcen and of the first Salesians, as it reflects the desire of the whole Vietnamese Church.

But wasn't it just a will-o-the-wisp if we think of the actual situation of our works? O Mary, will you not accept our prayer for an apostolate that is open ahead?

6. The first provincial delegation council

Because Thủ Đức and Gò Váp was then under Fr. Majcen as provincial delegate, the House Council (including Fr. Majcen, Fr. Generoso and Fr. Cuisset) was at the same time the Provincial Delegation Council. The Council had only a consultative right, their proposals needed the approval of Turin and Hong Kong. There were regular meetings only while Fr. Majcen was provincial delegate, but it was not so when the delegate was Fr. Mario Acquistapace who almost decided everything alone. (As Fr. Luvisotto later commented: "He who does something by himself has to do the work of three.") But later, when Fr. Alessandro Ma was provincial, the council worked better because the Salesians in Vietnam were about to be split from the China Province.

In the first meeting of the council, Fr. Majcen thanked the confreres for having done wonderful and heroic work during the years 1954-56, but this temporary work had now to be brought to a more lasting system. He also told them about his trip to Đà Lạt,

⁸ Cfr. the article "Il nostro lavoro" of Fr. Vode.

about the numerous Catholic youngsters he had met on his trip and he envisioned a promising vocational potentiality. He also spoke of the plot of the Benedictine monastery which would be very suitable for a future novitiate.

In practice, the council decided:

1. Due to changing situation, we cannot continue as we had with the previous system of the Boys Town, but must systematize our work in the model of a Salesian orphanage.

2. Thủ Đức will be a school to gradually become a Salesian aspirantate.

3. In Gò Vấp, we must dismiss the troublemakers and rearrange the vocational sector, admit poor boys, in particular those refugees from the North.

4. As for the location, our Thủ Đức house needs to be reorganized to improve. The existing Gò Vấp house is too small, we need larger space, with our trust in the Providence.

5. About the aspirants, we prefer to receive the boys from refugee families and also from the boys of Southern origin.

6. We will soon consider the possibility of a work in Đà Lạt for the Salesian formation and a vacation retreat for the Salesians.

These resolutions were approved by the superiors in Hong Kong and in Turin, with a recommendation that we should proceed with prudence because of the complicated situation, and always according to the design of Providence.

money. We also hired a very good cook who greatly pleased Fr. Musso.

The MEP priest continued to say Mass here every Sunday. Fr. Musso (Cha Mai) said Mass every Sunday in Trạm Hành where the Sisters Lovers of the Cross kept watch over a small church with a community of the local Catholics. Fr. Musso said Mass in Vietnamese with a Shiuchow accent which was unintelligible for the Vietnamese people.

The confreres from Thủ Đức and Gò Vấp occasionally came to the monastery for their vacation or spiritual retreat. The first spiritual retreat was done in French with a Redemptorist preacher and the participants were Fr. Majcen, Fr. Musso and Bros. Borri, Lục, and Nardin, of whom only Fr. Majcen could understand French.

A car accident

Fr. Majcen used to go to Đà Lạt every month in a car driven by an Salesian aspirant named Thuỷ. It was a very long journey (300 kilometers) and the heat made it very tiring. One day when getting across a montagnard village, the driver became drowsy and hit a montagnard who was zigzagging on his bike: the montagnard hit his head against the windshield. The police came while Fr. Majcen took the injured to hospital. The injury was minor while before the judge the montagnard asked for a very big compensation. However, Fr. Cuisset's intervention with the police had helped to reduce the compensation to a reasonable amount which nevertheless was still too much for Fr. Majcen's poor finance.

2. Fr. Luvisotto to take care of the Đà Lạt Monastery

Fr. Luvisotto who had been sent from Don Bosco School in Macao to Thủ Đức was a practical man and very suitable for the

days later, Fr. Majcen went to see the monastery. Fr. Bernard took him to see everywhere in the monastery. The monastery had first of all a chapel where Fr. Lilière, a MEP, weekly came to say Mass to the faithful who mostly were French and upper-class Vietnamese Catholics. Near the monastery was the Bảo Đại Palace which had then become a summer house for President Diệm who used to attend Mass in the monastery chapel.

Shortly later we got a positive answer from Rome, and then signed the purchase contract between the Benedictine monastery and the Salesians. Mgr. Caprio handed the money to the Benedictines. And so the Benedictines definitely moved to Cambodia and erected a new monastery in a suitable place for prayer.

When the news of the coming of the Salesians reached Đà Lạt, the parish priests of Đà Lạt church¹ was very pleased, hoping the Salesians would build a technical school here.² All the Church authorities were pleased with this new presence of the Salesians; only the civil authorities requested to investigate this location. But President Diệm himself was very pleased because these Salesians were not of French nationality, but Italian, Yugoslavian, Brazilian, etc... according to the Salesian principle of an international Congregation that could not be a danger for social security. Since then no one would object anymore.

After the monastery purchase was completed, Fr. Mario appointed the staff for the years 1956-60. Bro. Nardin became gardener, aided by some bigger boys from Sài Gòn who did not want to work but were not troublemakers. Bro. Nardin reorganized the rabbit hutch, while Fr. Cuisset dismissed the gatekeeper for being a communist suspect, after giving him a large amount of

¹ Now Cathedral of Đà Lạt diocese.

² Actually, it was the Lasalle Brothers, not the Salesians, who later realized this dream.

CHAPTER 22: A REDIMENSIONING OF THỦ ĐỨC HOUSE

On the staff: In the beginning there were only two Salesians: Fr. Majcen and Fr. Generoso Bogo. Next came Bro. Borri (Thầy Báu), Bro. Nardin (Thầy Tiến), the clerics Stra (Thầy Lực) and Vellere (Thầy Trinh). After a while there came Fr. Musso (Cha Mai), Fr. Luvisotto (Cha Lương) and Bro. Donders (Thầy Đô). Only Fr. Majcen, Fr. Generoso and Fr. Cuisset could speak Vietnamese. The others could just babble.

On the work: The house and the plot had to be rearranged. Walls had to be built around to prevent burglary and devastating dogs. Then there must have drainage ditches to prevent flood after the rain. Other works to be built next were a gate post and a house for clothes drying, while the dormitory and the infirmary had to be extended. In addition, the chapel had to be modified to become better and to make the boys accustomed to visit the Blessed Sacrament.

Fr. Luvisotto, a practical man, also had henhouses and pigsties built, while Fr. Generoso had a lot of trees planted to give shadow. We did not forget to have corridors and playgrounds for the recreation of about 300 boys. The superiors led a very popular life: they slept in the same dormitory with the boys to assist them and also to get some fresh air in the night. As for Fr. Majcen, he had a private bedroom next to his office but it was quite narrow and very hot.

Health care

Although the house was quite neat and tidy, and the sanitary conditions also satisfactory, not all had a good health. There were several reasons: the hot climate easily fatigued not only the Salesians who were all western people, but also the boys who came from the North. On the other hand, many boys were undernourished, very sensitive to lungs diseases. A good doctor weekly visited our boys and treated them, and the serious patients had to be sent to the St. Paul Hospitals where the Sisters took care of them with all their love and sacrifice. As for Fr. Majcen with his chronic toothache, he was sent to the hospital in Biên Hòa to be treated by the Hospitallers Brothers.

Financial matters

The financial situation was always unstable, because all the boys were poor and wholly depended on us. A large amount of money had to be spent for their daily food. Other works were also costly, added to the monthly salary to be paid to the teachers. But Providence took care of us. The Sài Gòn Social Department Director, who was a close friend of Fr. Majcen since they were in Hà Nội, was always very generous to him. Fr. Majcen also received aids from Caritas and other organization. He also got help from Fr. Cappelletti and Fr. Louis of the USA Foster Parents Organization. Many years later, they continued to send money to Fr. Majcen in behalf of his boys.

Scholastic matters

With the help of the postulants (the bigger boys who came from other seminaries or congregations), Fr. Generoso organized classes for the elementary programs leading them to high school. Those pupils who showed good abilities were chosen to advance in their studies with a view to becoming Salesian novices in the future. Initially Thủ Đức House continued to be called St. Theresa

1. Mgr. Caprio, Apostolic Nuncio, a friend of Fr. Majcen

Mgr. Caprio, the Nuncio, had his residence in the hospital of the Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres. The climate in Sài Gòn was suffocating for both the Nuncio and Fr. Majcen. But while the Nuncio lived in an air-conditioned room, Fr. Majcen had only the hot air as his companion.

The good Mgr. Caprio often called Fr. Majcen in, and in the cool space of his room, asked Fr. Majcen about things in the North, about our orphans and our plans for the future.

Fr. Majcen was really talkative when dealing with these topics. He talked to Mgr. Caprio about the boys in Thủ Đức and in Gò Vấp, and especially he emphasized his desire to have a vacation house in a cool region for the confreres and for a novitiate.

Mgr. Caprio was very much interested in this. One day he told Fr. Majcen: "Why don't you buy the Benedictine monastery that is for sale in Đà Lạt?"

Fr. Majcen replied: "Yes, we do, but we don't have funds."

"Try to write to Cardinal De Nigris to ask from the Holy See a fund for this. I'll help with a recommendation to the Holy See."

Fr. Majcen accepted Mgr. Caprio's advice and wrote a letter to Rome, while notifying it to the Provincial and his Council in Hong Kong. He also contacted Fr. Bernard OSB who still remained in his monastery in Đà Lạt to watch over it, as other monks had gone to Cambodia to open a new monastery in a more quiet place. A few

told us not to believe the communists' propaganda abroad: Salesians should not leave Vietnam. And so everything was decided.

Fr. Generoso was very pleased with this very precious "Portugal apple", and we Salesians should thank God for letting us stay in Vietnam.

These decisions also pleased Mgr. Simon Hoà Hiền, Bishop of Sài Gòn, and Mgr. Ngô Đình Thục, the President's elder brother. The President himself was always good to us Salesians.

3. A thank you to Mrs. Cúc, a Chinese from Guangdong

Fr. Generoso had had acquaintance with a rich Chinese woman who wanted to offer a large plot of land near Thủ Đức for the benefit of poor children. The land was sandy and not fit for culture, but could be useful to build a school.

Because Fr. Majcen was a provincial delegate, Mrs. Cúc went in a luxury car to Thủ Đức to see him, and officially offered us the plot near Tam Hà, and another plot in Tam Hải. Fr. Majcen thanked her for her generous gift, but could not promise her to use it right away for lack of personnel and funds for the constructions. But Mrs. Cúc said: "Please take the plots right away, otherwise others would come and might occupy them if they were laid waste." Fr. Majcen thought that after a few years, perhaps ten or more years, the land would be very useful to us.

Orphanage as it was in Hà Nội, but little by little, with its development, it was called an Apostolic School, then an Aspirantate, and eventually was called the Don Bosco High School. In the beginning Fr. Majcen had to ask a Lasalle Brother to be a nominal principal of the school, because we then had not a qualified Salesian to assume the role of a principal.

Piety and catechism teaching

While improving other things in the house, the superiors also took special care of the religious life of the boys by the practices of piety and also by the celebration of the triduum, novenas and feasts. They could watch religious and recreational films and filmstrips. Fr. Generoso organized the associations called "compagnies", the altar server group, the choir for smaller boys.

During two years in Hà Nội, Fr. Majcen had of necessity to speak Vietnamese with difficulty. Now in the South, he had to regularly teach catechism, make homilies, give conferences and advice, with a view to helping the boys understand more about Don Bosco and the Salesian vocation. He found as his Vietnamese teacher an orphan boy named Lâm Đức Dũng, an intelligent boy who had finished the form 9 of secondary school, and who knew French. Dũng was an ideal teacher for Fr. Majcen's purpose. In learning Vietnamese, he often confounded the accents and also confounded the Vietnamese with the Chinese he had learnt in Kunming. Dũng greatly helped him improve his Vietnamese, and he was proud when he saw the boys eagerly listen to his talk about religion and Don Bosco. Dũng later wanted to become a Salesian aspirant but the personal condition did not allow him to do so.

Following his example, other foreign Salesians also applied themselves more and more in learning Vietnamese and were engaged in the catechism teaching to the baptized and catechumens.

Cheerfulness in discipline

The wholeheartedly dedicated Salesians always stayed among the children, organizing exciting games and competitions to promote a healthy and cheerful atmosphere. Guests coming to our house were amazed at the serenity and cheerfulness of our boys, a picture they had never seen anywhere. And Salesian discipline emerged from this serene atmosphere. Even the boys who came from the Hà Nội Boys Town and who were used to more freedom there also began to adapt to this new atmosphere.

Good students

In Hà Nội, Mgr. Seitz had received some very intelligent boys and sent them to the school of the Lasalle Brothers. In Thủ Đức, the Lasalle Brothers also had a school and they continued to allow some of our students to study free in their school, because there weren't suitable classes for them. These were also adopted by some better off families and lived with them while still keeping an attachment to and love for the Salesians. They later became doctors, lawyers, teachers, ...

The moving family reunions

Fr. Generoso through the Social Department succeeded to find those families which had been dispersed by the war. Just imagine the joy and happiness of the parents who found again their children whom they had considered as definitely lost.

The adoptions

Many rich families who were without a child wanted to adopt some of our boys. They wanted to take the smartest boys. Our Salesians were against this selective way of doing, because they feared that once these boys were taken away from their familiar setting, they would abandon their faith. There were cases that some

priesthood and return to his family to help his mother manage a hotel in France.

An episode on the anti-president movement was an assassination plot by the bombing of the Independence Palace. One day a shaking detonation was heard in Thủ Đức, accompanied by the roaring of a fighter and then the shooting of machine guns. We saw armed soldiers go out of their camps and advance to a nearby canal. Later we knew that a young pilot had bombed the president palace then jumped into a canal that luckily was not very deep.

3. The hopelessness of the Superiors in Hong Kong at the situation in Vietnam

The political situation in Vietnamwas not clear, but abroad, the press and the left wing in particular made propaganda to dramatize it. According to them, Diem's government could be counted in days, and the communists would soon be ruler of the country. In Hong Kong, our Superiors was seriously hit. The Provincial and his council thought it was time to withdraw all Salesians from Vietnam. But the Salesians themselves in Vietnamhad an opposite assessment. Fr. Mario Acquistapace came, and after gathering the confreres, he announced that we should sell out our houses, entrust the boys to others and left. All the confreres were astonished.

Thus Fr. Acquistapace accompanied by Fr. Majcen, Fr. Cuisset and Fr. Generoso went to discuss the matter with the bishop of Bùi Chu who was currently in Sài Gòn. They were received by the Seminary's director who spoke Italian very well. When they said they wanted to see the bishop, Mgr. Chi and a very close friend of his, Mgr. Lê Hữu Tù, a Cistercian, appeared.

The bishops attentively listened to Fr. Acquistapace's presentation and proposal, and to the great surprise of everybody, they gave a decisive reply. The bishops said they would not buy our land or houses and that there would be no danger at all. They

Vietnam divided between North and South. According to a clause of the 1954 Geneva Agreement, there should be a general election for the reunification of Vietnam, but fearing that the Vietminh would break their promise, President Diệm decidedly refused to carry it out.

Two years later, the French withdrew from Vietnam. Fr. Majcen recalled the story as told by Fr. Cuisset:

"The last French soldiers and French citizen in Vietnam were present, and this was the day when their last legion left Vietnam. A serious and sad ceremony took place: the national anthem was played while the French flag was lowering for the last time from its pole..."

The ceremony marked 90 years of French's occupation of Vietnam, an occupation that had robbed Vietnam of its independence although it had also brought about some benefits.

2. The anti-Diệm groups

President Diệm was a dynamic and upright man who was loved by many in Vietnam, by the Catholics in particular. But he was opposed by those who still missed the French regime, the Caodaists and politico-religious groups like the Buddhists who had formerly been favored by the French regime and now were subject to Diệm's rule. Fr. Majcen was invited to a dinner at the house of a French legionnaire who was married to Mrs. Xuân, an euro-asian woman. During the dinner, Mrs. Xuân kept talking about sad things and discontentment...¹ Years later, Mrs. Xuân had her son named Adam enter the novitiate in France. He later became a Salesian of the Paris Province, but after a few years he left the

¹ In Fr. Majcen's words (AM vol. III, 1956-58): "Sono stato inviato alla cena di aiuto da un legionario francese, che si è sposato con un eurasiana ed anche a Madame Xuân, che parlava durante il pranzo solo di tristezza e malcontentezza..."

boys without a family who wanted to become member of a rich family took the opportunity of a visit to their relatives to frequent some rich families and then eventually stay with them definitely. In itself, the adoption was not bad, because some of the boys who were adopted had a good opportunity to study and they turned out successfully in their career and were very good past pupils. Fr. Generoso Bogo was very interested in this matter, and in principle it was a good solution for the boys.

Creating the personal files

In order to receive social subsidies, our pupils needed to have their personal files including their birth certificates and their family origin, but all those files had been lost on their itinerary Hà Nội — Ban Mê Thuột — Sài Gòn. This was a difficult task because many when entering the Orphanage were still very small and could not recall much about their family or even their date of birth. But Fr. Generoso who was responsible for making these files was clever enough to give them their new date and place of birth, and these pieces of information became their "official" personal file. But in the Church, to enter religious life or to become a priest, canon law requires a dispensation if any candidate does not have the requisite information on his family, as in the case of Fr. John Ty who was granted a dispensation from the Vice-Rector Major Fr. Fedrigotti.

CHAPTER 23: REDIMENSIONING OF GÒ VÁP HOUSE (1957-58)

The Gò Váp House was a branch of the Thủ Đức House. Fr. Majcen as a provincial delegate was also recognized by the civil government, and Fr. Cuisset was a prefect general. Responsible for Gò Váp was Fr. Cuisset, Bro. Mario Lực, and later Fr. Luvisotto and Bro. Carlo Nardin.¹

Origin and location

The Gò Váp House was formerly an old railway station that connected Sài Gòn—Gò Váp—Lộc Ninh. Frs. Berutti and Candella had once gone from Phnompenh to Lộc Ninh by car, then they took the train from Gò Váp to Kunming via Sài Gòn and Hà Nội.

Since 1956 Fr. Majcen often went to Gò Váp to oversee, give guidance in discipline and work. He observed that Bro. Lực was the only Salesian permanent staff who was too busy and tired and not very successful in keeping disciplines because of the evil influence of a number of bad pupils. On the other hand the Social Department continuously demanded us to receive more street boys.

There was a small villa of the former railways supervisor. There also was a large storehouse. Fr. Cuisset had a wall built all around the plot and constructed two long houses by using the iron frames brought from Hà Nội and other materials he was given in Sài Gòn. He wisely guided for the workers to make the most of everything. Thus we had a chapel, a classroom, some workshops

¹ According to Elenco 1956-57.

this advice: "You need to learn the Southern language because the vocations here are abundant, there are many martyrs and consequently there are lots of seeds to grow into Christians and Salesians for the future..."

After a time, some Southern young also entered our novitiate like Vĩnh, Xiêm, Linh... Fr. Majcen also observed that the Southern and Northern boys were difficult to accord with and understand each other. Several authorities recommended us to set up separate aspirantates and novitiates for the Southern and Northern, but as we were determined to keep a united spirit among different nationalities, we now should also keep this unity, in accordance with Don Bosco's spirit.

CHAPTER 25: HOPELESSNESS OF THE SUPERIORS IN HONG KONG AT THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN VIETNAM

1. A missionary life in war situations

From 1935 to 1956 when he came to Sài Gòn, Fr. Majcen, Fr. Majcen rarely enjoyed a quiet, peaceful period without being disturbed in his missionary life. When he was in Kunming, it was the guerrilla war of Mao Zedong, then the World War II between 1940 and 1945, and again in North Vietnam with the Vietminh guerrilla war leading to the 1954 exodus. Together with other Salesians, Fr. Majcen tried to save as many as possible the orphans from their miserable lives and brought them from Hà Nội to Ban Mê Thuột and then to Sài Gòn. Then he left Hong Kong and came again to Vietnam to help Fr. Cuisset in this burden, in a

who were still too attached to their Caodaism. Some of them became baptized, and that was really a miracle! Twenty years later, one of these boys wrote to Fr. Majcen expressing his gratitude for having been accepted, while some others also paid visits to Fr. Majcen in Trạm Hành. It is worth mentioning that the Caodaists believe in Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary. They also believe in the Buddha, Victor Hugo and Confucius...

A visit from USA

One day, Fr. Giulio Slapsak, a priest of Slovenian origin who was in charge of the aids for the Slovenian emigrants abroad, came to visit our house in Thủ Đức. Fr. Majcen ceded his own room for the guest, but it was very small and hot. The guest could not sleep at all because of the heat of Sài Gòn. Besides, he had to share our meals that were then very poor. Still, one day a whirlwind swept over our house, taking off all the roofs. It was like a nightmare for Fr. Giulio. But he was astonished to see our boys, under Fr. Generoso's instruction, collect all the debris and help to put everything in place. And the good Fr. Giulio could not wait for another whirlwind: he left without forgetting to leave us an amount of money, and he continued to help us later.

Another happy and important visit was by the secretary of Fr. Capelletti, Director of the Office for missionary aids in USA. He made a survey on our conditions and since then the Office had paid special attention to us and helped us more.

Fr. Majcen and Fr. Cuisset's visits to the bigger churches in the South

In these visits, Fr. Majcen noticed a marked difference between the Northerners who were very dynamic and systematic in comparison with the Southerners who were affable and gentle, fruit of their pleasant life and also of the tropical climate; even the Southern accent was also more melodious. The local priests gave

and also the bathrooms and toilets. With this we had a small boarding school for our student workers.

The apprentices

There were 60 apprentices who came from Hà Nội, then some more sent by the Social Department. They were divided into two groups: the smaller boys learned at home, the bigger ones outside. Responsible for the teaching were Bro. Lục and an outside teacher who was graduated from Cao Thắng Technical School.

Discipline

Fr. Majcen had a unique opportunity to give a goodnight talk to them. He spoke of discipline or something like that, but at once saw a grudge expressed in the face of some boys. In fact, one morning Bro. Lục informed Fr. Majcen that two or three boys escaped taking with themselves their beds, cupboards and clothes of other boys as well as boxes of tools given by Mr. Thomas of the Aids Organization² and by the Social Department...

Discipline had almost gone with the wind. The pupils had been left for a long time in a state of idleness in the last days in Hà Nội when the situation was uncertain, while the stay in Ban Mê Thuột had not been permanent and so, when they came to Gò Váp, they had lost their liking for work. They wanted now to be as free as when they had been in the Boys Town in Hà Nội where they could have everything and receive gifts from Mgr. Seitz. They therefore began to be rebellious and disappoint everybody. They defied the timetable and did whatever they liked. Fr. Cuisset being often absent could do nothing, while Bro. Lục met with much difficulty because he was Chinese and could not speak Vietnamese; still, he was of small stature.

² "Dal CARE – Mr. Thomas".

Jobs

As said earlier, many had jobs outside. Some smaller boys learn some elementary lessons in trade with Bro. Lục while others was taught by an outside teacher, but because these boys were too undisciplined, the teacher eventually had to resign.

Fr. Cuisset had to dismiss the stealers first, then dismiss those who had become dangerous morally. Shortly later he dismissed others after having found jobs for them and giving some money for their immediate necessities. So there remained only the smaller boys and about ten bigger boys who, though they were reluctant to work or study, were harmless for others.

It was evident that this situation must be changed, but it needed some time for Gò Váp to really become in 1958 a school and an aspirantate for those who wanted to become a Salesian coadjutor.

The young lions of Lyon

There was in Gò Váp a small and autonomous section of a small re-educational camp that we have mentioned earlier. The boys belonging to this section were called the “young lions of Lyon”, after the name of the Lyon Pen Club in Sài Gòn that sponsored it.

The existence of this work refers us to the well-known prison of Chí Hoà in Sài Gòn. With the permission of the director of this prison of 300 [rooms] and thousands of prisoners,³ Fr. Cuisset could visit it. It was partitioned into various sections and prisoner's wards.⁴ It had another branch in Thủ Đức.

³ “Direttore di questa città di 300 e più mille prigionieri”.

⁴ Later, two of our priests, Frs. Joseph Hinh and Fabiano Hào would be kept here by the communists.

sent by Fr. Majcen to Gò Váp to fill in the places of those who had been dismissed.

A visit by President Diệm to Thủ Đức house

The Social Department Director had spoken of our preventive system to President Diệm. And unexpectedly the President came to our house. Fr. Majcen was keeping order in the classes when he heard the roaring of police cars and saw many policemen coming, all armed to the teeth and came towards him without saying a word, then they guarded at all the strategic spots. The Fr. Majcen saw Mr. Hay, the President's secretary, get off his jeep and introduced the President to Fr. Majcen. The President saluted Fr. Majcen and asked him about his Salesians and the boys' workshops. Fr. Majcen explained to the President that we had in Thủ Đức only one sewing workshop while a big workshop was under construction in Gò Váp, under Fr. Cuisset's direction.

After his visit, the President shook Fr. Majcen's hand and left. His car went in the direction of the University Village, a beautiful site with small pretty gardens... The President wanted us to build there a church for the Catholic professors, but could not afford it for lack of staff.

The President's sister-in-law and the Caodaist boys

One day Mrs. Nhu, the President's sister-in-law, escorted by several officers and her secretary, visited us. She was sort of ‘elongated arm’ of the President in the social services. She wanted to visit all the school's sectors and then spoke of the Caodaist boys of an army children school that had just been closed. She asked Fr. Majcen to receive these boys whose number was up to 100. Fr. Majcen did not refuse it strait, but he said he could not take so many at once. Later, due to her insistence through the Social Department, he agreed to receive some who were the best boys but

was a younger brother of Vincent Quý. All three later became Salesian priests. Fr. Phùng would become a rector and parish priest of a very poor parish named Tân Cang, and Fr. Quý became a chaplain for the army of the Republic of Vietnam, then immigrated to USA. Fr. Cho was very good at languages and later got a Doctor in Theology and would become a Dean and professor at Dallas University. Some other boys were later admitted but would withdraw for not having a vocation. As Don Bosco said: “Try all but admit the good ones to our Congregation.”¹

Three seminarians from Hué

A Redemptorist Father brought to us two seminarians with a recommendation of Mgr. Urutia, MEP, bishop of Hué. With regard to the aspirants, even when there was no room, Fr. Majcen could always find ways to accept them, because our main aim was to form young Salesians. It was a feast of Our Lady. It was she who brought us Mr. Fabiano Hào.² Another boy was brought to us by the Redemptorists was Peter Đệ, who would replace Fr. Majcen as a novice master after 1976, then was a theology teacher and rector of Xuân Hiệp community in Thủ Đức. There was still another aspirant named Nguyên who later was indiscreetly dismissed by a superior before the novitiate year 1961-62 started.

The vocational students

The Social Department and some other people also recommended to us some boys to learn a trade. These boys were

¹ “Provati tutti, accettati quelli che sono buoni.”

² Fr. Majcen was very happy to say that when he wrote these lines, he received a letter from Fr. Fabiano Hào, then a novice master, announcing that he was preparing for 10 novices to make their profession and 4 others to enter the novitiate. Fr. Hào’s health was poor after 4 years in prison and was still needing medicine.

With a stirred heart, Fr. Cuisset was deeply moved by the conditions of these youngsters among whom some had committed murder or belonged to black gangs, but there were also youngsters who were innocent, victims of the disturbing social situation. FR. CUISSET felt a call to save these youngsters in Don Bosco’s name.

With Fr. Mario’s blessing in 1963, at the beginning of the school year and by a contract with Mr. Munier, Director of the Lyon Pen Club⁵, Fr. Cuisset started the apostolic work “The Youngsters of Lyon Club”. He bought a plot next to the existing one and built the dormitory, classrooms and an office for the Director of this work, Fr. Cuisset. He received subsidies for himself and for a supervisor.

Fr. Majcen personally met the 20 to 30 boys who had been selected by Fr. Cuisset at the Chí Hoà prison. Once released and came to us, some of them escaped, some others returned to their home, and they were not accustomed to discipline. We educated them by goodnight talks. Fr. Majcen was really interested in them and he studied a lot about this kind of apostolate. After many years, he had an opportunity to contact them personally when they went to Trạm Hành during their summer vacation.

Then there was some rumor about this marvelous French priest: where was he now? Where had he gone in 1964? Anyhow, Fr. Cuisset had truly and wholeheartedly worked for these boys for seven or eight years.

In the following years, Fr. Majcen, Fr. Stra and Fr. Massimino tried to apply suitable Salesian approaches to continue the re-education of these “delinquents”.

⁵ “Il direttore del Pen Club Munier”

Increase of pupils

In Sài Gòn, Fr. Majcen met an old friend of his, the former Director of the Social Department in Hà Nội, who was now Director of the Social Department in Sài Gòn. He proposed to Fr. Majcen to receive the abandoned boys who had emigrated from the North. After a survey, Fr. Majcen exposed his point: "We are working in the field of social service, because we are a pro-government entity in this field when we accept the boys subsidized by the Department monthly. We however cannot accept all of them, but only those who are good and who show intelligent enough to learn or know a trade. We want to do a systematic charitable work, and we try our best to make them become good and useful citizen, as Don Bosco said."

These words pleased the Director. Fr. Majcen later would repeat them to other guests, whether they were Vietnamese or foreigners such as the representatives of the organizations of Misereor, CARE, Caritas, or ambassadors, ... who came to see him. They were pleased with our principle. The Social Department Director himself also presented this principle to President Ngô Đình Diệm and his secretary, Mr. Hay.

A truck full of children

One day, a St. Paul Sister from Đà Nẵng brought 40 children on a truck to Fr. Majcen and asked him to receive them. Though he was a close friend of the bishop of Đà Nẵng, Fr. Majcen said he could not receive all of them. He said: "We cannot accept so

numerous children. OK, now you are tired by the journey, please take a rest then have breakfast. Then Fr. Generoso will select those that we can accept, but I must admit that we have no more room." The good Sister then left disappointed and had to find another place for her children.

From Rạch Báp, Bình Dương, to Tam Hà parish

A father in black gown took his son to Fr. Majcen, with a recommendation letter from Fr. Cao Đức Thuận. The boy showed himself really good and poor before Fr. Majcen's eyes. His ancestors had been persecuted for their faith for more than a hundred years, and his grandfather still kept the relics of a martyr on the family's altar. This boy was Dominic Uyễn, who would be among the first Salesian novices of Fr. Majcen and who would later study at the PAS. He would be ordained priest, said his first Mass in the St. Khang Church in Tam Hà, Thủ Đức. After 1975 he became a parish priest of the Liên Khuông parish and rector of a group of the 10 deacons and new priests between 1975-1978. Then he was arrested and imprisoned by the Communists, and was released a year later by the intervention of Mgr. Lâm, bishop of Đà Lạt. Fr. Majcen thought this boy mightbe a good candidate for the Salesian works in the future in Vietnam. And he thought these days were a good opportunity for us to catch big fishes for the Salesians.

Three other aspirants from Nha Trang

In Nha Trang, there lived a famous Chàm tribe who had had a high civilization among the world civilizations before Christ. A former military officer who had been a Franciscan aspirant, Vincent Quý, presented himself to Fr. Majcen to join the Salesian Congregation and was admitted. He was immediately appointed to teach math and French to Form 7, the then highest class in Thủ Đức school. When the aspirantate started, a Franciscan Father led to us two boys named Peter Cho and Michael Phùng. The latter

Diệm, the approved document was signed by the President on October 15 1963.

A definite return to Thủ Đức

On May 25 1959, Fr. Majcen returned to Thủ Đức definitely. Everybody was happy to know he would be a novice master. All the aspirants surrounded him to congratulate him and to show confidence in their future.

Celebrating the Feast of the Virgin Mary at Gò Váp

May 31 1959 was a solemn feast day in gratitude to Our Blessed Lady. Frs. Mario Acquistapace, Cuisset and Generoso had decided to have a common celebration in honor of Mary Help of Christians for both communities at Gò Váp where the church was large. Fr. Majcen was invited to give the homily in Vietnamese.

Fr. Majcen's preparation for his new apostolate

To prepare for his ministry as a novice master, Fr. Majcen made visits to the novice masters of the Franciscans and the Redemptorists. He also consulted with Mgr. Lê Hữu Tù who was a Cistercian, and Mgr. Phạm Ngọc Chi who was drafting the regulations for the Đà Nẵng Sisters Lovers of the Cross. Fr. Majcen carefully read the instructions of Fr. Pietro Ricaldone on Salesian formation, the books of Fr. Barberis and Fr. Terrone, and studied ascetic books in French and Vietnamese, while learning Vietnamese terminologies of asceticism. Unlike other novice masters who gave conferences in French, Fr. Majcen decided to use Vietnamese to give his conferences to his novices. He also wished to have the Salesian Constitutions translated in Vietnamese, a thing that he had to wait for some more years. Of course all this preparation was very hard for him, but it proved to be very helpful for his ministry in the future.

8. In a region bordering three countries

When they arrived in the region bordering Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, Fr. Majcen and Fr. Faugère stopped to look at the trails crossing the forests and leading to the elephants' country (Vientiane) and to the Angkor Wat, vestiges of very ancient civilizations. In this region, the Vietnamese refugees cultivated plantations of coffee, tea and industrial plants. At that time, no one was aware of the fact that not far from there, the communist had made the famous Ho Chi Minh trail, a route for the transport of the weapons and ammunitions during the atrocious Vietnam war. In this strategic region, President Diệm had begun to have the Quảng Đức City built where he repeatedly called on the Salesians to open a school: a desire that we could not satisfy for lack of personnel.

9. Ban Mê Thuột

Upon their arrival in Ban Mê Thuột (BMT), Fr. Majcen noticed the many changes effected since 1954. In that night, about 60 Hà Nội past pupils came to greet him. They belonged to the group entrusted to Fr. Faugère by Fr. Cuisset before the latter went to Sài Gòn.

Because they had learned a trade in the workshops of the RVN Army, they now had a status in their lives. Great was the joy of the meeting that day. Fr. Majcen was happy to see that they behaved much better than the troublemakers in Gò Váp.

The Past Pupils Association

On the next day, Mgr. Seitz came to Ban Mê Thuột for the formation of the Past Pupils Association with a view to creating a link between the Northern and Southern past pupils. Fr. Majcen presented an image of a Past Pupils Association: what it should be like, what activities and meetings it should have. The present past pupils here only intended to have a friendly association of mutual

help in difficult situations. Fr. Majcen instead suggested that the Past Pupils Association should aim at continuing Don Bosco's pedagogical system in society. A compromise was reached at the end: There would be a general meeting during the Têt to fix a date for an annual meeting and monthly meetings for an exercise of happy death.

10. A visit to Kontum

Mgr. Seitz invited Fr. Majcen to visit his Kontum Diocese where there had been a seminary for the Vietnamese and a new secondary school run by the Lasalle Brothers for the Banar children, a more advanced ethnic group among the other ethnics. Fr. Majcen was very happy to meet Fr. Vacher who was always busy with his contructions. Mgr. Seitz told Fr. Majcen that the roads here were not very safe, because the Vietminh had withdrawn into the forests nearby, after the Vietnam partition event. During this trip, Fr. Majcen observed many villages with bamboo huts. It was there that the village's young men and women came to pass their night. A Banar village chief kept guard and alerted them whenever the elephants came. At the alert, the young men and women shouted and made noise to drive them away. On this occasion, Fr. Majcen also met Mr. Thủ, an old catechist from Hà Nội who currently ran a printing shop to publish catechism books in Banar. Fr. Majcen also visited a leprosarium where there was a pretty chapel to provide the patients with Jesus's consolation.

He saw many interesting things during this trip, and when he returned to Sài Gòn, he was very enthusiastic after having witnessed the missionaries' lives and being enriched by their missionary experiences.

On the plot that was formerly the bus station and garage there was now a workshop with carpentry and mechanics equipment bought with the money sent by Fr. Rauh⁴ from the Bonn Missionary Support Office. The technical education was taught by Bros. De Marchi, De Groot, Mario Lục and a teacher recommended by Monsignor Schultz.

Fr. Chong and Fr. Cuisset had to purchase at a high price a small house on the neighborhood for an infirmary under the care of Bro. Borri. Because he wanted a compensation for his house, the owner had been reluctant to leave the plot we had bought.

The meeting of the Salesian Administration of Gò Váp house:

Here are the proceedings of the meeting:

The meeting on May 24 1959 of the Salesian Administration of Vietnam was composed of:

President: Fr. Mario Acquistapace.

Administrative members: Fr. Pierre Cuisset and Fr. Andrej Majcen.

All the members have been considered and approved by the governments of Hà Nội and Sài Gòn, with the approval documents numbers ... signed on the ...

The topic of the meeting has been to deliberate on the legal purchase of the plot of Thủ Đức and of the railway and bus station of Gò Váp. The Administration has applied for the signature of the President of the Republic of Vietnam by which the plots officially become the legal properties of the Salesian Congregation of Don Bosco.

Thus by the grace of Mary on her month of May, and after an exchange between the Vicar of the Rector Major and the President

⁴ A friend of Fr. Majcen and Fr. Mario.

Salesians, but he emphasized the priority of the trade and technical education. Fr. Fedrigotti and Fr. Cuisset had an audience with President Diệm. As usual, the President continuously talked alone during the meeting, and Fr. Fedrigotti had to wait for the President to stop to light his cigarette to address him: "Mr. the President, we'd like to ask for a favor." The President replied: "Yes, please." "We'd like you to officially recognize our properties in Thủ Đức and Gò Váp."¹ The President immediately commissioned his secretary councilor to prepare all the legal procedures for the recognition of the Salesian Society as a legal entity, which had already been granted in Hà Nội since 1953 with the intervention of Mgr. Seitz. The legal procedures took long before the recognition document was signed by the President on October 15 1963, just 15 days before Diệm was assassinated.²

A small celebration for Fr. Majcen's return in Vietnam

In the next morning, the Gò Váp children had a celebration welcome back Fr. Majcen to Vietnam. They played music with the brass band³ and there was also a performance which they had previously demonstrated on the occasion of the visit of Cardinal Agagianian.

Development steps of the Gò Váp house

Fr. Majcen was happy to see the new church dedicated to St. Joseph, Patron of worker students. The church had been built under the supervision of Fr. Cuisset and Fr. Luvisotto. The church could contain 500 people, and all the furniture was made by the carpentry shop's students themselves.

¹ And later also the land of Trạm Hành.

² President Diệm was assassinated on November 2 1963.

³ The instruments bought by Fr. Majcen with the money given by Fr. Vesco at Villa Moglia and sent by Fr. Matko.

The Past Pupils Movement

The Past Pupils Movement launched in the BMTmeeting began to develop and continued to exist until present. In 1957, during the Tết, a general meeting of the past pupils of Ban Mê Thuột and Thủ Đức in the presence of the assistants of Thủ Đức and Gò Váp houses. Among participants were also the past pupils who were studying at university. In the meeting Mgr. Seitz highlighted his idea that the members should commit themselves to mutual help in difficult moments such as unemployment, unhappiness, and in the events in their lives that needed extraordinary expenses such as weddings or funerals. There emerged also an idea about a past pupils' village. Fr. Majcen was not against such ideas, but emphasized the association's purpose and need of not only for mutual help but also allegiance to the Association's statute and the leadership of a President freely elected. As a result, Mr. Chuyên, a sewing shop head, was elected president, aided by a secretary and a treasurer.

In 1958 there was an important meeting of the Hà Nội past pupils in the presence of Mgr. Seitz, Fr. Faugère, and Teacher Khắc, secretary of the former Hà Nội Christ the King City. In addition, there were also Fr. Majcen, Fr. Cuisset, Fr. Generoso and Bro. Borri. Past pupils came from everywhere. Mgr. Seitz spoke of the need of unity to help each other in their piety and their living Don Bosco's spirit. After lively discussions on various matters, it was decided to invite Mr. Hảo, a lawyer, and Teacher Khắc, the former secretary, to elaborate a statute of the association and to present to the meeting the following year. For the time being, the Association's executive board would meet once a month in Thủ Đức. It was also decided to issue a monthly bulletin called Trúc Lâm to supply the members with information on the Association and also to remind of the former Trúc Lâm Villa in Hà Nội Christ the King City.

CHAPTER 27: FR. MAJCEN'S CHERISHED INITIATIVES THROUGH 20 YEARS IN VIETNAM

This is the missionary ideal of the first Salesian missionary group that was presented alive in us “with the conviction of hope against all hope”¹, based on the presence of Mary Help of Christians. It was the missionary ideal that Fr. Majcen had in his heart and he shared it to Fr. Cuisset, Fr. Mario, Fr. Stra, Mgr. Seitz, Fr. Generoso, Bro. Borri and other missionaries.

Under a few headings below, I'll present some of the initiatives that has become our Salesian stigma through 20 years and up to present. Perhaps I will reiterate them in my autobiography to present them clearer and better. We'll speak of our failures and successes as consequences of our efforts.

1. The Salesian Cooperators in Vietnam

Mrs. Carrée was our first Cooperator with a Cooperator Certificate granted by the Rector Major. Fr. Cuisset asked me to write a brief statute for the Salesian Cooperators, illustrated by a few stories on the great Cooperators in the world. I wrote them with the help of Mr. Dũng, my Vietnamese teacher. Fr. Cuisset had the booklet beautifully printed.

Some bulletins also printed the content of this 3rd Salesian Family which I had written. But after my vacation leave in 1958, Fr. Mario or probably some others abandoned this idea indefinitely.²

Fr. Cappelletti's idea on the Cooperators in USA developed the aim of helping poor children in the form of the godparents.

¹ “Contra spem in spem credidi.”

² Don Mario, e forse altri abbandonano la idea sine die...

much, and went to Austria to say farewell to his uncles and relatives.

He went to say farewell to Mgr. Kerec and the Vietnamese novices and left for Paris on the same day. He went to Turin to say farewell to Fr. Vode who offered him some Italian and French books that would be very useful for his work in the novitiate. He greeted the superiors and immediately went to Rome because his flight ticket was going to expire. Unable to find a straight flight to Sài Gòn, he took off via Cambodia. In Pnom-Penh, he stayed the night at the MEP house and set out for Sài Gòn the next morning. Unexpectedly he came to Gò Váp on May 19 1959, exactly one year after he left Vietnam.

CHAPTER 29: FR. MAJCEN WAS APPOINTED NOVICE-MASTER AND ACTING RECTOR WHEN FR. GENEROSO WAS AWAY (1959-1960)

During the time Fr. Majcen was in Europe, among others, there were these new and important events:

After the meeting of Fr. Majcen, Fr. Mario and Fr. Ziggotti, and after the General Chapter in August 1958, Fr. Tohill was appointed Provincial of the Chinese-Vietnamese Province, while Fr. Mario was appointed Provincial Delegate for Vietnam. The study programs for the Gò Váp house were limited to the technical and trade training only, the secondary school program being interrupted.

The visit of Fr. Fedrigotti, Vicar of the Rector Major

It was in that time that Fr. Fedrigotti, Vicar of the Rector Major, made his visit to the Salesian Works in Vietnam. In general, Fr. Fedrigotti approved the development program made by the

The last days with his mother

Back to Yugoslavia, he had a 6 month stay permission. His mother was very happy and wanted him to stay longer because she was old and would not live long. In fact, she died just a few years later, in 1961. Fr. Majcen's presence had prolonged her life. She was happy to be with her son, attend his Mass and hear his prayers. Actually Fr. Majcen's health did not improve much; he still had a pain on his left cheek. Moreover, since he was not a permanent resident, he had to be treated secretly by a doctor who treated him free of charge. But he did not want to let her mother and sister know all this.

On the last days of his stay with his mother, he went with her to his father's grave where her mother had decorated with flowers and candles. Fr. Majcen blessed the tomb, too moved to contain his tears. Seeing this scene, his mother thought of a day when she herself would lie beside her husband's tomb.

And the parting day came: The train arrived at Zagabria station. He seemed to be serene but inside he was full of sadness, being aware that he would no longer see his mother again. He look out through the train window and wave farewell to his mother for the last time. His heart beat hard and fast, but he got a consolation from prayers. He entrusted everything to God and to Mary's mighty help. After he had arrived in Vietnam, he received his mother's letter saying that his departure was like a funeral. And for him, it was an indescribable sacrifice.

Return to Vietnam

In Rakownik, Fr. Majcen bid farewell to and thanked the Salesians there. He visited the Shrine of Mary Help of Christians for the last time, pledged his allegiance to her and parted. In Trieste, he bid farewell to Fr. Studec, who had helped him so

Throughout 22 years (1954-1976)³, I had received a very big amount of money from them. But I had to maintain a continuous correspondence in English and Vietnamese between the beneficiaries and the cooperators. Fr. Bellido also did this work for the Salesian aspirants. This kind of correspondence was also maintained with the Spanish cooperators.

2. The idea on the Past Pupils Association

Mgr. Seitz himself promoted this idea. He invited me to come to Ban Mê Thuôt for a meeting with the past pupils who had come from Hà Nội. From this emerged the Past Pupils Association which was recognized by the government and which met annually under the presidency of lawyer Hồ and Dr. Quát. These two also attended the World Conference of the past pupils. Bro. Bullo⁴ had developed this work very well and which brought in financial support from the Association.

3. The Association of the Devotees of Mary Help of Christians

Fr. Zigiotti, Rector Major, promoted the Association of the Devotees of Mary Help of Christians and I asked that Vietnam be registered as a member. But with my new obedience letter in 1958, this initiative withered and died. Fr. Mario, a charismatic man for the devotion to Mary Help of Christians, helped to propagate the devotion to Mary Help of Christians everywhere. But this devotion had a popular and individual character and was only suitable where there was the Salesians' presence.

³ The time Fr. Majcen lived and worked in VN.

⁴ Now working in Ethiopia.

4. The Organization for the help of young delinquents

The Christ the King Boys Town in Hà Nội had been an organization of this kind, and it was restructured in the South to become an organization for the service of poor but good children, and we should manage it according to the preventive system. Fr. Cuisset experienced this hot problem in the organization of his Lyon boys, a kind of rehabilitation in a quarter of Don Bosco Gò Vấp. Because it was a too complicate work for us Salesian, our Superiors had abandoned it, and I and Fr. King had to continue the education for the last 20 Lyon boys in Trạm Hành.

Nevertheless, the desire of helping young delinquents remained still alive in our minds... I attempted to have our aspirants organize catechism classes and activities—a kind of Oratory—to these poor boys in Thủ Đức, and Fr. Massimino did the same for the young inmates in Đà Lạt. Other initiatives were also interested by the government.

5. Help for political prisoners, drugs traffickers and thieves

Later, when Fr. Mario was a provincial delegate, he also frequently visited the prisoners. The aspirants also volunteered to organize activities and entertainments in the prisons, especially for the young delinquent, especially under the guidance of Fr. Hiên, Fr. Cho... Once, they even managed to successfully organize a one day excursion for the young prisoners of Thủ Đức with a lunch, snacks and other entertainments...

Fr. Majcen never forgot to encourage these activities by giving concrete supports. Of course due to our financial difficulties, the supports could not be regular, but whenever the condition permitted, he always afforded to help, for example, Fr. Donders (Cha Đô) with his street boys, Fr. Aarts (Cha An) with the elderly and the sick, and Fr. De Meulenaer(Cha Ngọc) to help those families repair their houses damaged by bombs.

A visit to the novices at Villa Moglia and Lanuvio

Upon returning to Italy from Austria, on Fr. Antal's advice, he visited the novices at Villa Moglia near Chieri. He stayed there for a few days and eagerly listened to the conferences of Fr. Silvio Siri, the novice master, to his 70 novices. Fr. Majcen asked him:

— How do you prepare your conferences?

— I go to the LDC bookshop to buy the best books to read by night and then lecture to the novices on the next day.

— I can't use this method, because we can't find good books in Vietnam. Still, I am not good at expressing in Vietnamese.

At Villa Moglia, Fr. Majcen met Fr. Tirone, his former Provincial, who had an extraordinary memory that helped him remember many things that had happened to the religious life in Radna.

Then Fr. Majcen went to the novitiate Lanuvio near Rome, where Fr. Gorick was novice master. This Father had been his novice companion years ago. In a consultation, Fr. Majcen asked:

— Do you read as much as Fr. Siri?

— In fact I can't read as much. Therefore in my conferences, I usually speak about Don Bosco and the Constitutions for about 15 minutes. Then I review my previous conferences.

— This would be suitable for me. I would like to ask you one more question. Fr. Siri told me you used to receive your novices at night when they have problems, isn't that true?

— No, no. If anyone comes to me after night prayer, I would throw a shoe at him and send him away. God created the night for us to sleep!

A visit to Austria

Upon his return to Italy, he set forth Klagenfurt via Trieste and stayed in the Salesian houses in Austria. Here he met Fr. Cigan, an old novice companion who was now taking care of the Slovenian secondary students. He also visited the Salesian immigrants who had fled to Austria during the most difficult moment and who were now working as parish priests in Austria. In Kanten, a wholly Slovenian parish, he met Fr. Matko, his former assistant at the Rakovnik school many years ago. Since then, this Father had continued to help the Chinese and Vietnamese pupils with subsidies.

Then he went to see his uncles who had immigrated in Austria when Yugoslavia was created. Their families solemnly welcomed him at Gratzkorn, near the cities of Gratz and Kniefeld where uncle Hans and uncle Toni lived. Uncle Toni arranged for the Radio-Gratz to have an interview with Fr. Majcen which was broadcast in that same evening. The broadcast lasted for 10 minutes, and although the German of Fr. Majcen was full of mistakes, the listeners said it was very interesting and vivid.

Together with his uncles, he went to Vienna where there was the provincial office, to see Fr. Guglielme Smidt, who had been a Rector of the Salesian School in Macao and was currently in charge of the Office for the Sponsorship of Missions. Fr. Majcen also made a pilgrimage to the Shrine of the Virgin Mary of Mariazell where as a child he had come with his mother.

While he was in Austria, he heard the news of the death of Pope Pius XII, and twenty days later, the news of Pope John XXIII's election.

These were some distinguished concerns that I and the Salesians had done in Vietnam during war time. On the other hand, as a rector and later as a novice master, I also tried to form my novices and future Salesians to prepare themselves for the service of their countrymen and for the reconstruction of their country.

6. Restructuring the whole Salesian Works in Vietnam in 1958

Two years had passed in the midst of worries about the dangers and crises that questioned the very existence of our works. Two years during which we had been trying to find out a way to serve the young, or at least a way to identify ourselves and to get Salesian candidates... and above all, to find a land on which we could do our service. Fr. Cuisset was the precious man who could find those who wanted to sell their properties (actually they were French who were going to leave Vietnam, their old colony). I and he had bought the monastery in Đà Lạt (1956), then sold it (1958), received Mrs. Carrée plot (1958) then sold it, and finally bought a very good plot in Trạm Hành for our novitiate.

Fr. Mario, Fr. Generoso, Fr. Cuisset and Fr. Majcen had a meeting of the provincial delegation council to discuss the restructuring of our Salesian work for the future.

— The Thủ Đức house was to be an aspirantate with a chapel and a school and we would continue to receive catholic boys who might show a clear religious vocation.

— The Gò Vấp house was to be a trade school and an orphanage for the orphans from Hà Nội and for the apprentices.

— The Novitiate in Trạm Hành for prospective Salesian novices.

— There would be a studentate of theology in Đà Lạt, even a Pontifical Atheneum, a long time dream that even now we were not ready for it.

Fr. Majcen was entrusted to present all this to Mgr. Simon Hoà Hiền of Sài Gòn, and to ask his blessing as well as a rescript to make the Thủ Đức and Gò Váp houses canonically religious houses after Gò Váp was split from Thủ Đức house.

While the General Chapter 1958 was in its preparation stage, Fr. Majcen presented to his Provincial his case of 25 years far away from his country and his aged mother who was going to die, as well as his disturbing health because of physical and mental toil. As a result, Fr. Mario gave him permission to go to his home country. In the meanwhile the Provincial made necessary decisions regarding personnel, by sending more confreres and presenting to the Superiors, to Fr. Fredrigotti in particular, a more precise vision about the works and the perspectives.

At the beginning of the Oratory, Don Bosco said trees should be replanted in order to thrive. In the same way, the Hà Nội works had had to be reorganized fourteen times before it was settled in the Christ the King City or the Theresa Orphanage. Then it was replanted in Thủ Đức, Gò Váp, and then Đà Lạt. Finally it was definitely settled in 1958 as we have just said. But since 1975, it had again been replanted in 14 different locations. Indeed, the Salesian Works in Vietnam was like Don Bosco's tree, repeatedly to be moved and replanted here and there. Jesus and Mary Most Holy do not need a fixed location. Of course benefactors and money were all temporarily useful and necessary. But God and Mary wanted us to develop and transmit Don Bosco's spirit. Whoever believes in the Providence can realize that Don Bosco's spirit planted in Vietnam has continually developed, has become purified and invigorated. We must really be grateful to the most holy Mary Immaculate and Help of Christians.

master said: "The first lesson is to let the novices pick the grapes in the vineyard of the novitiate; I stay there with them, observing their characters and temperament. After a month, after knowing their endurance, I begin to give them a program." Fr. Majcen was very surprised at this way of formation, but little by little he saw the novice master taught his novices on prayer and work in his conferences and good night talks...

Fr. Majcen also consulted Fr. Amil, a veteran novice master, who explained him what he did: Read the Constitution article by article, and explained Don Bosco's thought according to the interpretation of Fr. Barberis and of other first Salesians.

A visit to Fr. Petit and Mgr. Kerec

From the novitiate, Fr. Majcen went to Marseille to see Fr. Petit, a former Rector of the Marseille house, a Salesian house that had become historic with a number of Don Bosco's visits on his trips to France. Fr. Petit recalled many souvenirs of the old days, including a mention of Fr. Lodovico Olive, a Marseillaise who had been a member of the missionary group to go to China in 1906. Fr. Majcen told Fr. Petit about Hà Nội, about Fr. Dupont and also about Kunming. Fr. Petit was still energetic and was currently a confessor of the Marseille community.

From Marseille Fr. Majcen went to San Cyr to see Mgr. Kerec. The Monsignor was currently confessor and catechism teacher to the Mary Help of Christians School. It was from this school that, said the school's director, St. Mazzarello in her last sickness had departed for the Mother House in Nizza Monferrato to spend her last days in her life.

Fr. Majcen stayed with Mgr. Kerec for a few days during which they talked about many things. Mgr. Kerec asked about the situation in Yugoslavia where he wanted to return.

recovered, he sent him to have more rest at the Ivrea studentate where the first Slovenian Salesians had studied.

Going to France

When Fr. Majcen was at Ivrea, Fr. Cuisset sent a telegram asking him to go to Nice, France, to take two Vietnamese aspirants to La Navarre to make their novitiate there. When he came to Nice, he asked for the Don Bosco School but nobody could show him. At last, a monsieur approached him saying: "Wouldn't you go to Don Bosco-Nice? It's near here." And he showed him the way. Arriving at Nice, he was very tired and sat on his luggage, waiting to see the Rector. And the Rector went out to greet him. Knowing that he was exhausted, the Rector offered him a French wine and a good dinner before he had a good sleep in a very comfortable room. On the next day, the two Vietnamese aspirants came to greet him. They spoke French quite fluently.

On the following day he and the two Vietnamese came to visit the Salesian studentate in Toulon. They made a visit to the cemetery where rested Louis Colle, an adolescent often mentioned in Don Bosco's life. The Rector of the Toulon studentate led him to see the La Navarre novitiate that had been erected by Don Bosco himself.

Upon arrival at the novitiate, Fr. Majcen greeted the Rector Fr. Peliput and the novice master Fr. Natigel, entrusting to them the two Vietnamese "precious treasures" who had been well prepared by Fr. Generoso Bogo. He also met Fr. Candela who had known him on his visit in Kunming. At the La Navarre, Fr. Majcen saw the sacerdotal cap of Don Bosco, kept in a showcase, and a very beautiful chapel where there was a beautiful mini-picture of Mary Help of Christians, a copy of the picture at Valdocco, Turin, and which was painted by the same artist. Fr. Majcen asked the novice master about the lessons the latter gave to his novices. The novice

7. Better identification of the functions of Thủ Đức and Gò Váp houses

In 1958, the functions of the two houses of Thủ Đức and Gò Váp were better identified.

Don Bosco Gò Váp was a trade school under the Social Department, and included the final elementary grades (grade 4 and 5), the lower secondary grades, and trade classes. The school was subsidized by the Social Department, and intended to become a technical school.

Don Bosco Thủ Đức became an aspirantate, and was a lower secondary school in the government education system. It was intended to develop to a higher secondary school. In the beginning, the number of the aspirants rose to 60. We sent 4 of our aspirants who followed the French program in the Mossard school, 26 bigger aspirants to the Bắc Ninh seminary, and the remaining 30 studied at home. All of them attended common conferences, participated in the pious associations ('compagnies') like the Mary Immaculate, the Blessed Sacrament and the Altar Servers... These 'compagnies' were very useful for their formation.

There had been some difficulty in obtaining the recognition from the Sài Gòn Education Department because the name Don Bosco was still very new and strange to Vietnam. But after having enough information, the Department agreed to acknowledge this name and Don Bosco would be used for the name of other new Salesian establishments in the future.

In principle, the school's principal must be approved by government. Up to that moment the government had never questioned who was responsible as a principal of our school. Actually only Fr. Generoso had been running the school, aided by some bigger pupils in the role of 'monitors' and teachers. We had asked the Lasalle Provincial to let Bro. Lucien to be our nominal

principal, and because Fr. Majcen was a confessor for the Lasalle Brothers, they were very pleased to help us Salesians in this respect, until 1964 when the first Salesian priest, Fr. Isidore Lê Huống, was acknowledged by the government as the principal of our two schools of Thủ Đức and Gò Váp.

8. On the military service

Military service was obligatory for all 18 year old young men, unless they had finished grade 12 and went on to university. Exemption was granted for the unique son in a family and for the religious so that they could go on with their studies. For this reason several young men applied for admission in the aspirantate without having made a good vocation discernment.

9. On the personnel

The personnel was the most important problem, especially in Gò Váp. In addition to Fr. Cuisset and Bro. Mario Lùc who were practical men and who could manage almost anything⁵, there were Fr. Luvisotto and Bro. Nardin to take care of the general matters. Then there were the clerics Stra and Donders, and the Bros. De Grott and De Marchi as workshops' heads. Fr. Majcen who was concerned with the personnel matter always said that it was not enough to have a place; we needed executives and technical agents. He insisted to have more missionaries for Vietnam, even Chinese missionaries, because these could adapt themselves learn Vietnamese more easily.

10. Fr. Majcen's preparations before his return to his country

Being aware that foreigners could not be legal owners of proprieties, Fr. Majcen went to the President Palace to meet Mr. Hay, the president's secretary and the bishop of Vĩnh Long, Mgr.

⁵ "Factotum pratico".

about Fr. Majcen?" Fr. Mario answered right away: "He could be a novice master for the future novices in Vietnam." The idea of a future novitiate for Vietnam seemed to be most persuasive, and so the Rector Major consented: Fr. Mario Acquistapace would be a Provincial Delegate for Vietnam while Fr. Majcen would be a novice master.

Fr. Majcen as novice master

News on Fr. Majcen being a novice master was quickly diffused and Don Antal, the Catechist General, called him in to give necessary instructions. Fr. Antal said: "In fact there aren't any prescriptions for the formation of novices. Experience is most important." He suggested him to consult experienced novice masters, such as, among others, Fr. Siri at the novitiate Villa Moglia near Chieri, or Fr. Giorgié at Lanuvio near Rome, or Fr. Natigel at the Navarre novitiate near Toulon, in France. Fr. Antal added: "Good health is also very important." And so he told Fr. Majcen to have some rest in Val d'Aosta where there was a vacation house for the theology students at the Crocetta studentate, Turin. While he was staying with the theologians there, he had an opportunity to know better about the Piedmontese region in Italy.

A visit to Bollengo studentate

Fr. Majcen went to the Bollengo studentate near the Ivrea studentate, to see the Chinese and Vietnamese students there. He talked long with a former Kunming pupils of his, Bro. Bosco Cheu Wei Sin. He recommended to the Rector a Vietnamese cleric named Isidore Lê Huống who had made his novitiate in the Philippines. Bro. Lê Huongoose promised to translate into Vietnamese the famous and very useful book entitled "Vade Mecum" of Fr. Barberis. Later, another Vietnamese brother named Joseph Đinh Xuân Hiên would also study in this studentate. At Fr. Majcen's return to Turin, Fr. Antal saw that his health had not yet fully

about 40 parishes in Slovenia and Croatia. Fr. Majcen also went to Zagabia to see a friend of his, Fr. Pavcic, who became the first Salesian Provincial of the Croatia Province when it split from the Ljubljana Province.

After the tour, Fr. Majcen went back to have quiet days with his mother during which he also accompanied his mother to Kirsco where he had passed his twenty first years in life. He visited the graves of his father, his little brother Zoran, and his grandparents. Then he went to Maribor to celebrate a Mass in the church where he received baptism. And together with his mother he celebrated the feast of Assumption. It was in those days that the Salesian General Chapter ended in Turin.

Important decisions

A few days later, he bid farewell to his mother and departed for Turin to see the Superior Councilors and Fr. Mario Acquistapace. Fr. Mario himself came to me saying: "Have you got the news? I'm no more Provincial. Our new Provincial is Fr. Bernard Tohill in Hong Kong... What shall I do now?" Fr. Majcen answered right away: "You may go to Vietnam and replace me as Provincial delegate so that I can more easily take care of the future novices." Fr. Mario went out, and after some reflections he turned back saying: "Please suggest to Fr. Zigiotti about this replacement." He went out and then turned back again asking me: "Why haven't you gone?" and he appeared very worried. Thus Fr. Majcen went to the Rector Major who warmly received him and asked him what he wanted. Fr. Majcen said: "I would like that Fr. Mario assume my position as a Provincial delegate now that he has ended his Provincial term." "What do you say?" asked the Rector Major in astonishment. In the meanwhile Fr. Mario who has been outside has heard everything. He entered and told the Rector Major his wish. But before giving his consent, Fr. Zigiotti asked: "What

Thục, the President's brother. He received their promises but not very clear. Mgr. Thục preferred the FMA to take care of delinquent girls. For this purpose, Fr. Majcen suggested to the bishop to ask for the Good Shepherd Sisters whom Fr. Tohill had talked about in 1954.

On May 2 1958, Fr. Majcen went to see Mgr. Simon Hoà Hiền, bishop of Sài Gòn, to apply for a canonical erection of a religious house. The bishop immediately agreed and made the necessary procedures with Rome. Thus the permission for the erection of the religious house arrived on December 28 1958 for the Gò Vấp house.

Fr. Majcen also went to St. Paul Hospital to take some medicines for his journey that comprised the medicines for his rheumatism, toothache, exhaustion, headache, stomachache, etc... And Sr. Francesca led him to Nuncio Caprio's office to report on the Salesian situation.

In the meanwhile, Fr. Mario also wrote recommendation letters to the places where Fr. Majcen would stay in Europe for a rest, asking the rectors of the places to help him. Fr. Cuisset bought his ticket Sài Gòn – Rome from the Air France and begged Fr. Majcen to come to see his father in Northern France and to see some of his relatives in Bordeaux.

On May 18 1958, Fr. Majcen bid farewell to everybody while giving them the blessing of Mary Help of Christians and a "see you soon."

**CHAPTER 28: FR. MAJCEN'S TRIP TO EUROPE:
MAY 1958 — MAY 1959**

A trip to Europe

With the Provincial's permission, Fr. Majcen quickly packed his luggage to go back to Europe. He went to bid farewell to Mgr. Simon Hoà Hiền and to ask for his consent to have the Gò Váp house canonically erected as a religious house entirely independent from the Thủ Đức house. The bishop agreed and wrote to Rome, resulting in the rescript dated December 28 1958 from Rome. Mgr. Caprio granted him a Vatican passport to facilitate his trips. He went to St. Paul hospital to take some medicines needed for his journey.

The Provincial appointed Fr. Generoso as rector of Thủ Đức and Fr. Cuisset as economer and rector of Gò Váp. In addition, Fr. Mario also wrote recommendation letters to the superiors and rectors of the places where Fr. Majcen would come. And Fr. Cuisset had bought flight tickets for him.

The journey Sài Gòn – Rome – Turin

With the farewell of the confreres at the airport, Fr. Majcen departed for his country to see his old mother (80 year old), celebrate the 25th anniversary of his priesthood, visit his relatives and especially restore his health. This was his first return to his homeland after 23 years away during which he chiefly lived in China and Vietnam amid tremendous sufferings due to wars.

Upon arriving at the airport in Rome, he took a bus to the central railway station and went straight to the Sacred Heart School nearby. It was late at night, luckily Father Rector was still in his

keep the Church's properties, and he had succeeded by a firm and calm behavior, while other priests, including the Salesians, had been imprisoned for at least a few months because of their careless words.

A familial party

His mother gathered all her relatives to have a familial feast, including his sister Milka's husband and their children. All were immensely happy and they posed for souvenir photos. Fr. Majcen invited everybody to come to Rakovnik to attend the silver jubilee of his priesthood on July 2, but they had to refuse it because they were afraid that by attending his Mass, they would lose their job. Only his mother, his sisters and some elderly people promised to come.

His silver jubilee of priesthood

Fr. Majcen's sacerdotal silver jubilee was wonderfully prepared by a friend of Fr. Majcen, Fr. Jurcek, together with Fr. Konstajevec and Fr. Pusnik: the numerous fervent altar servers in pretty costume; the smart choir who sang beautifully; and the community of devoted faithful who crowded the large church and who communicated in great number. Fr. Majcen's mother was so filled with happiness that she appeared to have long waited to see this day before she could sing the "Nunc dimittis". Among the attendants were some nuns who had been working with him in Chaotung, in a hospital of Mgr. Kerec. Upon returning to their country, these nuns continued to serve as nurses to take care of the tuberculosis patients before they were dismissed by the government.

These nuns arranged for a driver to take him on a tour of Slovenia. He also visited the parishes served by the Salesians. As they could not run the schools, the Salesians assumed the care of

Fr. Majcen's stay in his homeland until August 18 1958

Keeping the custom of the time, Fr. Majcen in his cassock was on the train with the ticket he had bought from Italy. Upon his arrival in Sezena, he was closely investigated by the security for two hours. Then he was again arrested and investigated at the Postojne station, and this time the investigation was even longer and more complicated. It reminded him of the investigations he had undergone in Kunming a few decades ago. After about two hours, he was released. When he arrived at the Ljubljana station, it was already late in the evening. He met Fr. Jarcak, an old friend of his and who was currently a Salesian rector in Rakovnik. This Fr. Jarcak had once got a death sentence but his sentence had later been reduced to 8 years of force labor. After getting out of prison, he became a Salesian rector while his co-prisoner, Fr. Vovk, became a bishop.

The reunion with his mother

After a three day stay in Ljubljana, Fr. Majcen took a train to Brezice to see his mother. Imagine what happiness he had when he saw his mother and his sister Marica after years away. His sister led him to see his mother's house where she had been working for the town court. In their conversations, he told what had happened to him, then his mother and sisters also told what had happened to them when they were in Kirska and when the Germans moved them to Serbia and other places. His mother, sister and his father had had to hide themselves from one place to another until they could find a safe refuge. They also told him how his brother-in-law, his sister Milka's husband, had escaped from Hitler's concentration camp and survived.

There Fr. Majcen went to the parish church to say Mass everyday and had opportunity to talk with the parish priest. The parish priest told him how he had had to fight based on the law to

office. He went out to greet him warmly. In the next morning he said Mass in the Sacred Heart Church, on the very altar that Don Bosco had celebrated Mass in tears in 1886. Fr. Majcen was very moved in saying Mass here, thanking God and Mary Help of Christians for so many graces he received through 23 years of missions.

He visited St. Peter's Basilica. Standing in front of St. Peter's statue with the inscription "Tu es Petrus", he pledged his allegiance to the Pope. Thus he could see Pope Pius XII whose voice he used to hear so frequently on radio. Pius XII appeared very old, pale and exhausted. In fact, a few months later, his death was announced on the radio.

He also visited the catacombs. It was here that the thoughts on the martyrs of Rome took him to the martyrs of Vietnam, the martyrs with or without blood in China and Vietnam, including Mgr. Versiglia and Fr. Caravario, Fr. Simon Liang, a collaborator of his in Kunming. He thought of Fr. Barnaba Lee who was the first Salesian vocation he had raised in the aspirantate in Yunnan. In St. Callisto's catacomb, he was honored to see Fr. Ricaldone, Fr. Battezzati and Mr. Doldi who were his old friends in China. A Yugoslavian confrere working at the catacomb gave him the joy of staying for a few days at San Callisto and enjoying the pine trees shadows.

With a recommendation letter of the Dominicans in Sài Gòn, he was greeted by the Superior of the St. Sabina Dominican monastery in Rome and was guided to visit the historical events of this monastery. The monastery's superior guided him along the corridor where St. Thomas used to walk while meditating on the realities he expounded in his Summa Theologica. He also led him into the chapel and the room where the Saint Pope Pius V had lived. He also saw there the picture of the Lepanto's victory and the vision in which the pope saw the Catholic legion's victory.

Then the superior led him into a garden from which he could see the dome of St. Peter's from afar.

In Turin

Fr. Majcen came to Turin by train. At the exit of the Turin station, the porter remarked: "He is truly a Salesian missionary, because only the Salesian missionaries carry so heavy a trunk!"

At the station he met Bro. Da Roit, a secretary of the Itinerary Office, together with Fr. Tatjak, a Slovenian, who were waiting for him. Fr. Majcen followed them to Turin. When they came in front of the Mary Help of Christians Basilica, Bro. Da Roit said: "You two please come in to greet Mary and Don Bosco; all the rest let me manage."

Entering the basilica, Fr. Majcen was moved to tears. He thanked Mary and Don Bosco, then turned to the altars of St. Mazzarello and Savio to pray.

Coming to Valdocco, he met the Superiors of the Superior Council: he first met the Rector Major, Fr. Renato Ziggotti, talking with him for a long time to report on the situation in Vietnam. Then Fr. Fredrigotti kept him there and had him tell about the Salesian works in Vietnam in the difficult conditions, especially the lack of personnel. Fr. Bellido recalled his visit in China in 1949, and introduced him to Fr. Antal to know how to behave when he would come back to Yugoslavia. Being a Hungarian, Fr. Antal was well informed about the situation of his country under the communist regime, just as Fr. Majcen had himself experienced in Kunming. Mgr. Arduino, who was then rector of the Mary Help of Christians Basilica, received him very warmly. The two talked, laughed and recalled their trip from Hong Kong to Shanghai when they greatly suffered by sea-sick. They also called to mind Fr. Geder, a missionary and vicar general of

Shiuchow diocese. The bishop told Fr. Majcen he intended to go to Hong Kong in 1959 to deal with the problems of his diocese.

From Foglizzo to Becchi

Fr. Majcen went to Foglizzo to see his old friend, Fr. Vode, a Slovenian, and to learn how to behave when he would come back to his country. Through Fr. Vode, Fr. Majcen could be informed of the news and situation of his confreres in Ljubljana as well as his mother's health who was in Brezice. The two friends talked about the bulletin of the Slovenian Salesians through which Fr. Vode was linked with the Slovenian confreres in the country and abroad. Fr. Vode showed him the chapel that had been blessed by Fr. Rua and dedicated to the Archangel Michael beautifully presented on a picture in the act of threading the aggressive Lucifer.

Fr. Vode took him on a trip to Becchi where they were invited by the rector of the Becchi house to have a lunch where there was the presence of Bro. Beve, a veteran missionary in Thailand and was currently responsible for the missionary salon in Becchi.

But the central point of Fr. Majcen's visit was the small house of Don Bosco in Becchi, where he celebrated a Mass with great devotion and emotion. He also went to Mondonio to visit the house where Dominic Savio, one of Fr. Majcen's favorite saint, died.

On his way home

Then from Turin, Fr. Majcen went to Trieste. He stopped in Trieste to see the confreres working in the Mary Help of Christians Basilica, among whom was Fr. Suhec, a Slovenian refugee, who was currently parish priest of Dolina of which most of the parishioners were Slovenian refugees. Not granted a transit visa to enter Yugoslavia, Fr. Majcen had to come back to Milan to see the consul who eventually gave him a permit for a 2 month stay in his home country.

... who came to Vietnam to serve at Don Bosco Thủ Đức. The number of aspirants rose to 200, divided into four groups: Besucco, Magone, Savio and Bosco.

The school year 1963-64. The aspirantate kept developing both in its facilities and aspirants, while the studies and activities improved in their organization. The group of aspirants (from 1958) graduated, some of whom entered the novitiate in Trạm Hành.

The school year 1964-65. The 1st group of philosophy students who graduated from Hong Kong Studentate came back to make their practical training as assistants in Thủ Đức and Gò Váp, including Bros. Quý, Ty, Uyễn.

Since 1965, admission to the aspirantate was made through a three days examination at the aspirantate. Out of many applicants, only 50 were admitted as aspirants.

In 1966: To satisfy the need of receiving more aspirants, an apostolic school was erected in Trạm Hành, accepting other aspirants for classes 6, 7, 8 and 9.

Recreational, physical and esthetic activities. There were more playgrounds for football, basketball and volleyball, and classes for music, banda, and typing with practices and competitions.

Since 1978, after Don Bosco Thủ Đức was taken by the State, it ceased to exist, closing a historical period that had brought so many good vocations to the Church and the Congregation.

DON BOSCO GÒ VẤP

In March 1955, the Theresa Family was moved from Ban Mê Thuột to Thủ Đức, Sài Gòn. However, after a consensus from the superiors, it was decided to move to Gò Váp, to settle in the plots that had been bought by Fr. Cuisset through several stages. Don Bosco Gò Váp became a trade school while Don Bosco Thủ Đức

A canonical visit of the Provincial

Fr. Bernard Tohill, the Provincial, began his canonical visit in June 1959. Thanks to this visit, many problems could find a solution, especially the problems regarding the novitiate. On the minimum age for admission to the novitiate, should we admit a candidate of 15 years old as in Italy, or should we wait for him to finish Form 12 as was the current usage of the other religious institutes in Vietnam? If we adopted the Italian usage, we could readily have candidates for the novitiate, leaving their scholastic and philosophical studies to be completed in Hong Kong. But if we adopted the current usage of the religious institutes in Vietnam, there would be very few candidates for Fr. Majcen's novitiate year 1960-61.

We also applied to the Ordinary, the Rector Major and the Holy See for the canonical erection of our novitiate. On September 4 1959 we received the Rector Major's decree appointing Fr. Majcen as novice master and in the same time the permission to erect the novitiate at Thủ Đức house.

Novice candidates included: Dominic Uyễn, Marc Huỳnh, John Ty, Dũng, Liêm, and Phúc from the North; Vincent Quý from the Center; and Linh from the South.

Fr. Tohill suggested to call back the aspirants who were studying in Hong Kong including Tôn, Sứ, Ván, and Mỷ.⁵ These boys already knew English which would be useful for them in their philosophical study later. They would continue to learn at the Bắc Ninh seminary for one year before entering the novitiate.

A proposal of Fr. Generoso

As Fr. Cuisset had built a church in Gò Váp, now Fr. Generoso also wanted to do the same, and he proposed to build a

⁵ Among these, only Mỷ continued to be a Salesian.

church of the Immaculate Conceptionin Thủ Đức. He also suggested that he would go to Brazil and Rome to find funds for the construction. It was a good proposal, and the Provincial appointed Fr. Majcen as acting rector of Thủ Đức house while Fr. Generoso was going to Brazil to raise funds for the prospective church.

In the meantime Fr. Majcen throughout the school year 1959-60 was studying with the contractor Tông Dụ Quang on the elaboration of this new project. He also helped to raise money for the construction.

The school year 1959-60

After the departure of the Provincial and the Rector, Fr. Majcen ran the work at Thủ Đức, with a good number of achievements.

We bought a private cemetery at a corner of the plot, and because these were the tombs of the owner's ancestors, Fr. Cuisset had to pay a large compensation. As for the purchase of Mrs. Lelièvre's plot in Trạm Hành, it was guaranteed by a contract by which we could already use it and Mrs. Lelièvre was keeping guard over it for us.

At this time our Salesian confrères were at a number of 19, including those who came from Europe and China. They were priests, clerics and lay brothers of various nationalities. Of course in the beginning they had to learn Vietnamese and so could not help much in our works.

Following the Provincial's prescriptions, Fr. Majcen started the program for the postulants including the aspirants of Thủ Đức and those called back from Hong Kong. While these were continuing their secondary scholastic programs (Grade III), Fr. Majcen gave them religious conferences, had individual talks with

were recommended by their parish priests without passing any examinations. These new aspirants were partitioned into two classes: 30 in Huitième (equivalent to last year of elementary school) and 20 in Septième (first year of secondary school).

About material facilities. Don Bosco Thủ Đức evolved with the enlargement and building of the dormitory, study hall, classrooms and refectory. In this school year the superiors also started the construction of the chapel and study hall to satisfy the increasing number of aspirants. As regard personnel, Don Bosco Thủ Đức received two new assistants: Bro. De Meulenaer(Thầy Ngọc), a Belgian, and Bro. Fantini (Thầy Phán), an Italian.

About formation of aspirants. Apart from their religious and scholastic formation, the aspirants also received other training on sports, music, performances and open-air activities by groups. They had every week a walk with their assistants across the neighborhood, and a day of picnic every month. Life and activities in the aspirantate were organized in a cheerful and familial atmosphere.

The school year 1960-61. We enrolled a new group with 50 boys divided into several different classes. In particular in this school year, a portion of the house was set apart for the first novitiate in Vietnam, with Fr. Majcen as novice master, Bro. Joseph Hiên as novice assistant and nine novices. Thanks to this novitiate, every three months the aspirants enjoyed a recreational performance staged by the novices with songs, music and especially plays with educational contents.

The school year 1961-62. Every year the aspirante evolved in facilities and especially in personnel and by the increase of aspirants. Fr. Ignatius Song, Fr. De Parscau (Cha Phán), Bro. Lagger (Thầy Lạc), Bro. Phương (a Belgian), Bro. De MeulenaerJr. (Thầy Bích), Thầy Xuân (a French), Thầy Luật (a Belgian), Fr. Tsang (Cha Trang), Fr. Aarts (Cha An, a Hollander),

CHAPTER 32: AN OVERVIEW OF THE HOUSES OF THỦ ĐỨC, GÒ VÁP, AND TRẠM HÀNH

To better comprehend Fr. Majcen's accounts, it may be helpful to complement them by a brief overview taken from *Fifty Years of the Salesians of Don Bosco in Vietnam*¹ with reference to the houses of Thủ Đức and Gò Váp.

DON BOSCO THỦ ĐỨC

Before becoming an aspirantate, a vocational nursery for the Church and the Congregation, Don Bosco Thủ Đức had had a developmental evolution through God's grace:

In January 1955, the Theresa Family was split into two groups: The first group comprised about 70 bigger boys remained and worked in Ban Mê Thuột with Fr. Faugère; the second group included a majority of smaller boys (about 200) left Ban Mê Thuột, together with the Salesians, and went to settle in Thủ Đức, Sài Gòn.

The facilities of Don Bosco Thủ Đức were set on a large plot of sandy land at approximately 20 kilometers from the center of Sài Gòn. In 1959, Don Bosco Thủ Đức became the first Salesian aspirantate. The bigger boys followed the French programs at the Lasalle Mossard School or the Vietnamese programs at the Bắc Ninh seminary nearby. The smaller boys followed the French programs at the aspirantate.

The school year 1959-60. On September 1 1959, Don Bosco Thủ Đức sent the orphans to Gò Váp, so that there remained in Thủ Đức only 20 aspirants. Then 50 new aspirants were enrolled, who

¹ An extract from 50 NĂM DON BOSCO VIỆT NAM (1952-2002), pp. 24-29; 120-124.

them and gave them necessary remarks. In the meanwhile Fr. Ignatius Song taught them English which would be very helpful for them in their post-novitiate formation.

As for the aspirantate, with Fr. Song's help, Fr. Majcen dismissed the unsuited boys and received the new good ones. Studies included the subjects equivalent to the II Grade secondary school. A few particular aspirants could follow their studies at the Bắc Ninh seminary and their studies were free of charge thanks to the kindness of Father Director of the seminary.

The Thủ Đức aspirants number rose to 150, as many as this house could contain.

Apart from the religious practice and scholastic duties, the aspirants had other occupations such as personal hygiene, laundry and house cleaning. They were also offered entertainments with a great variety of games, sports, excursions, festivals and artistic performances.

They became more and more cheerful and educated, very gentle and vivid, so much so that on seeing them, many guests were astonished and full of admiration.

These were fruits of so much efforts of Fr. Majcen and Fr. Song in their teaching and educating them.

In the meantime, Fr. Cuisset proceeded to prepare the place for the future novitiate in Thủ Đức.

A list of the working Salesian confreres

At Gò Váp, the Rector was Fr. Mario Acquistapace with the cooperation of Frs. Cuisset, Luvisotto, Mattheo Chong, Musso, clerics Stra and Fantini, and the lay brothers Liễu, Marco Lực, Borri, De Marchi, and Nardin.

At Thủ Đức, the Rector was Fr. Generoso who was temporarily absent for his trip to Brazil. The acting rector was the novice master Fr. Majcen, with the cooperation of Fr. Song, Fr. Cuisset, Fr. Luvisotto, Fr. Musso, and the clerics Lagger, De Muleneare, Wouve.

A crisis of ideas

There appeared in that year several progressive ideas from Europe by which several of our confreres were affected. They held that we had to replace Salesian traditional ideas, which they considered out of date, by new ideas and methods. In this situation, Fr. Majcen always defended the need of allegiance to Don Bosco and held that the updating should be done with discretion and always under the guidance of the superiors. This was also what the Vietnamese bishops were doing. They themselves wanted the update, but wanted it to be done gradually and wisely.

The financial situation of Thủ Đức

At Thủ Đức, we had not had any income from the pupils' school fees. Fr. Cuisset had to provide the aspirantate with money and rice every month. At that moment we had to entirely rely on Fr. Cuisset. But little by little Fr. Majcen started some propaganda to find financial support. Based on his friendship with the generous Fr. Vode, Fr. Majcen wrote a series of letters to Fr. Vode, presenting to him the necessities of Thủ Đức and asking him to encourage other Salesians to support us financially.

And learning from Frs. Roozen and Cappelletti, Fr. Majcen wrote many letters, creating a net of benefactors; besides, he also made propaganda by writing articles and sending them to newspapers and magazines in Slovenian language which were printed in Europe and Argentine, in which not only he asked for

The closure of the Lyon section

This section had been started in 1957 by a three year contract between Fr. Cuisset and Mr. Munier who sponsored it. The contract had been renewed in 1960 and expired in 1963. Upon the contract expiration, the superiors decided not to renew it because it was a particular apostolate needing specialists we did not have. The closure decision was a hard blow to Fr. Cuisset and to his French friends as well as to Mgr. Seitz had been so interested in it and who had considered it as a copy of his former Christ the King Boys Town of Hà Nội.

A change of Provincial

Fr. Tohill left the Philippines and came to Vietnam where he preached a retreat in English to the Good Shepherd Sisters in Vĩnh Long. When he came to Gò Vấp, he received a letter from Turin appointing him as Provincial of the Californian Province (USA). He stayed for a few days in Vietnam then left for Hong Kong where he handed over the office to his successor, Fr. Massimino, who was then rector at the Cheung Chau studentate where our Vietnamese brothers were studying.

The new Provincial, Fr. Massimino, had been a novice master, a marvelous formator, an open-minded man with modern ideas but at the same time very firm in the Salesian traditions handed down from Don Bosco and Don Rua.

school. Thủ Đức developed its secondary school and Trạm Hành enlarged the novitiate and prepared for an apostolic school.

For the III Grade Secondary School, Fr. Isidore Lê Hướng was recognized by the State as official principal of all the three schools of Thủ Đức, Gò Váp and Trạm Hành. From then on, we stopped being dependent on the Lasalle schools.

On the Formation

The pupils of the Trạm Hành apostolic school had a monthly conference, and a daily good-night talk to help them make a choice in their life status. At the aspirantate, the aspirants had weekly conferences and received observations from the superiors on their conduct, studies and health. All this helped the superiors to have a better choice of the good aspirants for Thủ Đức. In the year of postulantate, the postulants had weekly conference on the Salesian life to help them in their choice of vocation.

Trạm Hành personnel

Fr. Majcen who had been rector from 1962, was re-appointed rector and novice master and also rector of the apostolic school. Fr. Chong was prefect of studies and economer. As for Fr. Bosco Yau, he only stayed in Trạm Hành until he finished the construction.

Trạm Hành Apostolic School

Trạm Hành Apostolic School was erected when a class from Thủ Đức was sent to Trạm Hành. Thus the Trạm Hành Apostolic School gradually developed until it had all the three Forms 7, 8, and 9 of secondary school like in Thủ Đức Apostolic School. The number of these small aspirants rose to 140 and their presence brought a new life to Trạm Hành, with the boys well dressed, gentle and cheerful, studious and pious, all this helped to attract many people to Don Bosco's educational system.

help from benefactors but also reported on the apostolate he was doing in Vietnam.

The Vietnamese Hierarchy and three important visits

Around May 1959, while Fr. Majcen was in Europe, a National Marian Congress was held in Sài Gòn to celebrate the 4th Centenary of the first missionaries in Vietnam. On this occasion, Cardinal Agagianian, the legate of the Pope, came to Vietnam and declared the establishment of the Vietnamese hierarchy with the erection of three archdioceses and the promotion of all the Apostolic Vicariates into dioceses with their own ordinaries. The three archbishops were Mgr. Trịnh Nhu Khuê of Hà Nội, Mgr. Ngô Đình Thục of Hué, and Mgr. Nguyễn Văn Bình of Sài Gòn. The good bishop Mgr. Simon Hoà Hiền was moved to Đà Lạt, a new diocese.

Cardinal Agagianian's visit to Don Bosco Gò Váp

On this occasion, after having carefully prepared everything, Fr. Mario Acquistapace invited Card. Agagianian to Gò Váp. And so, the cardinal visited our house of Gò Váp, escorted by Monsignor Caprio, the Apostolic Nuncio, and several ambassadors and consuls. After this visit, the Cardinal and the Nuncio called on various agencies (Misereor, CARE, ...) to give priority to their help of the poor Salesians who were having big projects but were lacking funds. Taking advantage of this, Fr. Mario and Fr. Cuisset elaborated our works in Gò Váp which little by little became an important Salesian work.

Fr. Majcen came unexpectedly as if he fell from heaven precisely on these same days, just in time to attend the reception of the Cardinal at the church newly build by Fr. Cuisset and Fr. Luvisotto.

Cardinal Spellman's visit

In one afternoon of September 1959, Fr. Majcen and his poor children were in a rubber plantation near Thủ Đức when they saw a convoy escorted by soldiers on their motorbikes and accompanied by the Director of the Social Department. The convoy stopped at us with the presence of Cardinal Spellman and Fr. Mario. The Cardinal spoke in Italian and said he was interested in our Salesian works. Fr. Mario enthusiastically explained our projects and spoke of the numerous needs of our pupils.

Then the convoy resumed its journey toward Đà Lạt, where we were dreaming of a new work. Fr. Majcen just remembered two things: he was very tired, having neither money nor necessary means, and the Gò Váp house was then flourishing under the direction of Fr. Mario.

Mgr. Arduino's visit

In 1960, in the tropical monsoon of May or June⁶... with abundant rain and flood, Mgr. Arduino came to visit us. The pupils were very happy because it was for the first time they could see a Salesian bishop, a friend of Fr. Majcen. The bishop was very lovable and cheerful. The aspirants at once surrounded him and those who knew a little French kept asking him many things about the Salesian Society. As they were talking, a heavy rain poured down as torrents so they had to take refuge in the narrow corridor built by Mr. Tóng Dụ Quang. Mgr. Arduino said: "Please build another corridor connecting this barrack with the dormitory." Thus, thanks to this rain, he gave us money to build a corridor linking the two blocks, and the corridor was called "Mgr. Arduino's corridor" which proved to be very useful.

⁶ Fr. Majcen did not remember exactly the date. He wrote "in the tropical monsoon..." implying that it might have been around May or June or later.

CHAPTER 31: CONSOLIDATING THE SALESIAN SOCIETY IN VIETNAM IN DISTURBED SITUATION (1963-68)

New arrangements

After consulting other religious superiors and bishops, and with his personal experience, Fr. Majcen realized that the age for admission to the novitiate should be raised to 18 years old. With the consent of Fr. Tohill, it was decided that the aspirants could only be admitted to the novitiate after they had completed their secondary school (Grade III or Form 12). As a consequence, in two consecutive years there were only coadjutor aspirants in the novitiate. The Thủ Đức school also abolished Form 7 of secondary school and moved it to Trạm Hành, and so the pupils in Trạm Hành became too numerous to accommodate. Therefore Fr. Bosco Yau, who had just completed the construction of the technical school in Gò Váp, was entrusted with the construction in Trạm Hành of a wooden house with two floors, the upper for the novices and the lower for the aspirants who would come from Thủ Đức.

On the conferences for the novices

Giving conferences is a most important task for a novice master. Fr. Majcen felt the need to prepare the conferences better, so he decided to rearrange his conferences in conformity with the instructions of Fr. Bellido, Catechist General in Turin.

Programs for 1963

This year, the Salesians in Vietnam decided to have a definite redimensioning of the three houses of Gò Váp, Thủ Đức and Trạm Hành. Gò Váp prepared for the construction of the technical

A helicopter carrying President Diệm flied over our land and landed near the Cầu Đất tea plantation. Then the President walked into our land, examined it and then proposed to the Americans another hill nearby, telling them to let us Salesians in peace.

The Buddhists instigated by the communists wanted to overthrow President Diệm by imprudent demonstrations. Even in the Cầu Đất village near us, there were secret meetings of the communists.

In spite of the dangerous situation, the Salesians still worked zealously according to Don Bosco's teaching. This was a period for developing our Salesian devotion to Our Lady, so we benefited every occasion such as the Saturdays, the Marian feastdays, the novena, the performances in her honor, prayers, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and the consecration to Mary the Immaculate and Help of Christians.

Big feasts such as Christmas, Tét, Feast of Don Bosco, were solemnly celebrated, which helped a great deal to animate the community. Mgr. Simon Hoà Hiền was very happy to come with us, and we enjoyed delicious meals prepared by our novices.

The Catholics' golden time

The visits of the two Cardinals stimulated many to help the Vietnamese Church. Among many others, funds were raised for the erection of the Pius X Pontifical Atheneum in Đà Lạt under the direction of the Jesuits, with the faculties of philosophy and theology; the erection of the Catholic University of Đà Lạt with various faculties. And also the realization of the Vietnamese Catholics' dream to build the Basilica of Our Lady of La Vang near the 17 Parallel, a destination for series of pilgrimages. It was Fr. Mario himself who had got from a Vocation School in Spain a very beautiful statue of our Lady and offered it to the Basilica.

Dark clouds on the horizon

In that year there was a law prescribing all the Chinese having Vietnamese citizenship to do their military service and were restricted in their trades, resulting in a great resentment in them.

Profiting from this situation, the Vietnamese communists mingled and befriended with the Chinese circle, and got support from them in their guerrilla war.

Hồ Chí Minh, on his part, after getting whole control of the North, prepared to conquer the South. To do this, he and the lawyer Nguyễn Hữu Thọ formed the "Front of Liberation of the South" with its headquarters located at a secret place in Central Vietnam. From then on, the communists invaded everywhere. Groups of guerrillas launched unexpected attacks here and there with killing and devastating and then vanished.

Other discontentments

To win sympathy of the Buddhists, President Diệm favored the building of pagodas, notably the splendid Ân Quang Pagoda in Sài Gòn. Nevertheless, the Buddhists still distrusted him for having

previously stripped them off some rights. They became a good ambiance for the communist propaganda and instigation.

As for us Salesian, we kept working hard and detached from politics, putting our trust on Providence and took the Our Father as our politics.

It was precisely in this context that we began our first novitiate, while Fr. Mario Acquistapace was eagerly promoting the devotion to Mary Help of Christians, convinced that whoever trusts in her will never be disappointed. **Mary Help of Christians, pray for us!**

Fr. Majcen fell ill

His vacation trip to Europe had not much recovered his poor health. The following year, at about the beginning of May 1960, he was taken to St. Paul Hospital in an emergency case. He had to stay there for treatment for some time. When he came home, the confreres asked him to rest and just to show them what to do. He had to comply but his health did not much improve.

Admission of pupils

The pupils were admitted in accordance with the scholastic regulations. Around 250 boys presented themselves for an examination and 40 of them were admitted. Due to a lack of resources, we could not receive more of them.

The Immaculate Conception Chapel

The forecast expenditure for the chapel was 14million VN\$. Fr. Majcen had already had 9 million and hoped that Fr. Generoso would add an equivalent sum on his return from Brazil, but he was disappointed. Nevertheless, the construction contract was signed

The feast days

The feast of St. Andrew, his patron, and the Immaculate Conception were solemnly celebrated. On this occasion, a monument was built on which to put the statue of Our Lady of Immaculate Conception that had been offered by Mgr. Bordeau to Fr. Cuisset and the latter in turn offered to the Novitiate. The statue became the mighty protection and a center of devotion for everybody.

The religious clothing ceremony

It was held on November 21 according to Fr. Tohill's will. The novices' parents and relatives came to attend the occasion and they were very happy to see their sons live the novitiate life.

3. The situation of Vietnam in the years 1961-62

News on the Vietnam War began to spread throughout the world.

As early as in 1960, the North Vietnam government had started to build the Hồ Chí Minh trail crossing the Laotian forests to allow the communists to invade Đà Nẵng, Hué, Ban Mê Thuột, Pleiku, and Kontum, etc... There began to have assassinations and villages burnt, causing many Catholics to have to leave their houses and homeland as in the case of our aspirant Đê's⁸ family.

John Kennedy, the US President and a Catholic, sent 72 thousand American soldiers to Vietnam. The war then had not yet been bloody. A group of American soldiers came to Trạm Hành with the purpose of setting a radar station for communication between Trạm Hành – Bangkok – Washington. Fr. Majcen immediately understood their design to take our land for the radar station with a very mean compensation.

⁸ Who later became Mgr. Đê, bishop of Thái Bình.

A vacation of the “young of Lyon” at Trạm Hành

Fr. Cuisset took 24 young prisoners from Sài Gòn called the “young lions” for a vacation in Trạm Hành, because there was a good climate and also because it was sponsored by the President Munier of the Lyon Club and by the Social Department. But Fr. Cuisset began to have heavy clouds in his heart since his work was not supported by the Superiors who only wanted to accept only traditional educational apostolate. Anyhow, the presence of these boys at Trạm Hành brought us a protection of some sort: the communists did not attack them while the novices appeared to be their teachers.

The strategic hamlets

Rumors reached Trạm Hành about the political disturbances in Sài Gòn and Huế in particular: there were demonstrations of students and Buddhist monks, including some who burned themselves to protest. The demonstrations and guerrilla attacks chiefly aimed at the President and his brother Nhu, as well as the Catholics who supported them. To counteract, the government decided to build strategic hamlets⁷ surrounded by barbed wires and bamboos for self defense and protection against the communists’ attacks by night.

Fr. Majcen could not know how to do it. To enclose a large plot of land of 8 hectares was not easy thing, if not impossible because it was very costly and we didn’t have money. He consulted the Provincial and was answered that our protection was Our Lady herself. Thus he entrusted the whole house to her, while getting more dogs to keep watch and prohibiting everybody to go out by night, the favorite time for the communist activities.

⁷ A creation of Mr. Nhu in 1962.

and on the advice of Fr. Tohill, the Provincial, it would be a two-floor building with the upper floor for the Immaculate Conception

chapel and the ground floor for other appropriate purposes. Eventually the construction was begun and on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of that year, Fr. Cuisset had been able to take photos of the aspirants posing before the framework of the construction. All the rest would be successfully completed by Fr. Generoso Bogo and Fr. Aarts,¹ and the aspirants could already use the chapel. Fr. Majcen, on his part, continued to raise the fund, and the chapel was inaugurated after a year. The real total expense rose to 28 million VN\$.

CHAPTER 30: THE ‘FIRST’ RECORDS OF THE SALESIANS IN VIETNAM (1960-61)

In spite of the dark clouds on the horizon, the Salesians with their trust in God’s help and the protection of Mary Help of Christians continued to go ahead and prepared for the novitiate.

On May 24 1960, nine postulants presented to Fr. Generoso Bogo, Rector of Thủ Đức, their demand for admission to the first novitiate in Vietnam. The Rector with his council (Fr. Majcen, Fr. Luvisotto) admitted Nguyễn Đức Huỳnh, Ngô Hạnh Phúc, Đỗ Văn Sử, Phạm Xuân Uyển, Nguyễn Văn Ty, Vincent Quý, Đinh Thành Liêm, Linh, and Vân. The applications were sent to Hong Kong, where the provincial council admitted all the nine applicants. In this historic provincial council meeting there was the presence of Fr. Tohill, Provincial, Frs. Jansen, Lin, Suppo, Wu and Rassiga.

¹ Altro lavoro facevano Don Bogo e Don Aartz, che riuscivano benino.

1. The Novitiate Course I (1960-61)

On August 15 1960, nine candidates were admitted as novices of the Thủ Đức novitiate. As the day opened to a new episode of the Salesian Society in Vietnam, all the confreres and aspirants were present in the event which began with the hymn “Veni Creator” fervently sung, followed by the Mass. With a strong emotion, Fr. Majcen presented the novices, while the Provincial recommended them to attach their devotion to mortification, proper behavior and sacrifice that were concretized in the imitation of Don Bosco. Thus ended the opening ceremony for the novitiate.

Life in novitiate

The life in the novitiate was strictly organized according to the Constitutions and Canon Law. The novices lived separately from others, no contacts, no correspondence without the novice master's permission. The novices made the meditations using Fr. Bertetto's book that had been translated by the novice Vincent Quý. As for spiritual readings, they used Fr. Giulio Barberis's book, translated by Fr. Isidore Lê Hướng when he was in the theology studentate. Fr. Majcen gave the conferences in Vietnamese and based on Fr. Barberis's book. Apart from the conferences on asceticism, the novices also learned Latin and English to prepare for their post-novitiate studies.

The novitiate should be a year entirely devoted to interior life and prayer. The novitiate was dedicated to the Sacred Heart, with strict regulations on the visits to the Blessed Sacrament, together with other devotions and prayers recited alternately in Vietnamese, Latin, English and French.

Fr. Tohill emphasized on the mortification in eating, sitting and walking.. and also in orderliness in personal belongings and regularity in life style. He wanted the novices to learn how to

from Trạm Hành, below the Đơn Dương mountain pass, a distance not too far to cover on foot. We were received by the Abbot and Mgr. Từ who was a Cistercian himself and who was the immediate successor of the first Vietnamese bishop, Mgr. Nguyễn Bá Tòng. Fr. Majcen talked to the bishop about the formation of the novices, on the Constitutions and on its translation into Vietnamese. While they were talking, Fr. Majcen's dog lay at his foot. Seeing it, Mgr. Từ asked the novices: Have you ever seen the Dominicans' coat of arms? First, there is a shield with a white and a black sides. White means light and black means darkness. Then there is a dog holding a torch in its mouth, symbolizing a man keeping the truth of faith and fidelity to his vocation... faithfulness to Don Bosco: A true and marvelous conference... that urged us to put to practice.

Those were exchanges of words, but perhaps it was the voice of the Holy Spirit that resounded in our souls, and it was always the same in the divine horizon. On their way home, although they had to climb the slope and were therefore very tired, both the novices and the novice master were much enriched by this happy excursion.

The Oratory at Trạm Hành

Living in a house near the plot she had sold to us, and wanting to benefit the children in the neighborhood, Mrs. Lelièvre encouraged them to go to the novitiate to play with the novices on Sundays.

Thus the children from Trạm Hành came. Next came those from Phát Chi and then from Cầu Đất. Bro. Hiên and the novices organized activities, games and snacks for them, aiming primarily at connecting the Northern and Southern children. But this eventually failed because at last there remained only the Phát Chi children.

ready for a Mass in the next morning to place everybody under the protection of Our Lady.

Fr. Luvisotto guided the novices to prepare the places for the study hall, the dormitory, the dining room, the chapel and the novice master's room. Bro. Hiên, the assistant, guided the novice to prepare the playground and the rooms for guests and confreres. Fr. Majcen went to visit Fr. Hoá, the parish priest of Phát Chi, and the Sisters Lovers of the Cross at Phát Chi.

An excursion to the Châu Sơn Cistercians

Fr. Majcen used to tell his novices a story which was very old and always very new that had become his life program, a moment that marked his childhood. He was then 15 years old, and it was during World War I. He saw himself again and again standing at the window looking out to the waves of the Sava River precipitating one upon another... On the other bank of the river he saw the hooded Trappist novices working and hearing the bell chime at every hour to remind them to pray. He had been explained by Fr. Kurent, his parish priest, about St. Bernard's motto: "Ora et labora", a very impressive life program. Very curious, he went to the Raichenburg monastery located on a high rock where long ago the Trappist monks were protected from the pirates. He rang the bell and asked to visit the monastery. The porter took him into the corridor and showed him the Latin inscription: "BERNARDE AD QUID VENISTI?" The words kept echoing for ever in his heart and it still resounds even now when I am 80 years old: Why? Why am I in this world? Why have I come?... Fr. Tohill himself had said the same thing on the life programs of St. Bernard and St. Benedict. Why have you come to this Trạm Hành Salesian novitiate? ... Why?

One day Fr. Majcen decided to take his novices on an excursion to the Châu Sơn Abbey. The monastery was at 10 km

sanctify their lives in imitation of Don Rinaldi, by the frequent reciting of short prayers and by always living in God's presence.

Fr. Majcen in principle took charge of the conferences and interpretation of the Constitutions. As basic textbooks, he used the book of Fr. Ricaldone on Salesian Formation and the ascetic book of Fr. Pesch in French. He also consulted other books in Vietnamese and in Chinese to help him use the appropriate word for an exact meaning, including the Fr. Suppo's Chinese translation of the Constitutions and the theology and philosophy dictionary of Mgr. Chi and Fr. Trần Văn Hiến Minh. In all this, he also had exchanges with the novices themselves, leading to the creation of a Vietnamese Salesian literature.

The first Vietnamese Salesian literature

The booklet on the Life of Don Bosco written many years ago by Fr. Lý of the diocese of Bùi Chu was of course very valuable. Mgr. Ngô Đình Thục, a brother of President Diệm, also had his seminarians of Hué diocese translate some books in Vietnamese, in particular the booklets on Dominic Savio and on the Preventive System. Fr. Majcen's young Vietnamese teacher also rewrote Fr. Majcen's conferences in a very intelligible Vietnamese. All these works, among others, were initial resources of a Vietnamese Salesian literature that were very valuable and helpful.

The novices who knew French and English also tried to translate books or magazines including the book of Fr. Bertetto on Don Bosco, the *Don Bosco in the World*, the *Don Bosco's Dreams*. On special occasions or festivities, they also made short speeches at the Mary's grotto in front of the novitiate in honor of Our Lady and Don Bosco. Of course these translations and speeches were monitored by Fr. Majcen.

Other scholastic studies of the novices

In Fr. Tohill's view, the novices should also be prepared for their post-novitiate formation by classes of English, Latin or any other necessary languages. In his teaching, Fr. Majcen always wanted to be sure that the novices clearly understood what he taught, by asking them questions again and again until they could answer correctly. All he wanted was to form true Salesians of Don Bosco.

Helping the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians came to Vietnam in 1960. They soon found a small group of school girls who had just graduated from secondary school and were beginning their university studies. And they wanted to become Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Sr. Zoller, Rector, and the Provincial of FMA Hong Kong asked Fr. Majcen to make a scrutiny on these girls. He did it and found them to be good stuff. As a result, six of them were sent to Hong Kong in 1960, and another group of 8 girls were sent to Hong Kong and to Rome in 1961. The others continued their aspirantate formation at their rented house in Chợ Lớn. And Fr. Majcen became their confessor and catechist, and in a party he shared with them his experience of a master of novice. He continued to help them from 1960 to October 1961 when he moved to Trạm Hành, Đà Lạt. After him, Fr. Generoso continued the task of spiritual director for the aspirants of the FMA.

Fr. Majcen's health and political disturbances

At that time Fr. Majcen's health was relatively good in spite of some moments of exhaustion. The political situation was more and more disturbed. The guerrilla war kept increasing. One day, bodies of two French veteran legionnaires were found next to our house with a paper written: "Executed by order of the YX army of the

The Novitiate Course II (1961-62)

Trạm Hành Novitiate

The procedures for the transfer of the novitiate were completed and the Trạm Hành house was canonically erected as a novitiate with Fr. Majcen as novice master.

At 28 km from Trạm Hành is Đà Lạt City located on the highland which is free from the suffocating heat of Sài Gòn and where there are the bishopric of Đà Lạt, the Catholic University and an excellent hospital.

Middle way between Trạm Hành and Đà Lạt was the Cầu Đất railway station and a big hamlet with a police station that had very irregular activities. There were here a great number of Catholics with their own parish church, and a convent of the Sisters Lovers of the Cross. Cầu Đất had a bustling market and large tea plantations. Very close to Trạm Hành was the Phát Chi parish, a strategic hamlet where the inhabitants were mostly refugees from the North in 1954. The parish had its church with its own parish priest who was helped by the Sisters Lovers of the Cross. From Trạm Hành, a sloping road took us to Đơn Dương town where there was the Đa Nhim hydroelectric dam built by the Japanese. Not far from Đơn Dương, on the way to the Liên Khương airport, we saw the Châu Sơn monastery.

The move

Right after the feast of the Holy Rosary, with some trucks for the transport of the belongings, the novices together with the novice master and Fr. Luvisotto, the economer, set out for Trạm Hành. After about 5 hours, they stopped at Bảo Lộc (Blao) for lunch then resumed their journey to Đà Lạt (300 km from Sài Gòn) and then to Trạm Hành where Mrs. Lelière was waiting for them. After a dinner, the first things they had to do was to get things

2. Preparations for the novitiate transfer to Trạm Hành

The beginning of the following novitiate course coincided with the day when the novices made their first vows and the new novices were admitted by the Councils of the Vietnamese Provincial Delegation³ and the Hong Kong Province⁴ to begin their novitiate. The number of the new novices was 8 aspirants from Thủ Đức⁵ and 3 from Gò Váp⁶. In the meantime Fr. Majcen also continue his ministry at the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

However, to better organize the novitiate, the Vietnamese Provincial Delegation decided to move the novitiate to Trạm Hành. The superiors proceeded to ask for the permission from Mgr. Simon Hoà Hiền, bishop of Đà Lạt, then from the Holy See, and for the appointment of a Rector.

The novitiate therefore continued to remain in Thủ Đức for some time. In the meantime 6 new professed from the 1 novitiate year were learning English to prepare for their philosophical studies in Hong Kong. On the first Sunday of September, we solemnly celebrated the feast of the 117 Blessed Martyrs of Vietnam.

³ Including: Fr. Mario Acquistapace, provincial delegate; Fr. Generoso Bogo; Fr. Majcen.

⁴ Including: Fr. Tohill, Provincial; councilors: Frs. Pomatti, Lin, Jansen, Suppo, Haselsteiner, Rassiga.

⁵ Peter Cho, Fabian Hào, Joseph Giảng, Joseph Mỹ, Joseph Sử, Joseph Tiêm, Peter Tịnh, and Joseph Tôn.

⁶ Vincent Hùng, John Khang, Peter Vĩnh.

Front of Liberation of the South." People were often killed by night. Early in November, there was a bombing of Sài Gòn. The President Palace was bombed by an aircraft and two arches of Bình Lợi bridge were detonated. They were at once replaced by floating bridge but the traffic from Thủ Đức to Sài Gòn was cut for several days.

The clothing ceremony of the novices

On November 21 1960, eight novices received their religious habits. On the occasion of Fr. Tohill's visit, there was a scrutiny meeting for a voting in which he conveyed the wishes of the Superior Council. Fr. Bellido kept reminding us to carefully form our first novices because they would be the base for the Salesian works in Vietnam.²

A major problem for this novitiate was language. The novices could understand a little French, but they knew almost nothing about Latin, English or Italian.

Feast of the Immaculate Conception

After the novena in preparation for the feast, the day was celebrated very solemnly. There came the brass band from Gò Váp, directed by Bro. Lục. The superiors and the aspirants were very happy at the clerical clothing ceremony of their friends through their exemplary behavior and devotion. On this day, there was also the inauguration of the Immaculate Conception chapel, although it had been only completed in their exterior.

The Immaculate feast was also a feast day of the Vietnamese Conference of Bishops. On this occasion, the Thủ Đức community

² In fact, in 1986 Fr. Ty became delegate of the Rector Major; Fr. Huỳnh became provincial economer and Fr. Uyên became a professor for our young Salesians.

had also the honor of the visit of Archbishop Nguyễn Văn Bình of Sài Gòn.

The last letter from Fr. Majcen's mother

Fr. Majcen received the last letter from his mother on his feast day, St. Andrew's. His mother was living the last days of her life, although Fr. Majcen's sister tried to hide from him her mother's real situation in order not to worry him. Nevertheless, he had no illusion and kept praying for her. He was very sad and suffered for not being able to be at her side.

The first Vietnamese Salesian priest

March 1961 gave Fr. Majcen a great joy. The first Vietnamese Salesian, Isidore Lê Huống, was ordained priest on March 25. He had come from the Bùi Chu seminary. His director had recommended him to Fr. Majcen in 1952. In 1953 he began his aspirantate and in 1954 was sent to Hong Kong and then to the Philippines for the novitiate. After the novitiate, he remained there to be a novice assistant. Then he was sent to Italy for his theology studies.

The first Mass of the newly ordained priest was celebrated in Austria where Fr. Matko lived, on the very feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, June 29, 1961. In Siebenhugel in Austria, he was solemnly welcomed by the Salesians there. More than a thousand faithful stood inside and outside of the church to attend his Mass in which Fr. Luskar gave an eloquent homily and Fr. Lê Huống spoke in Italian and Fr. Vode translated into Slovenian. The old Fr. Cauti spoke of the 117 martyrs of Vietnam and the faithful were happy to welcome a descent of the Vietnamese martyrs. A benefactor accepted to be his foster mother to substitute his parents who were in North Vietnam and who could not have contact with him. Fr. Huống also sang some Vietnamese songs which brought a great

joy to everybody. He also celebrated his Mass in somewhere else before returned to Sài Gòn in September and celebrated his first Mass in Vietnam, together with Fr. Majcen.

The first Salesian professions in Vietnam

The novitiate ended, 6 novices were admitted to profession. Father Provincial chose the feast of Assumption for the novices to begin their spiritual retreat together with the 11 new novices who were preparing for the novitiate. And the profession ceremony took place on August 22 1961, feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, in which Father Provincial celebrated the Mass and received the vows of the 6 new confreres, fruits of the first novitiate. The joy was indescribable.

Lay brother vocations

Aware of the need for local lay brothers in Vietnam, before the novitiate ended, we priests and lay brothers had at Thủ Đức a Congress on Vocation to discuss this topic. All agreed to make the Gò Váp house a Technical School and an Aspirantate for lay brother vocations. This year was the second novitiate in which we had three lay brother vocations: Hùng, Khang and Vĩnh from Gò Váp, together with other 8 cleric novices from Thủ Đức.

Fr. Majcen's mother died

On September 15 1961, Fr. Majcen got the news of the death of his mother. In a telegram, Mgr. Kerec told him that his mother breathed her last on August 21 and was buried at the Kirsco cemetery on the 23, in the presence of his two sisters, his relatives, Mgr. Kerec and the nuns who had been with him in Chaotong, Yunnan. The sad news caused him a tremendous pain, since he loved her so much and was so grateful to her for her greatest support for him by her prayers and sacrifices, especially when he was small.

responsible for agriculture and raising of chicken, rabbits and fish. This would also be his occupation when he came in Việt Nam in 1957. He was very good at telling stories and amusing people with his accounts on the hens ... in brief, he was a strong, stout man who worked tirelessly and with a venerable beard.

In charge of the monastery in Đà Lạt

The nuncio Caprio asked us about our project for the Salesians in Vietnam. We intended to have a work in Đà Lạt for our novitiate, a vacation house for our confreres, and a future studentate. As we didn't have enough money, the Holy See granted us one million francs. With the money, Fr. Mario and Fr. Majcen bought the Benedictine monastery and sent Fr. Luvisotto and Bro. Nardin together with some boys there to guard it and taking care of the garden. A practical man, Fr. Luvisotto managed to create a perfect atmosphere for studies.

The purchase of the French bus station in Gò Váp

As we had not enough staff because the Italian confreres had not come yet, we couldn't start any work with this monastery. Mgr. Caprio suggested us to resell it to the Franciscan Missionary Sisters and to buy a French bus station in Gò Váp. Fr. Luvisotto therefore left Đà Lạt for Gò Váp where, with his good health and skills, he helped Fr. Cuisset and Fr. Tchong to prepare the new place for our future works.

The construction of the chapel at Gò Váp

While Fr. Majcen was in Europe doing his apostolate, having rest and visiting his family and friends, as well as celebrating the 25th anniversary of his ordination, the work in Vietnam was having big progresses through the combined efforts of Fr. Luvisotto, Fr. Cuisset and Fr. Tchong. As a result, when he came back to

was reserved as an aspirantate for the training of candidates to the priesthood.

According to a report of the Provincial Delegate, Fr. Luigi Massimino (dated June 1 1963), there were in Gò Váp 3 workshops for electricity, mechanics and carpentry. In addition, there began an aspirantate for lay brothers with 100 aspirants.

By October 1963, the Gò Váp house became complicate and had to split into three separate works: the Don Bosco Family, the Don Bosco Technical School, and the Lay Brother Aspirantate.

The school year 1964-65. The lay brother aspirantate began to have its own facilities except the workshops.

The school year 1965-66. As the newly professed coadjutors could not go to Hong Kong for their studies, their formation was entrusted to the Gò Váp house.

The school year 1970-71. Gò Váp became a Technical School.

The school year 1972-73. Gò Váp was partitioned into 4 sectors: the Technical School, the Lay Brother Aspirantate, the Orphanage, and the Hostel, all under a unique Rector. The formation of lay brothers and bigger aspirants was moved to Thủ Đức.

The school year 1973-74. There remained only 3 sectors in two communities: one with the combination of the Technical School and the Apostolic School, under one Rector; and the other was the Don Bosco Family for the orphans.

After May 1975, the Apostolic School closed. There remained only the Don Bosco Family and the Delegation Office until 1977 when it had to be handed over to the Social Welfare Service.

DON BOSCO TRẠM HÀNH

Novitiate Course III (1962-63)

Fr. Massimino decided to open the novitiate for the coadjutor novices in January. As the new novices had not completed their technical training, he wanted them to receive at least a formation for a kind of a ‘factotum’ coadjutor to respond to the instant needs of the houses. Fr. Majcen, the novice master, prepared himself for this task. And so on January 21, the novitiate started with the novices Thọ, Thuộc, Đường, Doãn and Nhàn.

Life in the novitiate was very cheerful and exciting, especially during feastdays. On Don Bosco feast, the Dalat bishop came and celebrated Mass with us. He congratulated us for our work and talked about the Vatican II Council of which he had attended the first session. He also talked about Pope John XXIII and encouraged everybody to imitate the Pope’s benevolence and kindness that was very necessary for today.

The novitiate ended with the profession of the vows of Bros. Thọ, Thuộc and Đường on 24 January 1963.

Disturbances in May

The Communist propaganda stirred up the resentment between the Catholics and the Buddhists. The Catholics were allegiant to President Diệm who was himself a Catholic and who supported the Catholics, while the Buddhists were against the President and was supported by American ambassador Cabot Lodge. In Hué, on Buddha’s birthday, clashes broke out between the Buddhists and the police, resulting in a number of arrests and casualties. The Buddhists demonstrated their indignation against the Catholics who had solemnly celebrated the silver jubilee of their bishop, Mgr. Ngô Đình Thục, elder brother of the President.

rigid towards the so-called ‘modern’ Salesians. He had an antipathy with the young confreres who had progressist ideas... On the other hand, he had a golden heart toward the poor sick children just as Don Bosco wished. He was very displeased seeing some young modern priests getting in the infirmary and taking care of the sick children... And it was a real shock for him when he heard that the Rector had bought him a ticket to go for a vacation in his country, implying that he would be forever separated from his dear children.

And then we received news of his death. As a novice master, every year on the day of the dead I always reminded my novices—especially those who knew him—to pray for him who until death had always loved the poor and suffering Vietnamese children. Through many years, on the anniversary of his death (March 7 1966), Bro. Borri was always remembered by the all the Salesians in Vietnam for his golden heart toward his dear sick children.

And it’s certain that he will always be in the hearts of those whom he loved so much. Let’s pray that now in heaven he continue to help alleviating the pains and sufferings of the Vietnamese children.

2. Fr. Guerino Luvisotto (1957-1976)

Fr. Luvisotto’s early mission in Shanghai

Fr. Majcen knew Fr. Luvisotto for the first time in 1946 when he came from Kumming to Shanghai for a Provincial Chapter after World War II. Fr. Braga, the Provincial, invited the Chapter members for an excursion to Nesiang where he happened to know this ‘son of Mary’¹ and also of his mother Teresa. He was then

¹ ‘Son of Mary’ is Don Bosco’s appellation for a late vocation.

Fr. Majcen and Fr. Cuisset had bought the old bus station in Gò Váp on which there was a small house with several rooms. Fr. Tchong put the house in place and changed a room into an infirmary for the sick boys. Bro. Borri brought in the room some beds for the use of the sick boys during the day, and some beds in other rooms for the sick who needed to stay in bed longer. He also arranged for an outside doctor who came now and then to monitor their illnesses and gave Bro. Borri necessary instructions for the care of the sick. He demanded a strict silence in the infirmary, kept hygiene and took the temperature, etc... In other words, he acted as a real doctor, as we called him such.

During his first years as Rector of Gò Váp, Fr. Majcen often came to visit him in the infirmary. Bro. Borry told him everything, even about the disorders there. In particular, he told him of the state of the souls of his small patients. Fr. Majcen saw him a true nurse as Don Bosco wanted. Bro. Borri also wanted to imitate the nurses who had taken care of Fr. Olive, Fr. Beltrami and Fr. Scartorishi, among others. But he was really indignant if any boys wanted to stay in the infirmary out of slothfulness in order to avoid work or study.

Fr. Majcen's appraisal of Bro. Borri

Fr. Majcen had been Bro. Borri's superior between 1956 and 1959. After he left for Slovenia and then became a novice master at Thủ Đức and Trạm Hành, he had very few opportunities to see him except on some rare occasions when he had a visit to Gò Váp. On such occasions, Bro. Borry was very happy to see Fr. Majcen and to tell him so many things about his difficulties or successes.

Externally, Bro. Borri's behavior described a true son of Don Bosco: his exactitude made him suffer when he saw anything not conformable to the principles he had been taught in the beginning of his Salesian life. As a consequence he showed himself to be

This incident had a reverberation also in other regions, including Đà Lạt where bishop Simon Hoà Hiền recommended all not to confound religion with politics. Of course at Trạm Hành we always practice the politics of "Our Father", the Father of all men and women, as Don Bosco taught us.

Fr. Majcen at hospital

Later in the month, Fr. Majcen was brought into St. Paul's hospital for a kidney operation. He left hospital after three weeks and went to the FMA in Tam Hà for convalescence. In the late June, he went with Fr. Duchesne to Đà Lạt. Upon arrival in Đà Lạt, he was warmly welcomed by the Lasalle Brothers before returning to Trạm Hành.

A spiritual retreat and personnel change

The confreres had the annual spiritual retreat in Trạm Hành for its refreshing climate. Assistant Hiền left for his philosophical studies at Bollengo. Coming to replace him was Fr. Matthew King, ordained in 1962.

40th Anniversary of Fr. Majcen's religious profession

The 40th Anniversary of Fr. Majcen's religious profession was almost forgotten in Vietnam, while abroad it was remembered by articles in English and Slovenian on several magazines.

The coup d'état

Harmful propaganda of the Buddhists and Americans against President Diệm began. Mgr. Thục was in Rome attending Vatican II Council, while Mrs. Nhu was in USA to make clear the President's rule. Fr. Cuisset had tried his best and succeeded to have the President sign the papers legalizing Don Bosco's properties on October 15 1963.

On All Saints day 1963, the two brothers Diệm and Nhu were in Đà Lạt, attended Mass at the former Benedictine monastery, then hurried to go back to the Presidential Palace in Sài Gòn. The President refused to resign, his palace was attacked and surrounded by soldiers. They fled into the palace's tunnel and secretly went to Chợ Lớn, to the house of a Chinese named Mr. Mã where they passed the night and in the morning attended Mass at a Chinese church run by the MEP fathers. They fervently received holy communion and prayed long. On their leaving the church, they were arrested by a captain named Xuân who pushed them into an armored car where they were killed. Their bodies were brought to St. Paul's hospital and were examined by a French doctor. Sr. Francesia told that their bodies got many bullets. The Catholics were very sad and astonished.

Everywhere people offered Masses for the late President. General Dương Văn Minh, a Buddhist, nicknamed Big or Pig Minh, became President.

Several days later, there was news on the radio announcing the assassination in Dallas of the US President John Kennedy, who together with Cabot Lodge were responsible for Diệm's death. During that time, the bishops and cardinals who were attending Vatican II in Rome solemnly celebrated Mass for John Kennedy, which caused Mgr. Thục, Bishop of Hué, to criticize them for not having done the same for his brother the President Ngô Đình Diệm. He himself said a Mass for his brother but very simply and without the attendance of other Vietnamese bishops! That gave him a great shock and was a wound that would never be healed! Unfortunately, he was later excommunicated by the Holy See. We Salesians, in particular Fr. Mario, lost a great lover of Don Bosco... RIP!

CHAPTER 36: IN REMEMBRANCE OF TWO DISTINGUISHED SALESIANS: BRO. JOSEPH BORRI AND FR. GUERINO LUVISOTTO

1. Bro. Joseph Borri, a golden heart for the orphan and sick boys (1957-1966)

Coadjutor Borri had a predilection for the suffering and sick children. Don Bosco and Mary Help of Christians, always present in the Congregation, had formed in him a golden heart for the children as they had done to the good lay confreres in the beginning of the Congregation. He took care of the poor boys and gave them everything he had, especially stood by them night and days when they had a fever or fell gravely ill. He was a special devotee of Mary with his rosary always in hand.

Bro. Borri's service in Vietnam

Bro. Borri had been working in Shanghai and then in Macao before he came in Vietnam. Following the reports on the illnesses and diseases affected by the children in Vietnam, he asked Fr. Mario Acquistapace, the Provincial, to send him to Vietnam to live as a poor among the poor, and especially to offer his life for the poor sick children for whom he always showed a special predilection.

During the bloody war in the North and the evacuation to Ban Mê Thuôt, he gave a great helping hand to Fr. Faugère, MEP, who with his delicate heart and with the material means obtained from the French constantly took good care of the sick, poor children, victims of the war which had rendered them homeless, orphan and miserable.

one of the doctors, and two French Catholic priests, one of whom was buried alive.” (p. 27)

And he concluded: “The killing in Hue that added up to the Hue Massacre far exceeded in numbers any atrocity by the communists previously in South Viet-Nam.” (p. 31)

9. A return to normal life

The communists’ attack in Hué lasted for a fortnight before they were completely driven deeply into the forests. It had failed but its horrible consequences still remained. Life returned to the normal with the transportation services opened again. Fr. Bogo could fly back to Saigon and Fr. Tchong could take the smaller aspirants from Sài Gòn to Trạm Hành.

10. Our Lady of Fatima

As an act of thanksgiving and expiation, we effectively cultivated the devotion to Our Lady of Fatima whose statue was on a pilgrim tour across the South.

^

Fr. Cuisset left the Congregation

To celebrate St. Andrew’s feastday, Fr. Majcen’s Patron, on November 11 1963, Fr. Cuisset went to Trạm Hành and offered two excellent liquors. He talked about many things and many projects, as if he wanted to share all his feelings in his heart; but when he was invited to give a goodnight talk and hear confessions, he refused. The next morning, he bid farewell to Fr. Majcen and it was for the last time they saw each other. He silently left the Congregation to part for another region forever. It was a shock for everybody. As Fr. Mario Acquistapace later commented, “It is a mystery of human heart!” It was heard that he later became a professor in Algeria, and several years later, the Provincial Office in Hong Kong received from the Algerian episcopal office a short notification announcing that “Fr. Cuisset has been granted a dispensation from his priestly ministry to return to secular life.” Thus the Lyon sector in Gò Váp was closed, some of the boys moved to the Gò Váp school and some others to Trạm Hành.

News about Fr. Massimino

Fr. Massimino also decided to move 20 smaller boys of the Lyon sector to Trạm Hành, where Fr. King with his fatherly love took care of them, educated them and found ways to bring them back to their families. One of them who had stolen money and his mother had asked the police to take him to prison. Fr. Cuisset saved him and then Fr. King also succeeded to change his mother’s heart to receive him back.

After the Tết, Fr. Massimino went back to Hong Kong, and on his flight one of the engines of his airplane was on fire, but the pilot and crew members managed to control the fire and the airplane landed safely at the Hong Kong airport in the midst of 14 fire trucks... The confreres came to pick him home like the prophet Elias on his fire carriage.

Novitiate Course IV (1963-64)

The IV novitiate course began on August 16 1963 with two novices: Bro.Joseph Cheung Koon Wing, a Chinese, a graduated from Aberdeen Technical School, Hong Kong, and Bro. Vincent Chuyên, an elementary school graduated but who had good dispositions for a Salesian coadjutor. Although there were only two novices, Fr. Majcen's tasks doubled because he had to give conferences in Chinese to Bro. Wing and in Vietnamese to Bro. Chuyên. The novitiate ended on August 16 1964 with the profession of both brothers: the Chinese Joseph Cheung Koon Wing and the Vietnamese Vincent Chuyên.

Army post but they were pushed back by the American soldiers who protected the radio broadcast station nearby.

In Huế, the communist attack started on the 2 Tết (31 January 1968). On the 3 Tết, the counterattack from the RVN Army and US Army pressed the communist soldiers inside the city and entirely swept them out on February 23 1968.

Apart from the confusion and disturbances of the war, there was the horrible scene of the many Huế inhabitants killed by the communists and who were found buried in mass graves in the schools of Gia Hội, An Ninh Hạ, Vân Chí, in the pagodas of Từ Quang, Theravada, at the Seminary, at the tombs of King Tự Đức, Gia Long, etc... They were killed by many cruel ways: their bodies were found bound together and burned, exploded by bombs, their heads cut off, shot or broken by gun-stock, by spade or axes... It was estimated that six thousand people had been killed in Huế.

Douglas Pike, in *The Viet Cong Strategy of Terror*, has recorded:

"The first discovery of communist victims came in the Gia Hoi High School yard, on February 26; eventually 170 bodies were recovered. In the next few months 18 additional grave sites were found, the largest of which were Tang Quang Tu Pagoda (67 victims), Bai Dau (77), Cho Thong area (an estimated 100), the imperial tombs area (201), Thien Ham (approximately 200), and Don Gi (approximately 100). In all almost 1,200 were found in hastily dug, poorly concealed graves. At least half of these showed clear evidence of atrocity killings: hand wired behind backs, rags stuffed in the mouths, bodies contorted but without wounds (indicating burial alive). The other nearly 600 bore wound marks but there were no way of determining whether they died by firing squad or incidental to the battle. Among these victims were three West German doctors, a medical technician who was the wife of

they had been taught in our schools. The feast was celebrated in an atmosphere of great joy and brotherly love without anybody being suspicious of the Damocles's sword hanging over their head.

The disguised funerals

While at Gò Váp, Fr. Majcen was wondering why outside there were so many funerals that took place solemnly with music and with the presence of the Buddhist monks. It was said that it was customary for the Vietnamese to keep their dead at home and wait for the good hour to take them to the cemetery before the Tết (Vietnamese New Year). It turned out that, as Fr. Majcen later discovered, there were no dead body in those caskets which, instead, were filled with weapons and ammunitions that were so secretly transported.

The tragic events – the Hué massacre

Fr. Majcen was notified by Fr. Hoá, Phát Chi parish priest, that on 30 January 1968 (29 Tết), the communists launched a general attack on all the cities of the South, and Đà Lạt city was bombarded on 31 night (30 Tết). All the transportation services by air and on land were interrupted. People on the highland were cut off with the outside. Fr. Generoso who had just finished his retreat preaching in Trạm Hành could not go back to Sài Gòn. Fr. Hoá told Fr. Majcen that on TV he saw thousands of refugees flocking into our houses of Thủ Đức and Gò Váp, where our Salesians provided them with food, shelter and other necessities.

In Trạm Hành, where the supply of food and electricity was very difficult, people could do nothing but pray for the safety of the confreres, the pupils and everybody. At about midnight of February 12, bombing was heard from Cầu Đát, about 5 kilometers from our house at Trạm Hành. The communists attacked the RVN

CHAPTER 33: NOVITIATE COURSES V-VI-VII (1964-67) – VATICAN II'S REFORMS – POLITICAL CHANGES

1. Novitiate Courses V (1964-65), VI (1965-66), and VII (1966-7)

These were consecutive novitiate courses and resulted in 30 newly professed (12+12+6). The events regarding these novitiate courses were reported below but not in a chronological order.

2. The Reform and its problems

Vatican II promulgated a decree calling for an *aggiornamento* from every religious congregation. Our Special General Chapter had discussed the matter thoroughly, but Fr. Majcen did not know how to implement his conferences and what guidance he had to give in the novitiate. Among the confreres, Fr. De Parscau, a French, and Frs. Aarts and Donders, Hollanders, and Bro. De Marchi, an Italian, were for a radical reform. Fr. Majcen consulted some bishops (e.g., Mgr. Tù, Mgr. Hiền, Mgr. Đoàn, Mgr. Chi), and also the Provincials of the Franciscans and the Cistercians, then he made up his mind: Reforms were necessary, but they must be done without compromising the spirit of Don Bosco, a historical Don Bosco but also a 'Don Bosco with the times'. However he did not want to make any changes before receiving clear instructions from the Superiors.

The vacations and travel difficulty

During summer time, the confreres went to Trạm Hành for spiritual retreats and vacations. Sometimes the aspirants also went

there for their vacations. It once happened that the route between Sài Gòn and Đà Lạt was cut for several days, forcing the confreres to go back to Sài Gòn by air. And it was very difficult to find means to take 59 aspirants back to Thủ Đức. The sending of the newly professed confreres to Hong Kong for their studies also met with difficulty in getting a passport and a visa for Hong Kong.

The professions of the vows

As usual, the professions of the vows were always organized in the chapel of the Immaculate Conception in Thủ Đức. The confreres, the parents of the newly professed confreres, the pupils and the aspirants of the three houses of Thủ Đức, Gò Váp and Trạm Hành, all attended at the ceremony.

3. The Apostolic School of Trạm Hành

This school developed into five classes: two 7th classes with 140 pupils, two 8th classes with 140 and one 9th classe with 70. The total number was 350 boys. Fr. Tchong, the Rector, had rows of houses constructed including the chapel, the theatre, the study hall, the classrooms and the dormitory. Taking charge of the kitchen were the Chợ Quán Lovers of the Cross Sisters.

4. The Novitiate of Trạm Hành

The novices, apart from attending the conferences given by Fr. Majcen, also helped to assist the aspirants under Fr. King's guidance. They were very smart in organizing feasts with songs, artistic performances and theatrical plays... They also practised making discourses and 'sermonettes'. Besides, they took care of the cleaning and maintenance of houses, grew vegetables and did the gardening.

Fr. Majcen, Fr. Tchong and Fr. King took turns to preach the conferences and Sunday homilies to the aspirants. These were as

priests (including one who was imprisoned right after his ordination as a witness of the faith) and 3 were deacons waiting (for how long?) to be ordained because of the government restrictions regarding ordination. Hope for a change!

8. The 'Tết Mậu Thân' bloody events (1968)

Political context

In those times Vietnam was under three flags: The Hồ Chí Minh government in the North under the red flag with a yellow star; and its puppet government in the South called the "Front of Liberation of South Vietnam" under the red and blue flag, headed by lawyer Nguyễn Hữu Thọ with its headquarter in Long An; and the government of the Republic of Vietnam under the yellow flag with three stripes, with its capital Sài Gòn, led by President Nguyễn Văn Thiệu and Vice President Nguyễn Cao Kỳ, after a free election in September 1967.

The US Army was responsible for the protection of the cities and towns where there were many refugees from the North and the national roads. Under God's protection, the Salesians lived and worked quite safely.

Fr. Majcen's celebration at Gò Váp

On January 21 1968, Fr. Majcen went to Sài Gòn for the 15th anniversary of Salesian works in Vietnam and of the coming of the rectorship of Fr. Majcen (1953-1968). The celebration was organized in Gò Váp with the presence of Mgr. Seitz, founder of the work for the orphans at Ba Vì in 1943. About 500 past pupils attended the event. Mgr. Seitz retold the story of the works in Ba Vì-Hà Nội, as well as in Ban Mê Thuột, exhorting the pupils to love and help one another, as Christ has loved us, while Fr. Majcen recommended everybody to live their profound Christian life as

of our aspirants: apart from the novices and professed confreres in formation, there were also 200 aspirants at Trạm Hành, and 300 aspirants at Thủ Đức and Gò Vấp. Why so many? Fr. Majcen answered: With that number of vocations we could have a good selection, and of those who would not become Salesians, many would become "Salesians in the world." In fact, most of our pupils have turned out to be forever our good and dear past pupils.

7. Novitiate Course VIII (1967-68)

Clerics (professed)

1. Joseph Hoàng Văn Hinh
2. John B. Đinh Tiên Hướng
3. Joseph Phạm Văn Hữu
4. Jerome Nguyễn Đức Mạnh
5. Joseph Nguyễn Văn Quang
6. Peter Đỗ Văn Thuán
7. Peter Hoàng Đình Thuy
8. Anthony Nguyễn Văn Vy

Clerics (not professed)

9. Peter Hoàng Hữu Đức
10. Joseph Nguyễn Trung Tâm
11. Joseph Trần Duy Thắng

The novices were all clerics. There were no coadjutor novices this year because we had had enough "factotum coadjutors", so at present we were preparing the coadjutor candidates in Gò Vấp by sending them to technical colleges in order to get a recognized diploma as a requirement for the Industrial and Technical School we would open in the future.

Out of the 11 novices, 8 were professed and 3 left at the end of the novitiate. Among the professed, at present (1986) 5 were

devoted and disciplined as in the beginning of Don Bosco's Oratory. Other tasks and occupations were smartly done by Bros. Doãn, Thọ and Thuộc.

Fr. Musso as confessor

Until Fr. Musso came, the aspirants and confreres had had to go to the nearby parish for confession. After he came, he always faithfully sat at the confessional to hear their confessions. He had a special character, but a great heart. His eyes were so poor that he could see very little, but his feet were very agile, helping him to travel a lot. He speak a very special Vietnamese so that the more he spoke, the less people understood what he said.

But for the poor people, Fr. Musso had a great heart which urged him to find funds for them, especially for those in Trạm Hành and Cầu Đát. For this, he never hesitated to write letters to whatever individuals or organizations he knew, such as to FAO, to the Italian government, even to the US President, and evidently he never got any replies. Wanting to do everything he could for the poor, he approached also the civil and military authorities who generally did not know what he wanted. Fr. Majcen and even the bishop wanted to dissuade him from such activities but he never gave up. He was content with being "the voice of one shouting in the wilderness" in behalf of the poor and miserable. People, whether communists or not, allhad sympathy for him. Anyhow, Fr. Musso was really an extraordinary saintwith a golden heart. He died on October 10 1978 in Hong Kong, at the house of the Sisters of the Poor! God give him eternal peace!

Helping the miserable

On his sixtieth birthday celebration (1904-64), Fr. Majcen wanted Fr. Cappelletti and the American Cooperators to pay more attention to the victims of the bloody war in Vietnam. Mrs. Rosa

Maria, drawing on Fr. Majcen's letters, wrote a book on the Salesians in Vietnam entitled "Children Welcome" in which she spoke of Fr. Dupont's activities to save the abandoned children, the Orphan Village in Hà Nội, the young detainees who were saved from the prisons, and other SOS works in Vietnam (Chapter 15). The author also spoke of the works of Mr. Gmeiner del Kinderdorf who had a relationship with Fr. Majcen. Later, Fr. Teresio Bosco wrote another book entitled "Architects for a Better World"¹, mentioning the activities of Fr. Mario, Fr. Cuisset and Fr. Majcen. Fr. Majcen wrote to the Aids Office in New Rochelle to ask Fr. Cappelletti for help. The latter immediately sent him 1000 US\$ as an initial aid, with which Fr. Majcen could help some war victims who had lost their houses and especially the orphans. And Fr. Cappelletti continued to help by finding other benefactors or sponsors for the poor in Vietnam. In Spain, Fr. Bellido was also interested in providing the aspirants with scholarships, especially the aspirants who had lost their parents.

The act of charity towards all poor people without discrimination resulted in the novitiate being loved by everybody. Even the guerrillas never did any harm to the novitiate.

5. The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians had bought the former Vinh seminary where they built the Linda Center for the children's upbringing and education. They also had their aspirants and catechists serve the parishes, and transformed their house into an Oratory. Fr. Majcen still kept some photos of a newly professed FMA, Sr. Trần Thị Xuân Hiền, of an aspirant and of the signing ceremony of the Linda building just built by architect Tống Dụ Quang.

¹ Original title: *Architetti del mondo migliore*.

3. The translation task

Apart from his many regular duties, Fr. Majcen also set apart his time to translate Salesian books into Vietnamese and to write about his missionary experiences in China and then in Vietnam, as well as the accounts on the work of Fr. Dupont in Hà Nội until his martyrdom, then the work of Mgr. Seitz in Ba Vì and in the Christ the King Boys Town in Hà Nội. He also translated meditation texts on Don Bosco and the booklets on the lives of some distinguished Salesians (Fr. Olive, Mgr. Cimatti, Mgr. Matthias, etc...). Although the translations were still far from perfect, he thought they were indispensable to know and to deepen the knowledge on Don Bosco's charism.

4. Diabolic weapons

The American army kept strengthening with their bombing and shelling. As a counter-attack, the communists had recourse to their diabolic weapons: corrupting moral lives of the people, using beauty traps and opium, all proved to be very effective weapons.

5. Confusion of ideas

The long war had resulted in the people a confusion in ideas and viewpoints. Here and there appeared protestations and articles demanding the withdrawal of the Americans and a Buddhist nun even burned herself as a protest. Even the universities were confused by the propaganda of Sartre's thoughts. Fortunately, the University of Đà Lạt was exempt from these influences because the professors were almost all Catholics who only taught their students orthodox doctrines.

6. Why to receive so many aspirants?

There were some criticisms against our approach in the admission of aspirants. The criticisms were about the great number

CHAPTER 35: BLOODY CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE NATIONALISTS AND THE COMMUNISTS (1964-68)

1. The military coups – the preparations for the war

After Diệm's assassination, there followed a series of coups effected by the military men, beginning with General 'Big' Minh, then with Gen. Khánh and eventually with Gen. Thiệu who became the last President for the II Republic of Vietnam for a relatively long period before the Communists finally took control over the whole of Vietnam. In the meanwhile Hồ Chí Minh had been sending troops and ammunitions through a secret route later called the 'Hồ Chí Minh trail' which ran across the jungles between Vietnam and Laos to intrude into the South. The communists began to take control over many regions, making the routes very dangerous and insecure.

Every month Fr. Tchong used to go down to Sài Gòn to buy rice and he often met and was arrested by the communist soldiers. It was only by God's grace and his particular Chinese-Vietnamese language that he was safe to return to his poor boys in Trạm Hành with his food and stuff truck.

2. The taxes

The Trạm Hành novitiate was free from all kinds of taxes. On the contrary, other rich people had to pay a lot of taxes both to the legal government of RVN and to the communist guerrillas. That was a necessary condition for them to live in peace. Of course the tea and rubber plantation companies had to pay these taxes, and even the Châu Sơn Trappist monastery had to give their cows to feed the guerrillas.

CHAPTER 34: PROBLEMS REGARDING ADMISSION TO THE NOVITIATE (1964-67)

Admission to the Novitiate

According to the Constitutions, the Provincial Council is responsible for the admission of candidates to the novitiate. But in reality, as the Provincial councilors in Hong Kong did not actually know or see the candidates personally, the voting for or against anyone was very paradoxical. The only superiors who knew them were the members of the Vietnamese Provincial Delegation such as Frs. Mario, Majcen, Generoso Bogo and Tchong.

In addition, there were some candidates who wanted to become Salesians chiefly in order to avoid military service, so it was difficult to discern who had a true vocation, and to mistakenly reject a candidate might mean to reject an important call from God. And so it was decided that we followed Don Bosco's practice, that was to try all and to retain what was good. Moreover, they would benefit from our education to become good Catholics and good citizens. Indeed, from our education, many of our aspirants and novices after leaving us have become useful and respectable men in society and have remained our dear past pupils until now (1986).

In practice, our novitiate formation program differed from one course to another, so for convenience we give here lists of novices from courses V to VII, and briefly describe the educative methods used at that time.

Novitiate Course V (1964-65)**Clerics (professed)**

1. Phạm Hoàng Bá
2. Nguyễn Văn Đê
3. Nguyễn Văn Khi
4. Trần Đình Cường Phùng
5. Hoàng Xuân Viện

Coadjutors (professed)

6. Nguyễn Văn Chấn
7. Nguyễn Dậu
8. Nguyễn Ngọc Huệ
9. Phạm Văn Thọ
10. Nguyễn Văn Thường
11. Hoàng Văn Xiêm
12. Nguyễn Văn Bi

Novices (not professed)

13. Nguyễn Công Hoàng (cleric)
14. Phúc (coadjutor)

Novitiate Course VI (1965-66)**Clerics (professed)**

1. Fr. Hoàng Phú Bảo
2. Nguyễn Hưng Đạo
3. Phạm Đình Khơi
4. Nguyễn Văn Linh
5. Hoàng Văn Phú
6. Lê Hùng Sơn
7. Nguyễn Văn Thêm

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prayers. In the last phase, the Bishop came for the baptismal rites. In the presence of Fr. Majcen and the missionaries, the Bishop used the K'Ho language to ask the candidates about their intentions, then he and other priests baptized all these 150 people. It was really a happy and meaningful feast in a war-torn Vietnam.

Fr. Majcen profited of this occasion to teach his novices on how to prepare themselves to become missionaries to these ethnics. Then, on the advice of Mgr. Simon Hoà Hiền, Fr. Majcen took his novices to some other ethnic villages near Đà Lạt and talked with the MEP missionaries. The MEP missionaries had created the K'Ho alphabet and used it to translate the Missal, the Bible and other prayers in K'Ho. The Protestant missionaries also did well in this connection.

It was a great consolation for Fr. Majcen when he saw that, from 1975 onward, three of his novices were working for the ethnics. Although this work was interrupted for some time, it has been resumed and gone on until now.

At present, the mission for the ethnics is one of the primary objectives of the Salesian works in Vietnam.

atmosphere with melodious sacred hymns mingled with the bombing and the sounding machine guns at a distance of about 10 kilometers.

Fr. Majcen attended a spiritual retreat in Hong Kong

In 1967 Fr. Majcen went to Hong Kong to attend a retreat and a meeting of Salesian rectors. On this occasion he met again Fr. Geder and Fr. Pavlin (a Slovenian Cistercian) who were working at the Tang King Po School. He also went to see the Vietnamese clerics who were studying at the Cheung Chau Studentate of Philosophy.

The translation of the Constitutions and Regulations (1965-66)

As early as in 1960 Fr. Majcen with the collaboration of Bro. Hiên and the novices had started to translate the Constitutions. With the help of the novice Fr. Bão, he made a second revision of the translation. Fr. Majcen always required a more and more precise translation regarding terminology to reflect Don Bosco's charism faithfully. This was a tiring, long and necessary task in order to convey the deep meaning of the Salesian spirit. With the preparation for the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the birth of St. Francis de Sales (21-8-1957-1967), a favorite saint of Fr. Majcen, he gave a conference on the *Filotea* and on the imitation of Don Bosco's examples.

Fr. Majcen's missionary ideal

In a valley near Trạm Hành there was a hamlet of the K'Ho ethnics where their chieftain had asked the MEP Fathers to baptize about 150 persons including some other people from other hamlets. The missionaries ministered their baptism through these stages: a burning out of all their superstitious things, a rather long period of catechesis and then a solemn profession of the Creed and other

- 8. Nguyễn Văn Tuân
- 9. Trần Văn Viện

Coadjutors (professed)

- 10. Lê Hữu tôn
- 11. Huỳnh Truyền
- 12. Nguyễn Văn Ty

Novices (not professed)

- 13. Chân
- 14. Dần

Novitiate Course VII (1966-67)

Clerics (professed)

- 1. Vũ Ngọc Đồng
- 2. Đỗ Tiến Hiệp
- 3. Phan Thành Thuyết

Coadjutors (professed)

- 4. Nguyễn Văn Hiên
- 5. Thực
- 6. Nguyễn Văn Tuân

Novices (not professed)

- 7. Tâm

To the masters of spiritual life, does Vatican II bring Light or confusion, or a battle between the old and the new?

In her search for Don Bosco's genuine charism, the Salesian Congregation has lost 2000 of her members! It was a disorder that rose in the Salesians, in the intellectual members in particular who

drew others backward. Even the Salesians in Vietnam were affected by a wave of inappropriate theories originated from Holland to Italy and from the media. Fr. Majcen felt the need of a religious renewal in liturgy, in the religious rules, in the instructions in novitiate, in life and in the Salesian apostolate according to Vatican II and to the Salesian General Chapter. Furthermore, there was a need to adapt to the Vietnamese context to become both international and in the same time specifically Vietnamese.

After the closure of Vatican Council II on December 8 1965

Against the true interpretations on the Council, the so-called progressivists thought they were illuminated and criticized the whole reality while their new trends weren't based on any secure foundations...¹

What to do and what to abolish?²... It seems that the simple norm of the naturally prudent Fr. Luvisotto can apply also in this context: "Who proceeds slowly goes safely."³ This was also the answer of the Vietnamese bishop to Fr. Majcen himself, and even the Provincial, Fr. Massimino, in his highest responsibility... held the old views until we received clear and considered instructions.

Fr. Vode, a friend of Fr. Majcen, sent him from Italy some new and updated books in which was reflected the more considered and appropriate directions for the formation of novices in Vietnam after the Vatican II's reform.

¹ Dopo quella conclusione del 8.XII 1965—è la voce della Chiesa—e del Vaticano II, illuminati progressisti ne hanno avuto tante critiche, contra tutto presente e nessuna base assai sigura della nuova direzione.

² Quid faciendum ed quid omittendum...

³ Chi fa adagio, va sano.

Fr. Braga's visit

On March 1 1965 Fr. Braga went to Việt Nam to congratulate Fr. Majcen on the development of the Salesian works in Việt Nam. Fr. Braga was a patriarch of Vietnamese works. It was he who had been to Việt Nam several times between 1934 and 1949, who sowed the first seed for the Salesian work called the René Robin Orphanage of Fr. Dupont in 1941-45, and the second work in Hà Nội in 1952. He sincerely advised Fr. Majcen to carefully select the candidates for Salesian life because, as he said, "These candidates will be the foundation for the Congregation in this country," and showing the statue of the Immaculate Conception he recommended him to cultivate in the novices a devotion to the Holy Virgin and to imitate her virtues."

Inauguration of the novitiate chapel

Following Fr. Majcen's criterion, the simple chapel had been built steps by steps in the measure that the workers and funds were available. It was blessed in October 1965, on the World Mission Sunday, accompanied by an exhibition on missions that attracted the people and also the novices. On the feast of Christ the King, for the first time the Mass was concelebrated in the chapel by Fr. Majcen, Fr. King and Fr. Bảo who was a novice that year.

The clothing and badge wearing ceremony at Thủ Đức

Being informed of the presence in Thủ Đức of Fr. Tohill, former Provincial and now a member of the Superior Council, Fr. Majcen obtained from an American officer 17 seats on a military airplane for himself, Fr. King and 15 novices to go to Sài Gòn. At Thủ Đức, 7 novices received clerical habits from Fr. Tohill, 7 other received Salesian badge and a priest novice named Michael Bảo received the blessed candle. The ceremony was attended by the aspirants from Thủ Đức and Gò Vấp in a solemn and joyful

CHAPTER 38: DON BOSCO'S WORKS BETWEEN 1970-72
FR. MAJCEN, RECTOR OF DON BOSCO GÒ VÁP
FR. MASSIMINO, RECTOR OF ĐÀ LẠT STUDENTATE

On February 15 1971, after the successful purchase of the former hotel at 4G Võ Tánh² Street, commonly called Mrs. Mùi Hotel, Fr. Mario and Fr. Lagger took our philosophers there to continue their formation.

On April 25 1972 Fr. Machuy, the Provincial, made these decisions:

In that April visit, Fr. Machuy had a meeting with the rectors and the Vietnamese Delegation Council including Fr. Massimino, Fr. Majcen, Fr. Mario, Fr. Isidore Lê Hường, and Fr. Walter Van Wouwe. In the meeting, Fr. Massimino announced the appointment of Fr. Van Wouwe as rector to replace Fr. Majcen. As for Fr. Majcen, due to his poor health, he would have a lighter job in Đà Lạt as vice-rector in charge of the theologians and the lay brothers in their specific formation.

The minutes of this meeting also included other items: The house of the Lazarist Fathers was not optimal for our students for lack of facilities. So it was urgent that we had our own studentate built. Fr. Majcen was entrusted to write to the Superiors in Turin and to Don Rauh, Director of the Help Office in Bonn to ask for funds.

On May 24 1971 Fr. Luigi Ricceri, the Rector Major, officially established the Studentate in conformity with canon law by Letter no. 127/71 and nominated Fr. Luigi Massimino as its Rector by Letter no. 2345, signed on May 25 1971.

And Fr. Massimino officially began his rectorship in Đà Lạt on November 7 1971. At this point, the philosophers could already move in the newly bought house while the lay brothers in formation still had to stay at the small lease house. We therefore

**CHAPTER 36: IN REMEMBRANCE OF TWO DISTINGUISHED
SALESIANS: BRO. JOSEPH BORRI AND FR. GUERINO LUVISOTTO**

Vietnam, Fr. Majcen could already see at Gò Vấp the new chapel dedicated to St. Joseph that could contain about 400 pupils. There was a solemn reception of distinguished guests including Cardinal Agagianian and other ecclesiastic and diplomatic authorities. President Ngô Đình Diệm was pleased with the very promising Salesian work. And Fr. Luvisotto always appeared with his imposing beard.

Rearrangement of Thủ Đức aspirantate and preparation for the novitiate

Fr. Majcen was back to Thủ Đức in 1959 and was appointed novice master. However, he still was responsible for the aspirantate before dedicating himself entirely for the novitiate. Once again Fr. Luvisotto came to help him. Their friendship became more and more intimate. Fr. Luvisotto began to take care of the poultry, the pigpen, the timber deposits and the contacts with the Catholic Aids Agency to get rice and food for the children... in brief, to have a simple refectory where there was sufficient food and also a hygienic surrounding through his work on the drainage that was often flooded during the monsoon season... Mgr. Arduino came to inaugurate the aspirantate. But more importantly, Fr. Tohill had decided on the preparation of facilities for the first novitiate in Vietnam that would soon open with 9 novices. For this, Fr. Majcen started to find funds for the construction of the Immaculate Conception chapel. Then when Fr. Generoso was back to Thủ Đức to resume his rectorship, he started the construction of the chapel with the architect Tống Dụ Quang... In brief, where there was hard work, Fr. Luvisotto was always in.

One year later, Fr. Luvisotto went to Trạm Hành for the preparation of the new novitiate

This new novitiate house would also be an Apostolic School for the lower secondary school boys, beginning with Form 6 and

² Now 4G Bùi Thị Xuân, Đà Lạt.

then the Forms 7, 8 and 9 successively. Fr. Majcen still saw how Fr. Luvisotto crumble the old walls down to build a large dormitory, a chapel and a study hall. In addition, Fr. Luvisotto also took on trucks full of necessities from Sài Gòn to Trạm Hành, without forgetting Fr. Majcen's pet, the dog named "Út". When he saw that our novices were short of many necessary things, he brought to them not only food but also other necessities. He constantly came to help Fr. Majcen during the 10 years the latter was novice master.

However, he rarely lived in Đà Lạt and Trạm Hành due to the altitude of 1500 m above sea level that made him easily tired. He felt better with the warm atmosphere of Sài Gòn where he could more easily frequented the American camps to find food and other necessities that the people needed, especially during the bloodshed of the Tết Mậu Thân (1968) when thousands of people had to take refuge in our houses.

Although living in Sài Gòn, Fr. Luvisotto also helped Fr. Massimino a great deal in the construction of the Salesian Studentate in Đà Lạt near the Pius X Pontifical Atheneum.

In 1972, Fr. Luvisotto once again worked side by side with Fr. Majcen at the Thủ Đức aspirantate which now included also aspirants of the Franciscans, Jesuites, Nhà Chúa, Benedictines, and Blessed Sacrament, with an excellent board of professors. At Thủ Đức, Fr. Luvisotto also helped the lay brothers to have simple workshops to teach mechanics, automotive engine, etc... to poor children. Besides, there was a Sunday oratory for the children in the neighborhood and from the prisons and orphanages... In this apostolate, Fr. Luvisotto provided the children with food, beverages and also clothing which he got from Providence. In the eyes of the American soldiers whom he knew many, he was the beggar for the poor. With them he spoke a special American which they themselves could hardly understand, but they understood his

Fr. Majcen's illness

Fr. Majcen's health became worse due to a block in blood circulation which caused inflammation in his feet. As he could not run the house through the school year, in April 1972 he chose Fr. Van Wouwe as his successor.

9. SDB Vietnam split from the China Province

The split had long been desired. This time the consultation of the confreres was made by way of voting, with the result of 73 pros out of 91 votes. After there had been the consent of the Vietnamese delegation and of the Hong Kong Provincial Council, the proceedings were sent to the Rector Major.

10. The beginning of the Salesian Studentate of Đà Lạt

For the school year 1970-71, as the young Salesians could not go abroad for their formation, the Superiors were obliged to have their theology and philosophy formation in Đà Lạt. The first formation course for theology included two confreres: the clerics Dê and Phùng who stayed temporarily at Lê Thái Tô Street, in the house of Mr. Trương Công Cửu, a former RVN Minister of Education, together with two lay brothers Simon Truyền and Joseph Ty. The theologians studied at the Pius X Pontifical Atheneum. The 13 newly professed included Joseph Ký, Linh, Quảng, Văn, etc.. They stayed and studied philosophy at Trạm Hành.

Later we intended to buy a plot of ground near a Protestant pastor to have enough space for our ever increasing number of our theologians who would go for their studies at the Pontifical Atheneum. So for the time being we borrowed from the Lazarist Fathers their Sacred Heart Villa near the Sacred Heart Church in Đà Lạt.

thanksgiving Mass at the parish of Blessed Khang¹ in Tam Hà, Thủ Đức. It was a grandiose celebration with more than a thousand participants. Fr. Majcen thanked God for having sent Dominic Uyễn to the aspirantate in 1957 and now reached the priesthood. Fr. Uyễn had a godmother in Gorizia who had greatly supported him financially for his path to the priesthood.

Later in the month, Fr. John Ty, who had studied in Rome together with Uyễn, also celebrated his thanksgiving Mass at Gò Váp.

The presidential election

In those days there was a presidential election with so much propaganda and confusion too. President Thiệu was reelected. Although he was a new Catholic convert, he was quite popular with the Catholics.

Some statistical figures in the political context: At the Gò Váp School, we had 31 pupils who had lost both parents, 65 had lost their fathers, 13 their mothers, and 134 could not be in a condition to have a decent living.⁸

St. Andrew feast

The feast of St. Andrew, Fr. Majcen's patron, was always celebrated solemnly, in part also because it was the first day of the Immaculate Conception novena. That year we were honored by the presence of Archbishop Bình of Sài Gòn, and the feast was marked by a historical performance show representing the folklore culture that delighted everybody.

¹ Now Parish of Saint Khang, named after the Vietnamese martyr.

heart and gave him whatever he wanted... He collected anything they gave and then distributed it also to Đà Lạt and to Tam Hải and Tam Hà, etc... To give is better than to receive.

The last days of the Republic of VN

The Feast of St. Joseph 1975 marked the flight of our communities from Đà Lạt to Nha Trang and then by sea to Sài Gòn. We painfully lost all our aspirants while in Sài Gòn the last attack of the city pushed so many refugees into our Thủ Đức house. After these day, Fr. Majcen and Fr. Massimino resigned and Fr. John Ty began with the new Provincial Chapter to rearrange the confreres. Our Gò Váp Technical School was occupied, and Fr. Majcen was in charge of the novitiate at Tam Hải. Fr. Luvisotto stayed in Thủ Đức and prepared various common feasts for the Salesians, the novices, the FMA, the VDB, etc...with everything from God's goodness.

May 1976: The last gathering at Thủ Đức with a feast prepared by Fr. Luvisotto

It was the profession day of the last novices under Fr. Majcen. Our guests included the FMA, the VDB, and parents of the 8 professed novices. Fr. Luvisotto, Fr. Walter Wouwe, provincial economer, and Fr. Ty, new provincial, tried their best to have a last big and solemn feast. All were happy to be together but at the same time a presentiment of darkness covered everybody: very shortly the last European confreres would part, two Italian sisters, Fr. De Meuleneare, Fr. Walter and perhaps Fr. Majcen also...

In fact, on June 9 1976, Fr. Luvisotto had to leave for Italy together with two Belgian Salesians and two Italian FMA, leaving behind Fr. Majcen alone who on July 23 would part as the last Salesian missionary together with other last missionaries of the MEP, Jesuits, PIME, etc...

Thus ended the story of more than 300 years of evangelization in Vietnam and from July 24 1976 the Salesian Congregation in Vietnam opened a new page of its history with the Vietnamese Salesians.

Fr. Luvisotto, a heart as large as the sand on the seashore

With his venerable beard, Fr. Luvisotto was still the center of the information with his preaching, conferences and his prayers for the Salesian fold. He was a true ‘son of Mary’ and of Don Bosco, and in some sense he realized the words that had been applied to Don Bosco, who had a heart “as large as the sand on the seashore.”

Fr. Majcen was fortunate to meet him again after his own expulsion from Vietnam. It was an encounter full of records and memories of Vietnam. Fr. Luvisotto continued to be a favorite confessor, but he already felt the suffering of the illnesses that brought him to the tomb. In the city of the missionary patriarch of China, Fr. Odorico, he expired on February 6 1986 in his homeland Pordenone, Italy, at the age of 74, waiting for the day of his resurrection. May God give eternal peace to our dearest and unforgettable Fr. Guerino Luvisotto.

Our pupils who were 18 years old without graduating from secondary school must do their military service. Before joining the army, they came to bid farewell to Fr. Majcen, who gave him a rosary and the blessing of Mary Help of Christians. One of them was killed in his patrol two weeks after his departure by the communist snipers. Fr. Majcen attended his funeral and gave condolences to his suffering family.

On the occasion of the Têt, our boys had a concert show on the State TV channel with traditional instruments to display the beauty of our traditional music.

In addition, we had Olympic games organized in our school with the boys grouped under various flags representing various nationalities. The game were played according established rules.

The Provincial’s canonical visit

Fr. Machuy made his canonical visit which ended successfully on March 8 1971. After his visit ended, all the pupils bid him farewell before he left for Hong Kong. In the last meeting in which he spoke in English, he asked the opinion of teachers about whether the day school or boarding school was preferable. All agreed that the boarding school was better, since it could avoid the dangers of the traffic which was in great confusion in the city.

A priestly ordination. Fr. Majcen embraced the newly ordained

On July 17 1971, Dominic Uyễn was ordained priest at Gò Váp. A family gathering was held in the joy of his parents and relatives and in particular of his novice master who had received him as a boy in 1957. The newly ordained celebrated his

Therefore the hostel was closed, and there remained only an office for the Past Pupils' Association.

7. Fr. Majcen in charge of the Provincial Delegation house

Following the Provincial's circular letter announcing the official setting up of the Vietnamese Provincial Delegation Council, the Rector Major in 1969 issued a letter to canonically establish the religious house for the provincial delegation at Gò Váp. Fr. Majcen began to have everything arranged for the delegation headquarters with rooms, a chapel, a kitchen and a refectory for about 20 people and this could become an independent community.

8. Miscellanies

During Fr. Majcen's two years as rector of Gò Váp, some remarkable happenings were worth mentioning here.

One day, a 12 years old Buddhist novice came to ask Fr. Majcen for admission into the technical school. Fr. Majcen agreed with the conditions that the boy could not wear the monk's robe, and must keep his hair long. The boy complied and he proved to be a good pupil. He listened to the night talks and prayed with other Catholic boys, but at night he said his Buddhist prayers as he did in the pagoda.

A Buddhist who was principal of a technical school in Sài Gòn sent his son to our school because he said our school had a good discipline and the studies were serious.

Almost every day there were news about the death in the battleground of a father, a brother or relative of our pupils. Our school used to have prayer sessions for the departed.

CHAPTER 37: TWO NOVITIATE COURSES – LOOKING FOR THE LODGING OF OUR THEOLOGIANS (1968-72)

A change in personnel

In Hong Kong, the provincial term of Fr. Massimino expired and Fr. Alesandro Machuy succeeded him as the first Chinese Provincial.

At Trạm Hành, Fr. Majcen was reappointed as novice master but he was no longer rector of the house. Fr. Tchong succeeded him as rector. Fr. Matthew King went to Rome to attend the spirituality course at the Salesian Pontifical University. At Trạm Hành, Fr. Lagger was prefect of studies for the aspirants and Bro. Michael Phùng was assistant of the novices.

Novitiate course IX (1968-69)

Clerics (professed)

1. Trần Đức Dậu
2. Trần Văn Cương
3. Nguyễn Văn Hân
4. Trần Ngọc Hoàn
5. Nguyễn Văn Kích
6. Mai Xuân Lâm
7. Phạm Ngọc Lan
8. Bùi Xuân Luõng
9. Phạm Văn Nam
10. Trần Quang Tòng
11. Nguyễn Văn Thái
12. Tạ Đức Tuân

13. Phạm Văn Thuỷ
14. Nguyễn Ngọc Vinh

Clerics (not professed)

15. Nguyễn Bá Vi

The 15 novices were all clerics with only one who did not profess at the end of the novitiate. As of 1986, three among them had become deacons and were working in the parishes while the rest remained at the Đà Lạt studentate with much financial difficulty and having very few opportunity for the apostolate. But gradually they would also go to assume responsibility at other places and the perseverant ones also arrived at the priesthood.

Everybody wanted peace

After the tragic events of Tết Mậu Thân (February 1968) with so many deaths and destructions, everybody now wanted peace. Even the Americans who were tired with a war without end now also want to end it, and US President Nixon proposed to withdraw the army step by step and to offer millions US dollars for the reconstruction of the country. And a peace negotiation began in 1968. While President Thiệu of the South showed good will, North PM Phạm Văn Đồng wanted to drag the talk from 1968 till 1973 with a view to preparing for the eventual victory of the communists in 1975.

The Rector Major's visit

The Rector Major Fr. Ricceri made a canonical visit to Vietnam in 1969 and he was welcomed in a most spectacular way. Beside the SDB confreres and aspirants, the FMA and their aspirants also attended the reception in which one of their aspirants greeted the Rector Major with a very good Italian which impressed him. He was very pleased and expressed his desire that all the SDB aspirants learn Italian too. However, it's a pity that the boys had

of the ecclesiastic ordinary, Fr. Majcen sent our Salesian priests there to say Mass every Sunday. From 1978, it became the office of the Vietnamese Provincial Delegation headed by Fr. John Ty, delegate of the Rector Major.

5. A special apostolate

Fr. Donders (Cha Đô), a Hollander, was a newly ordained priest with a special charisma in his apostolic work for the orphans and street boys whom he collected across the city and took care of. He was supported by some benefactors, in particular the Holland ambassador through his advertisement on TV. He had a house built for the boys' shelter and also some workshops for a future trade school. All this he did exclusively by his love for the boys and in imitation of Don Bosco, without asking for permission from his superiors. In principle Fr. Majcen could not grant him permission, but morally he supported him and his work in the consultations with the superiors.

But we could clearly see God's finger here. After Fr. Donders left Vietnam in 1975, the house became Fr. Majcen's last novitiate between 1975 and 1976. Later, Fr. Acquistapace commented that God could make a straight line with a crooked rule!

6. The Past pupils

Like all other rectors, Fr. Majcen continued to help his past pupils materially and spiritually. The house council wanted to entrust this responsibility to Bro. Bullo and so the former house for the young ex-criminals of Fr. Cuisset became a hostel for the past pupils. But in longer term, things had run badly and many morally evil incidents took place. The past pupils even took women in their living quarters at night. They were warned but didn't change.

orphan victims of the war who were increasing in number. Therefore Fr. Majcen and some other Vietnamese confreres tried to reopen the Orphanage with the dormitory ward, the living ward including the kitchen, the refectory and the simple workshops ... In other words, the purpose was to teach the orphans in various trades which could make them good workers, not technicians.

As he had done previously in Hà Nội, Mr. Chán also sent some orphans to us. And this turned out to be a good luck for us, because the orphanage could exist for more than 3 years after the tragic event in 1975 while other activities at Gò Váp were suppressed.

2. The House in Vũng Tàu

In Vũng Tàu, Fr. Isidore Lê Hường had bought a plot of land near the seashore where he built a summer house with 50 beds for the vacations of the orphans, pupils and aspirants. There was a kitchen with a woman who did the cooking and watched over the house. There was also a chapel and a garden for the boys to do the gardening. Fr. Majcen also had a room among the boys' quarters.

3. The reconstruction of the church at Bến Cát

Bến Cát was a catholic village near Gò Váp District, where Fr. De Meulenaer was parish priest and pastor. The church had been almost completely ruined during the Tết Mậu Thân battle. Encouraged by many, Fr. De Meulenaer managed to rebuild it with the help of benefactors. After the defeat of the RVN in 1975, Bến Cát became a Salesian parish with a Salesian community next to it.

4. Ba Thôn

Near Sài Gòn there was an Orphanage run by the Chợ Quán Lovers of the Cross. There was a small church where at the request

already been overloaded by the learning of English, French and Latin to start learning another language! The Rector Major visited all the three Salesian house in Vietnam where he gave valuable instructions. Fr. Majcen took these as a resource for the formation of the confreres.

Infected with a bubonic plague

Bubonic plague is quite familiar in Vietnam. The Vietnamese also call it rats plague since rats are the sources that carry the infection. Near our house at Trạm Hành there was a farm raising hundreds of pigs that lived with innumerable rats. One day Fr. Majcen was walking and praying on the playground not far from the forest when he got a flea bite. He immediately got a very serious fever and fainted after he was taken to bed. Frightened, Fr. Tchong ran to the infirmary of the Sisters of the Lovers of the Cross but no one knew how to treat. He then drove to Đơn Dương and found an American doctor who realized that it was a very serious case. He called a helicopter to take Fr. Majcen to a hospital in Nha Trang. At the hospital, the American doctors could not find out the disease, but a Vietnamese assistant doctor, Dr. Quang, said at once that it was a bubonic plague. Thus Fr. Majcen was brought into the isolation ward. He stayed unconscious for two days, but when a Redemptorist priest came to give him the sacrament of the sick, he could answer the Latin prayers very distinctly, probably subconsciously. After one week, he felt a little better and after two weeks he left the isolation ward and was brought to the normal room. The lymph node was as big as a piece of salami. While he was at hospital, the Provincial and other superiors came to visit him and together with him had meetings to prepare for the upcoming General Chapter. He eventually came back to the novitiate to give a spiritual retreat to the newly professed and new novices. He also gave conferences to the newly professed to compensate for what he had missed by his absence.

Novitiate course X (1969-70)

Clerics (professed)

1. Phạm Ngọc Chinh
2. Nguyễn Anh Hùng (RIP)
3. Phạm Minh Ký
4. Phạm Văn Linh
5. Đinh Văn Nho (RIP)
6. Nguyễn Hữu Quảng
7. Hoàng Văn Số
8. Trần Thạch
9. Nguyễn Văn Thành (1)
10. Nguyễn Văn Tùng
11. Phạm Viết Văn (RIP)
12. Lay Brothers (professed)
13. Nguyễn Văn Chân
14. Lê Văn Chứa
15. Nguyễn Văn Cung
16. Trần Văn Hay
17. Phạm Tất Hội
18. Trần Văn Hùng
19. Nguyễn Văn Minh
20. Nguyễn Văn Rõ
21. Nguyễn Văn Tâm
22. Nguyễn Văn Vui (RIP)

Fr. Machuy had wanted. Fr. Majcen demanded them to have a monthly talk (*rendiconto*) with him for their personal formation, as it had been customary in the novitiate.

The influences of progressivist ideas on the lay brothers

There was at that time a lack of religious discipline as a consequence of an incorrect interpretation of the terms such as ‘desacralization’, ‘freedom’, ‘conscience’ and ‘personality’, mingled with the “individualism”, ‘authority’ and ‘autonomy’, ‘dialogue’, etc., together with a false concept of ‘equality’ between the priest and the lay brother, ‘a lay brother can also be a rector, a provincial or a rector major’, etc... In this state, the priests who had been ordained after Vatican II were also responsible for introducing these dangerous ideas to the Vietnamese Salesian lay brothers.

Still, they insisted to change the position of the altar, to remove the statues and images, the blessed water, to do away with the genuflection, the goodnight talks, prayers and daily Mass, the visits to the Blessed Sacrament, the Holy Rosary among many others.

In these conditions, Fr. Majcen could still count on a number of young and mature confreres who supported his moderate position which was also embraced by the Vietnamese Bishops and many Vietnamese priests. As Fr. Braga said, we could overcome the evil by the good. It was an error to introduce the Western progressivist ideas to an Oriental environment as in Vietnam.

Fr. Majcen enhanced the Gò Vấp house by the rebirth of the Orphanage

The Social Department Director Lý Kính Chân complained that our Technical School had dropped the Orphanage for the

dangerous mistakes. That had also the methods used by the abbots of old. The Gò Váp house had many places to inspect: the workshops, the infirmary, the past-pupils' sector, the provincial delegation office as wanted by Fr. Mario, the entrance gate, the kitchen, and the store houses. Then you have to be at your office to talk with your confreres, the parents and so many guests. You also have to hold meetings, especially those of the House Council, and to arrange for the daily tasks..."

Fr. Majcen's difficulties in the formation of the lay brothers

As early as in 1964, Fr. Thomas Haar had had a predilection for the aspirants for the lay brother vocation. They were reserved a separate study hall and dormitory. They had their own daily Mass, their own sport activities and traditions. However, before Fr. Majcen came, they had been much criticized by Fr. Stra and Fr. De Meuleneare, causing much suffering from the part of Fr. Thomas Haar while the aspirants' spirit and life went down. Fr. Majcen, being too busy with his work and bad health, could not remove those criticisms or lift their spirit and life up.

The lay brothers' formation

Fr. Majcen's main concern was the formation of our young lay brothers as he was recommended by the Provincial Fr. Machuy to continue the post-novitiate formation of these young confreres. The young lay brothers included nine in their professional formation (magistero) and a number in their practical training as Salesian assistants. Fr. Majcen taught them philosophy, pedagogy and ascetics, and the principles of Vatican Council II as guided by the latest books sent by Fr. Vode from Turin.

The lay brothers however did not have much time since they also had to work for the children every Sunday at the Oratory as

Clerics (not professed)

1. Nguyễn Văn Biên
2. Trần Tiến Đức
3. Phan Văn Long
4. Nguyễn Văn Ngoạn
5. Đinh Huỳnh Phùng
6. Nguyễn Đức Thành
7. Nguyễn Văn Thành (2)
8. Cường
9. Đức
10. Minh
11. Nguyên
12. Tâm
13. Thạch
14. Triêm

Lay Brothers (not professed)

15. Nguyễn Văn Can
16. Phạm Văn Yên
17. Đức

The total number of the professed was 20. This novitiate was the most numerous. It ended with 11 clerics and 9 lay brothers professed, 4 novices left from the beginning and 11 during the novitiate. The reason for so great number of leavers might be due to a careless selection at the aspirantate, especially in a period

under the influence of the ‘progressivists’ with an erroneous mentality that even Fr. Acquistapace was unable to resolve.

The first Salesian clerics at the Pius X Pontifical Atheneum

Our two first clerics who follow their theology studies were Michael Phùng and Peter Đê. They temporarily stayed at a leased house. Canonically they belonged to the Trạm Hành community.

An important Provincial'scircular letter

With his circular letter dated August 22 1968, the Provincial announced that, after consultation with the Rector Major and his Council, he set up for Vietnam a true consultative council headed by Fr. Mario Acquistapace as provincial delegate with a wide range of faculties delegated by the Provincial. The provincial delegation council included Fr. Isidore Lê Hường, Fr. Matthew Tchong and Fr. Majcen. After the council was established, Fr. Acquistapace summoned and presided over the meetings as prescribed to discuss the redimensioning of the works in Vietnam.

Life in the novitiate

While the guerrillas' attacks continued in the neighborhood, life in the novitiate passed tranquilly. The religious clothing ceremony which had been scheduled to take place on November 21 was postponed until March of the following year. The reason was to avoid the cases of clerics who had just clothed the religious habit had to take it off within a few months, resulting in a bad impression for the faithful who used to have a great respect for the religious habit. In the same year, Fr. Majcen also had a solemn celebration on his feast-day although he was no longer the rector of the house.

A painful experience: Fr. Majcen had a pupil who came from a good family but both his parents had died, leaving him alone with his elder sister who had to do shameful job to earn money. He was shameful to ask for an exemption. Following Fr. Stra's advice, Fr. Majcen gave the boy free tuition and also helped his sister have a good decent job. Unfortunately, a few years later, he joined the guerrillas together with his sister.

An important visit

Fr. Majcen and Fr. Stra made a visit to the Deputy Minister for Education who was in charge of the technical department. Since the Deputy Minister had already known Fr. Stra and highly appreciated our school, Fr. Majcen and Fr. Stra took this opportunity to ask him to admit our lay brothers to the National College of Technology which in principle took only the graduates from state schools. This was an effort to make our brothers get a diploma so that they could teach and become headmasters in our schools in the future.

Exhibitions of the school's products

Following the tradition in our Salesian professional schools, Gò Vấp School also had exhibitions of its technical products. Among the guests there were the President Thiệu and the Vice President Kỳ, other officials, ambassadors and parents of the pupils. The guests were always welcomed by the brass band directed by Bro. Paul Hau, and they were very pleased with the pupils' products as well as with the cheerfulness and discipline of our pupils.

Fr. Majcen's task was really heavy. He followed Fr. Braga's advice when he was in Kunming: “As rector, you must daily visit all the sectors and contact the people in charge to know about the problems relating to the staff and the pupils so as to avoid

employees. Fr. Stra had established the Pupils' Parents Association which was very helpful to Fr. Majcen and which was desired by many.

The workshops

There were several workshops at Gò Váp. First was the Mechanics shop which had been erected by Fr. Cuisset and equipped by the Misereor; then there was the Carpentry shop, well equipped also, and Electricity and Engineering shops.

The Technical School had good teachers who took good care of their students, especially in the final classes which usually got their students graduated 100 percent.

Meeting for the teachers were well organized by Fr. Stra who invited Fr. Majcen to preside over them and guide the teachers to work in Don Bosco's spirit.

The Pupils' Parents Association

The Pupils' Parents Association at Gò Váp was created by Fr. Stra. It had a temporary statute with the deliberations taken by voting. Fr. Majcen reminded the Association's members to educate their children according to the times. Of course there needed a balance between the activities of the Association and those of the teachers.

The school fees

Of course the pupils had to pay for their tuition, books and accessories, but for the poor or orphan pupils who were good and showed diligence, Fr. Majcen gave them a reduction or even free tuition.

Finding a place in Đà Lạt for the Studentate

This was no easy task for Fr. Majcen. The bishop wanted to offer us a church but the land was not large enough for a studentate, while the Dominican studentate was spacious but quite far from the Pius X Pontifical Atheneum and too close to the guerrillas' area. Buying a hotel or a beautiful villa was almost impossible for lack of funds. Finally we managed to lease the Lazarists' studentate which became the first establishment of our Salesian Studentate in Đà Lạt.

Spiritual retreat

Fr. Majcen had his spiritual retreat in Sài Gòn at the retreat house near the Jesuits' novitiate. His retreat ended, Fr. Majcen could have some days' rest during which he had an opportunity to talk with Fr. Provincial on several useful topics.

New appointments

In the same time, Fr. Provincial announced the appointment of new superiors: Fr. Mario Acquistapace as provincial delegate with the headquarter at Gò Váp; Fr. Majcen as rector of the Gò Váp Technical School; Fr. Isidore Lê Hướng as rector of the Thủ Đức aspirantate and Fr. Matthew King as novice master at Trạm Hành, while Fr. Generoso returned to his country Brazil for a second visit.

Some statistic facts

Fr. Majcen was novice master between 1960 and 1970, during which he has received 125 novices out of whom 90 have professed. In the following years, Fr. Matthew King was novice master for 5 years (1970-75) during which he has received 78 novices out of whom 46 have professed. Below is some assessments by Fr. Majcen on his experiences as a novice master.

Fr. King as a novice assistant was a precious help

After the daily conferences by the novice master, Fr. King as novice assistant usually had the novices go into the chapel and before the Blessed Sacrament, he had them think over the conference they had just heard to see how it could be applied in their lives, then go to have a talk with the novice master to draw practical conclusions. On Sundays he usually went to the American camp to preach, hear confessions and say Mass to the American soldiers. Many Americans died for Vietnam but didn't receive due appreciation from the Vietnamese.

The most personal moments in the novitiate

These are the personal talks with the novice master as prescribed by the Constitutions. They are the most suitable moments to talk about the personal state of the novice, and the most intimate hours between the novice master and his novices. They are as the workshop of the Architects who are the Holy Spirit and Our Virgin Mary. During the talk, the novice master as God's useless servant tries to prepare a spiritual atmosphere for his novice to know God and get a deeper knowledge of himself, his characters and God's gifts in him. It's the novice's duty to purify himself, to form and adapt himself to become a true apostle as God wants him to be, that is 'qualis esse debet' in imitation of Don Bosco's model through a total transformation in conformity to the Salesian charisma.

Many years ago (1959), Fr. Majcen and Fr. Grignon, director of the former Kunming Seminary, were at the Sacred Heart Basilica in Rome. They saw groups of religious coming by turns into the basilica's yard. Fr. Grignon looked around then said what was in his mind: "Look at these religious and we can tell what congregation they belong to by the way they behave. The Franciscans happily walked with their cord round their loins as if the rope that bound Jesus in the flagellation, while the Salesians go

In addition, the situation in South Vietnam was extremely hot with the war not only between opposing armies (the communists, the nationalists, the Americans...) but also between opposing ideologies. And we Salesians who followed the politics of "Our Father", we had to find a middle way. Faced with these issues, Fr. Majcen wanted to consult and get an answer from the experienced and responsible authorities, in particular from the meetings of the rectors in Hong Kong.

Fr. Majcen was interested in making visits to our vocational and technical schools in Hong Kong and Macao. He needed to learn their acknowledged methods to adapt to our schools in Sài Gòn. Again in Hong Kong, he had an opportunity to visit his former novices who were studying at the Cheung Chau Studentate, where the Vietnamese and Chinese students got along very well, retaining of course their distinctive characteristics.

Faced with those problems, Fr. Majcen wanted to consult specifically on the formation of our young lay brothers of whom he was in charge at Gò Váp. He also could not ignore his doubts concerning the current formation at PAS and Messina because he believed that others' correct or wrong approaches could give a lesson for life...

His upcoming work at Gò Váp would be the continual restructuring of the house.

With this in mind, his journeys to Hong Kong and Macao were designed to get an assessment of the methods and experiences from the Salesians in these places.

Upon his return to Vietnam on August 24 1970, Fr. Majcen started his task immediately. Gò Váp house was quite complex: There were 37 Salesians including priests, clerics, lay brothers, confreres in practical training and lay brothers in specific formation. There were 470 students and many lay teachers and

continued his correspondence. And he continue to write until now and even thereafter.

Don Bosco's works in Vietnam were supported by the Rector Majors Don Ricceri and Don Viganò as well as other superiors, with the sole purpose of "ad majorem Dei gloriam", in imitation of Don Bosco who had always written to spread God's works.

CHAPTER 38: DON BOSCO'S WORKS BETWEEN 1970-72

FR. MAJCEN, RECTOR OF DON BOSCO GÒ VÁP

FR. MASSIMINO, RECTOR OF ĐÀ LẠT STUDENTATE

1. Don Bosco work in Gò Váp

The work in Gò Váp had been basically set up by Fr. Cuisset, and was later developed during the terms of rectorship of Fr. Generoso and Fr. Lê Huống. Now it includes a Technical School, an aspirantate for the lay brother aspirants, and a boarding house, while others continued to take shape.

We can say here that the period right before and after Vatican Council II till the 1972 General Chapter was a period of discussions and controversies with false steps and disorientations regarding discipline among the lay brothers who were influences by progressivist ideas introduced from Europe.

This was also a time in which the traditional formation since the time of Don Bosco was undergoing a drastic change in religious life and in the Constitutions and Regulations. We needed to adapt the original charisma of Don Bosco's spirituality to the modern time. Fr. Majcen had to find a way to go deep into the complicate paths of new ideas that were brought into the mind of so many young men and inexperienced confreres.

to and fro talking and making noise cheerfully as a copy of Don Bosco himself. Thus the novices of Don Bosco must also have their face as radiant as Don Bosco's face, or as Moses's face that radiated God's glory."

What Fr. Majcen wrote here gives us an sketch of what he did at that time. And his former novices continued to write to him about their memoirs with him...

The need to form Salesian missionaries among the lay faithful

Many years had already gone, but Fr. Majcen still felt a wound in his heart: the pain of getting up at 4 am to call a novice and tell him: "You have to leave immediately, because you have committed a serious curiosity when you were in Đà Lạt. This is an order from the superior which I have to tell you with a deep sore in my heart." Thus Fr. Tchong took him to Đà Lạt from where to go for his home in Đà Nẵng. This was a very inappropriate way of doing before it was changed by Vatican II. From then on, Fr. Majcen had a resolution to never act in that way again. If a novice is considered unsuited for Salesian life and has to leave us, he should bring along with him the warmth of Don Bosco's heart and his educative system of love which he has received from the Salesian environment, to become a Salesian missionary lay faithful in the world, in the Church and with the heart of Don Bosco.

A support for the Vietnamese Salesian clerics

It was fortunate for us to have the Chinese Province with its superiors who had a big heart to receive our clerics and lay brothers in their initial formation and specialization. The Salesians in formation of Vietnam and Hong Kong had the same formation program in Latin and English.

Fr. Massimino as provincial and rector of the formation house was an excellent formator of our philosophers and theologians. As

a novice master, Fr. Majcen felt secure that his novices would fall into the hands of a great Salesian who would open their minds in knowledge and spirituality in the philosophical and theological fields.

But Fr. Majcen faced the problem of getting visas for the clerics to go to Hong Kong. In this difficult condition, we in Vietnam were considering the possibility of sending our students to the Pius X Pontifical Atheneum in Đà Lạt, or to other studentates or seminaries. For this purpose, we tried to have our students learn well English and French so that they could be able to understand the lectures that the professors at those studentates only give in French. We needed good teachers such as the two Chinese Salesians Fr. Sung and Fr. Leung.

Again on the statistic facts

During Fr. Majcen's ten years as novice master (1960-70), the novices were 125, out of whom 35 left. The total number of the professed after they finished their novitiate was 90.

And these are the figures for the time of Fr. King who succeeded Fr. Majcen as novice master:

Year	Novices	Professed	Leavers
1970-71	9	6	3
1971-72	13	8	5
1972-73	19	12	7
1973-74	18	11	7
1974-75	17	12	5

The total number of novices in the time of Fr. King was 76, of whom 49 professed.

The great total of the professed in 15 years of novitiate (1960-75) was 139.

Fr. Majcen offered God this thanksgiving prayer:

I will forever be thankful to God and Mary and Don Bosco for my ten years' work as a novice director. As Fr. Braga used to say, when God entrusts someone with a responsibility of a superior, he also gives him graces for his own sanctification and for the sanctification of others.

I humbly thank you for your graces. Forgive my sins, my defects and also my scandals.

I praise you, I thank you. Continue to bless my novices!

And on August 27 1970 Fr. Majcen began his new office as Rector of Don Bosco Gò Váp.

Fr. Majcen's sensible heart

Fr. Majcen used to write articles in Slovenian on several missionary magazines which were published worldwide. He happened to know that Bro. Opaka, a simple and free-spoken man as Nathanael, once wrote to Fr. Vode: "Fr. Majcen is like a hen that has laid an egg and immediately cackles to make it known to all the world." This remark hurt Fr. Majcen, making him feeling as if he has lost all the merits. He wrote to Fr. Vode and several friends of his and the magazines' editors, telling them that he would no longer send them any news about his work. They

protested, encouraging him to continue to write to make known the wonders of God for His glory and for the benefit of many who would know the works of Providence and of Mary, Don Bosco's Teacher. Encouraged thus by these letters and those of the Superiors, Fr. Majcen overcame his scrupulous considerations and

on the feast of Mary Help of Christians at the former delegation house which had been repaired by Fr. Van Wouwe; and the novitiate would be provided with financial resources. Thus in Fr. Ty's presence, 15 cleric novices began their novitiate under the guidance of Fr. Majcen. That was the 16th novitiate course in Vietnam. The VDBs also came here every month for their activities.

Other novitiate courses after 1975

Novitiate course 1976-77: Novice master: Fr. Majcen, with 8 novices: Trần Văn Cường, Trần Văn Hào, Trần Thanh Phương, Đỗ Đình Sáng, Nguyễn Tiến Đạt, Nguyễn Tuấn Đoàn, Nguyễn Thành Minh, Trần Ngọc Thắng. There now (1986) remain: Fr. Cường, Fr. Hào, Fr. Phương, Bro. Sáng.

Novitiate course 1977-78: Novice master: Fr. Majcen for 1 month, then Fr. Đệ. Now there remain: Fr. Bộ, Fr. Hưng, Fr. Liêm, Fr. Tuấn...

Novitiate course 1978-79: Novice master: Fr. Đệ. Now there remain: Fr. Chân, Fr. Tân.

Novitiate course 1979-80: Novice Master: Fr. Đệ. Now there remain: Fr. Hiển.

The new regime's rule

In every corners of the city loudspeakers kept sending continued messages on the life reformation, calling people to read newspapers, and requesting government authorities on all levels to carry out new instructions of the State.

A new economy program obliged all refugees to return to their places of origin. Those inhabitants in Sài Gòn without a job were forced to go to the new economy regions to turn the land to grow

proceeded to buy more land near Mrs. Mùi hotel to have enough space for all our brothers. Then we also bought Mr. Năm Lành's land. Finally we had a 1 ha land for the building of our studentate.

11. Fr. Majcen's short visit to Ban Mê Thuột

Before going to Europe for a visit to his country, Fr. Majcen was invited by Fr. Lê Hướng, rector of Thủ Đức, to go to Ban Mê Thuột for a short rest. He took with him 15 aspirants and some confreres who wanted to visit their parents there. In Ban Mê Thuột, Fr. Majcen went to see Mgr. Mai whom he had known in Hà Nội as a secretary of the Hà Nội bishopric. Fr. Majcen also went to see the land on which our orphans had lived for half a year after they had immigrated from Hà Nội to the South. And after a few days' rest, Fr. Majcen came back to Sài Gòn.

CHAPTER 39¹: SALESIANS IN VIETNAM IN THE YEARS 1972-73

A National Medal award

In a letter dated May 15 1972, the Social Department Director with whom Fr. Majcen had been collaborating from 1952 to 1972 announced that the State had issued a decree to award Fr. Majcen the First Grade Medal for his social service.

On May 23 1972, the Minister of Social Affairs invited Fr. Majcen to come to the Ministry office. In the presence of the Ministry's staff, of the representatives of the Church and the Salesian Congregation, the Minister awarded him the Medal in a solemn ceremony. In his discourse, Dr. Nguyễn Văn Phiêu, the Minister, spoke of Fr. Majcen's merits for the orphans in Hà Nội,

¹ Chapter 39: 'The Battle of Hell' in the Vietnamese version was not written by Fr. Majcen and is not translated here.

Thủ Đức and Gò Váp. In receiving the Medal, Fr. Majcen said this honor was not for himself but for all the Salesians who had been working with him through these years. When he was back, all the confreres and pupils greeted him and congratulated him. In his speech, Fr. Mario Acquistapace spoke of Fr. Majcen's 20 years' work as a founder of the Salesian works in Vietnam.

A journey to Europe

Fr. Majcen left Sài Gòn for Rome, where the Congregation's Generalate had been moved from Turin. There he reported all the needs and conditions of Vietnam to the Rector Major, the Regional Councilor Fr. Williams, the Economer General Fr. Pilla, and Fr. Tohill, the CouncilorGeneral for Missions. He told them that the purpose of this journey was not only for rest but also for raising funds for the works in Vietnam.

Then he set out to Turin to draw in spiritual resource from the Congregation's cradle in Valdocco. From Turin, he took the train from Trieste, crossed the Sava river and went to Belgrado, Atene, Constantinople, etc... Finally the train stopped in Lubljana from where he came to Krsko, his heart's call, where his late mother had rested since 10 years.

He went to see his two sisters and the parishes run by the Salesians where he realized that even in a communist country we could do our apostolate with Don Bosco's pedagogy system. This was also the kind of apostolate which the Salesians in Vietnam were currently carrying out.

From Yugoslavia he went to Austria to see his uncle Hans for some days. Then he made a visit to the Austrian Province, accompanied by Fr. William Schmidt whom he had known in Macao in 1951-52. Fr. Schmidt was currently president of the Sponsoring Office for the Austrian Province's Missions. Fr.

parish priests had gone overseas. The bishops were pleased to grant us 14 parishes and communities which were without a priest. In these new environments, although our Salesians were living in extreme poverty, they could still be faithful with their Salesian vocation. At Gò Váp there was still the Orphanage. At the Technical School, its teachers and employees had to attend a course of indoctrination. Near our small chapel at Bến Cát, we had two priests and some lay brothers who earn their living by planting rice and raising pigs. At Thủ Đức we had still 70 aspirants. In Đà Lạt we had the Studentate of Philosophy and Theology...

The confreres who did not belong to these communities went to the following parishes:

Sài Gòn:

Ba Thôn: Fr. Ty; Cầu Bông: Fr. Hưng; Củ Chi: Bro. Vĩnh; Hóc Môn: Fr. Hoè; GV Technical School: Bro. Hiền; Bến Cát: Fr. De Meulenear; GV Orphanage: Fr. Huỳnh; Delegation House: Fr Van Wouwe, Fr. Bá; Tam Hải Novitiate: Fr. Majcen; Xuân Hiệp: Fr. Đê.

Đồng Nai:

Tân Cang: Fr. Phùng; Phú Sơn: Fr. Hướng; Đức Huy: Fr. Hiên; Suối Quýt-Cầm Đường: Deac. Hữu.

Lâm Đồng:

Đà Lạt: Fr Massimino; Trạm Hành: abandoned; Liên Khương: Fr. Uyễn; Thanh Bình: Fr. Tiêm.

Fr. Majcen reappointed novice master

On May 6 1975, Fr. Ty came to St. Paul Hospital to tell Fr. Majcen that, with the consent of his council, he had nominated Fr. Majcen as novice master and rector. The novitiate would be started

with the picture of Hồ Chí Minh, while the name Sài Gòn City was changed into Hồ Chí Minh City.

Sài Gòn City with 3 million inhabitants was overcrowded with refugees who were now able to return to their places of origin. The roads were jammed with people traveling when all the main roads in the part under Parallel 17 were now cleared.

After handing his power to Fr. Ty, Fr. Massimino prepared to go back to his studentate in Đà Lạt. Before leaving Sài Gòn, he went to greet the Sài Gòn Archbishop Nguyễn Văn Bình, the Xuân Lộc Bishop and also the newly consecrated bishop of Đà Lạt, Mgr. Bartholomew Nguyễn Sơn Lâm, asking him to support the young Salesian Congregation in Vietnam.

After handing the Thủ Đức School to Fr. Hào, Fr. Majcen went to St. Paul Hospital for a cure and rest.

Now as delegate of the Rector Major, Fr. John Ty, with the consent of Fr. Massimino, chose for his council:

Fr. Joseph Hiên: Vicar
 Fr. Marc Huỳnh: Economer (Fr. Van Wouwe: Vice-economer)
 Fr. Dominic Uyễn: Councilor
 Fr. Fabian Hào: Councilor
 Bro. Joseph Hoan: Councilor.

Fr. Ty began to study with his council on the faculties he needed to ask from the Rector Major so as to respond to the difficult situation, especially in the impossibility of communication with the superiors in Rome.

Knowing that in the new regime, all the Catholic schools would soon be nationalized, all Catholic organizations abolished and the priests' activities would be limited to the parish and the church only, the council asked the bishops of Sài Gòn, Xuân Lộc and Đà Lạt to give to us their vacant parishes where their former

Schmidt then took him to Horn, near the Underwaltersdorf School where he had a few unforgettable days with Fr. Schmidt's sisters. He also met Fr. Matko who kept him for a vacation in Alpi Karavanke. But he could not stay long there, because his chief purpose was to find scholarships for his theology students. He had to go to Germany immediately.

In Germany, following Fr. Tohill's instruction, he flew to Gratze, Salisburg and Frankfurt and then to Bonn where Fr. Rauh was awaiting him. He wanted to go to Aachen to contact the Misereor to find support for the enlargement of the Gò Váp Don Bosco Technical School and for the specific formation for the lay brothers at Gò Váp, as well as to find annual scholarship for 70 Vietnamese young confreres in formation. Generally speaking, the finding of financial aids to the confreres in formation was quite easy. But he needed to clearly expose the political situation in Vietnam.

Both Fr. Majcen and Fr. Rauh were very satisfied with the good results. Finally Fr. Rauh took Fr. Majcen to the grandiose cathedral of Aachen, then they made a tour of the vineyards and wine productions areas in the Rhine valley.

Back to Vietnam

Early in September, Fr. Majcen flew to Gratze to bid farewell to his uncle Hans. He went to Brezice and stayed with his sisters for a few days then took a train to Trieste-Rome. He met the General Economer and Fr. Tohill to report on his journey. Upon arrival in Sài Gòn he came to greet Fr. Mario Acquistapace at the provincial delegation office then went to Đà Lạt to greet the Provincial and Fr. Massimino and reported to them on his journey. At that moment Fr. Lagger had had a room prepared for him at the Sacred Heart Villa of the Lazarists where he could stay as vice-rector to Fr. Massimino to take charge of the theologians and the

lay brothers in specific formation. But then Fr. Lê Huống for some very serious reasons had asked the Provincial to nominate Fr. Majcen as rector of Thủ Đức house to replace him and so Fr. Majcen's intended responsibility as vice-rector in charge of the theologians and the lay brothers was not actualized.

The first Vietnamese Salesian priest to live out of community

Our first Vietnamese priest, Fr. Isidore Lê Huống, after a few years as rector of the Thủ Đức aspirantate, met with a serious scandal. He demanded the Provincial to let him live out of the community and he obtained Fr. Machuy's permission to go and live with his brother who was a parish priest in Ban Mê Thuột. Therefore Fr. Machuy called Fr. Majcen back to be rector of the Thủ Đức aspirantate.

Thus Fr. Majcen was an interim rector of the aspirantate for the years 1972-73 then became official rector for a 3 year term between 1973 and 1976. Here was the arrangement for the house staff: Fr. Majcen, rector; Fr. Luvisotto, vice-rector and economer; Fr. Joseph Hiên, prefect of studies; Fr. Cho, graduated from PAS, catechist; and Fr. Aarts in charge of the oratorian boys and poor children. After 1975 came Frs. Hào and Phùng and finally Bro. Doãn in charge of material jobs in the house.

Fr. Lê Huống applied for an incardination in the Ban Mê Thuột diocese but he was refused and was only allowed to do pastoral work in the parish of Quảng Đức. Later the bishop decided to incardinate him in the pastoral field only while he still kept his statute as a Salesian priest. It was in May that Fr. Majcen had an opportunity to pass his vacation at this parish.

The Thủ Đức aspirantate's situation

As an official principal of the Thủ Đức school, Fr. Lê Huongoose had well organized the Form 7, 8 and 9 of the lower secondary

CHAPTER 42¹: SOUTH VIETNAM WAS LOST TO THE COMMUNISTS – AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SALESIANS

On April 30 1975, at 10 am, Fr. Majcen heard the news that Sài Gòn was completely in the hands of the communists!

The cannons and gunfire receded. In the afternoon some braver people went downtown. They saw the communist soldiers everywhere in amiable and cheerful appearances as if to win the sympathy of the Sài Gòn people.

The hand-over of authority in the Congregation

On May 1, Fr. Massimino came to Thủ Đức and proposed to Fr. Majcen to hand over his rectorship to Fr. Fabiano Hào. The hand-over was made smoothly and was celebrated in a simple manner by toasts in the community. And Fr. Massimino in his turn handed his authority as delegate of the Rector Major to Fr. John Ty, his vicar, and as soon as the route Sài Gòn-Dà Lạt was cleared, he returned to Đà Lạt with his students.

The crowds of refugees in Sài Gòn were now allowed to return to their places of origin. Even the foreign missionaries as well as the Salesians could enjoy a relative freedom in the beginning.

Sài Gòn on May 1 1975

Everybody knew they had to begin their new life with the new regime, and so people in Sài Gòn tried to find favor with their new masters. Red flags with star were hanged everywhere, together

¹ Chapter 44: "The Events of April 30 1975" in the Vietnamese version was not written by Fr. Majcen and is not translated here.

Brothers and Redemptorists left Vietnam. Fr. Majcen was offered to board an American airplane together with the clerics but he refused because he wanted to stay with his dear sons in Vietnam. Many aspirants and postulants left together with their parents. Fr. Massimino recommended everybody to be in cold blood and calm.

Sài Gòn City seemed calm and quiet. The traffic was normal. However the battles round the city were going on, the gas deposits burned, the arsenals detonated, the sky clouded with smoke, and on the last days of April 1975, the sky of the city turned gray and gloomy.

On April 28 we heard about the fall of Biên Hoà, a city 20 kilometers from Sài Gòn. The communist troops prepared to enter Sài Gòn. Sài Gòn government under president "Big" Minh surrendered but a portion of the RSV Army still resisted while withdrawing to the Mekong Delta.

On the eve of 29 and 30, people could not sleep. Rockets tore across the sky. At 2.00 am Fr. Majcen heard the roaring of American tanks led by South Vietnamese soldiers but these all wore berets with the communists' star. The tanks were heading for Sài Gòn.

Near our house in Gò Váp the nationalists burnt their weapons arsenal causing explosions with smokes and flames covering the sky. At 10 am we knew we were safe. In the afternoon some brave people went out to the city. The communist soldiers were everywhere. They all were smiling as they were welcomed by the people.

school at Thủ Đức with 350 pupils who came from poor families but who had a desire to become priests or Salesian religious. The higher secondary school included the Forms 10, 11 and 12 with 200 pupils as Salesian aspirants, out of whom the Form 12 students were Salesian postulants. We had good and demanding teachers.

Fr. Hiên successfully organized a music performance in the study hall, with about 900 attendants.

At the beginning of this school year, about 30 bigger aspirants started their oratorian activities with the boys at Savio House, on our plot of land near the Tam Hải parish. Our Don Bosco Oratory was full of life with activities such as catechism teaching, sports and snacks. The boys numbered 500, often up to 800.

On September 17 1972 there was a meeting of religious at the Phuoc Sơn monastery where Fr. Majcen was present. The priests, monks and nuns spoke on the possible coming of the communists and on how we should act in the new situation, without arriving at a solution. Finally the moderate people concluded: Deus providebit!

In the meantime along the road newly built by the American soldiers linking Sài Gòn to Đà Nẵng, the traffic was by no means safe, especially by night. Very often the police had to remove the flags of the Liberation Front and erase the words written on the walls, and here and there the roaring of bombing and gunfire were heard: Such was the situation when Fr. Majcen came back to Thủ Đức.

The Special General Chapter 1971-72 and the Vietnamese Chapter

The SGC was transferred from the motherhouse in Turin to the Generalate at Pisana, Rome. On October 29 1972 there was the beatification of Don Rua. At that time some Salesian lay brothers

put forth new ideas on the absolute equality between the priests and lay brothers. Only at the next general chapters did the correct concept on this matter reappear.

In Vietnam, with the Rector Major's consent, the Provincial held a special chapter on November 21 1972 to decide on the necessary arrangements for the establishment of a Vietnamese Special Delegation in a near future. This was the assuming of our responsibility before the Congregation. The task was prepared by discussions in each house before the matter was discussed at the provincial delegation level.

From Hong Kong, the Provincial Fr. Machuy together with Fr. Lomazzi and Fr. Joseph Zen as observers came to Vietnam for this special chapter.

At the chapter, there were interventions from the house rectors and delegates and from the novice master. The discussions were deepened and concerned the issues that had been discussed in the previous meetings. The Provincial was sometimes confused perhaps because he could not understand the opinions which the translator did not translate them into Italian correctly. But Fr. Massimino was more experienced in comprehending the arguments and the statements. He and Fr. Majcen looked for more practical solutions in the mid of the worst war in March then in October 1972. Finally the Provincial concluded that what had been deliberated was only our desire that needed to be approved by the Rector Major after listening to the opinion of the Provincial Council.

Fr. Majcen's task

At this time, the young confreres wanted to change everything even what was not necessary. On the other hand, Fr. Majcen was sent to Thủ Đức precisely for the formation of Salesians who

When the route Sài Gòn – Đà Lạt was reopened, we received news from Fr. Lagger and Fr. Stra who had remained with some volunteer confreres at Đà Lạt. There they had done a very great job. The Trạm Hành house had been abandoned. The Rector Major kept continuous correspondence with Vietnam: he insisted Fr. Majcen to stay in Vietnam with the young Vietnamese Salesians. No one knew what would happen. The American had left according to their policy. The Church which did not do politics stayed, and we Salesians were determined to stay with the Church. However, Fr. Viganò instructed on how to implement the hand-over of power to the Vietnamese Salesians, to grant special faculties to the Rector Major's delegate, as also to the priests who could not officially exercise their ministries. In the same time the North government had asked Vatican to nominate Archbishop Trịnh Như Khuê of Hà Nội as a first Cardinal in Vietnam, and Mgr. Trịnh Văn Căn as assistant archbishop. Both were permitted to go to Rome. That was a quite open policy at least in the beginning.

Many Vietnamese citizen, with about 30 priests, including our Fr. Vincent Quí, had left Vietnam and got entry visas in the United States. Many others who had not an entry visa also bought boats and ventured their lives to leave Vietnam by sea to Thailand, Malaysia and Hong Kong. Innumerable boats people lost their lives in this evacuation. The sea had become the grave for many.

The last week

The communists occupied the provinces one after another. Quảng Trị, Huế, then Đà Nẵng in turn fell. On April 22, President Thiệu resigned. Gen. Minh replaced him.

To serve the evacuation of the Vietnamese, the Americans used giant ships and airplanes. Fr. Aarts and Fr. Donders having their Hollander visas departed for Europe. One hundred Lasalle

The evacuation by boat

Our evacuees arrived at Phan Rí where they were received and given food by the parish priest there, who then found boats to take them to Vũng Tàu. From Vũng Tàu, they took coaches to Thủ Đức where Fr. Majcen happily received them and had a meal prepared for them. The aspirants' parents at once brought their sons home. Thus ended unhappily the Trạm Hành Apostolic School which we had spent so much energy to build and in which we had put so much hope!

By the end of April, the novices and philosophers had been settled a part at Gò Vấp and a part at Thủ Đức. Fr. Majcen did his best by acting both as rector and novice master to replace Fr. King who had returned to Hong Kong from where he went to China to see his old mother whom he hadn't seen for so many years.

Then news reached Thủ Đức about the bloody battle in Quảng Đức where a thousand Catholic soldiers were killed. The national army became greatly discouraged. Although the soldiers still had enough weapons and ammunitions, very few still had a will to fight.

April 1975

In spite of the general bad situation, at Thủ Đức we still went on with the existing classes and an added class for the novices who had come from Trạm Hành.

When Đà Nẵng collapsed, Mgr. Chi recommended Fr. Bogo and Fr. Tchong to go back to Hong Kong.

Fr. De Meulenear (Cha Ngọc) assumed his chaplainship of the Lovers of the Cross and their Ba Thôn chapel, where Fr. Ty used to go to say Mass. Ba Thôn later became the headquarters for the Vietnamese Salesian Delegation.

should be strong, ready for the modern times, of "firm people", as Fr. Ricceri often said. In Fr. Majcen's view, what we needed to do was not so much to change some structures as some people wished, as to form the aspirants' personality to make them become new persons in imitation of Don Bosco. In his talks with the aspirants, he found it not difficult to give them remarks, because they trusted him, a "novice master with 10 years' experience." He only found it difficult to talk with the confreres with the progressivists ideas they had learned from some professors such as Lutte, Girardi and others at the PAS in Rome, which had caused so much suffering to the Rector Major and the Superior Councilors.

But Fr. Majcen was greatly comforted because at that time he could together with the aspirants learn how to become a Salesian "qualis esse debet" in Don Bosco's dream, and also by the help of God and of Mary Help of Christians. Fr. Majcen was grateful to Don Bosco because in that dream he learned the characteristic virtues of a Salesian vocation for all times and all moments. At that time, this was the resolution of the trio Massimino-Majcen-King, the results of which still remain with the Salesians in Vietnam.

CHAPTER 40: TOWARD SETTING UP THE VIETNAMESE DELEGATION OF THE RECTOR MAJOR (JAN 1 1973 – JUNE 6 1975)

1973

After series of air raids and atrocious battles across the South for ten days during Christmas, there was a ceasefire and then peace negotiations in Paris between the Americans, the South and the North governments. The people however did not believe in the success of these negotiations. At Thủ Đức we were celebrating the feasts of St. Francis of Sales and St. John Bosco. Archbishop Bình came to preside over the Mass and gave the homily on St. John Bosco.

On January 24 there was an announcement of the signing of a peace Agreement. The news was received with great joy but on the 25 there was rumor that the ceasefire would become bloody. In spite of that, on the eve of Tết, January 26, we had a big feast at Thủ Đức with the presence also of the Archbishop.

On January 27, the date on which the ceasefire took effect, some people who were on their way to Đà Lạt had to come back in fright because there were attacks on the way. Several bridges were destroyed, and there were cannons and gunfire everywhere. In the night, signal flares brightened the sky and the houses were trembling.

At 8 am of January 28, President Thiệu announced on TV that more than 300 areas throughout the South had been raided by the communists and 200 places had been intruded for their propaganda. While he was speaking of peace, bombardments continued and peace was vanishing!

prepared a very solemn chanting Mass. After Mass, all had a very happy party but at the end of the party, news came that the communists had cut the route Đà Lạt – Sài Gòn while they were advancing toward Đà Lạt. So we decided to evacuate via Nha Trang from where to take a boat to Vũng Tàu, a district at about 120 kilometers from Sài Gòn. Fr. Hào and the postulants took a coach to the seashore. At Trạm Hành Fr. Hiên hurried packing some necessary stuff then took 300 small aspirants in four coaches for Nha Trang. Fr. King and Fr. Lagger took care of the novices and a number of the philosophers. There remained in Đà Lạt only Fr. Stra, Bro. Bullo and some clerics who volunteered to stay. Fr. Uyễn had intended to stay at Trạm Hành but as two of the boys had missed the bus, he had to take them to chase after Fr. Hiên's coaches. On the way, he met Fr. Massimino who ordered him to join the group and go together to Sài Gòn for the possibility of teaching the theologians there in the future.

From Đà Lạt, other religious men and women also evacuated via Nha Trang. Our confreres and aspirants came to Phan Rí, where Fr. Peter Lê Văn Tịnh, a parish priest and Fr. Majcen's ex-novice, helped to find some fishermen who had a boat and who could take us to Vũng Tàu.

In the worrying atmosphere in Sài Gòn

News about the dangerous situation in Đà Lạt brought worries to Sài Gòn where Fr. Majcen kept updating information about it by phone or telegram but unsuccessfully because all communication channels were interrupted. Parents of the boys in Đà Lạt came to inquire about their children's conditions but Fr. Majcen was unable to give them an answer.

still calm... In that atmosphere, all were expecting some indescribable event.

To leave or to stay?

The Holy See gave order to the pastors in Vietnam not to abandon their faithful. Except Fr. Quí, Fr. Majcen, Fr. Massimino and other foreign Salesians had decided to stay in Vietnam with the Vietnamese Salesians. This was a great consolation and comfort for the Vietnamese Salesians. However there was order that the confreres lent to Vietnam by the Chinese Province had to return to Hong Kong. Fr. Francis Tsang was the first to be called back. Thus Fr. Majcen had to replace Fr. Tsang to take care of the VDBs, by gathering them every month for a retreat and giving conferences for their formation. He got very rich resources left by Fr. Tsang and Fr. Mario. Fr. Majcen studied their rules and charism to apply to their formation. Since they hadn't passed their novitiate according to the rule, he asked from their generalate in Rome to have a canonical novitiate for them.

CHAPTER 41¹: THE PANIC EVACUATION FROM 19-3-1975 AND THE SURRENDER OF SÀI GÒN

Feast of St. Joseph

To keep the confreres' morale high, Fr. Massimino had the feast of St. Joseph solemnly celebrated at Đà Lạt. The gathering included all the philosophy and theology students, the lay brothers in specific formation, the novices, the postulants who had come with Fr. Hào from Thủ Đức. Fr. Stra, Fr. Lagger and Bro. Bullo

¹ Chapter 42: "The Ban Mê Thuôt Battle on March 10 1975" in the Vietnamese version was not written by Fr. Majcen and is not translated here.

In the meantime the Americans began their withdrawal to leave the Vietnamese their own defense. And so the war continued raging in Vietnam until April 30 1975.

After the Tết holidays, the school resumed their classes. On March 6, the Delegation Council met to discuss prospective works after our split from the Hong Kong Province. It was decided that our Thủ Đức house would be changed into an Aspirantate and Interreligious High School, and to move here the lay brothers in specific formation from Gò Váp together with the confreres currently studying at the State universities.

Thus we dropped the idea of an establishment of a formation house in Bảo Lộc because of lack of funds and impossibility to sell the Trạm Hành house and land.

In April the Delegation Council agreed on the opening of the Technical School in Đà Nẵng where Mgr. Chi, our old friend in Bùi Chu previously, had everything prepared for the workshops. Fr. Tchong would go to Đà Nẵng to supervise the constructions and help the parish priest there. Fr. Generoso Bogo, future rector of Đà Nẵng, would temporarily take care for the spiritual life of the St. Paul Sisters in Đà Nẵng.

The Delegation Council also agreed to sent the post-philosophy formation confreres to attend the State university in order to get diplomas for our future schools.

At Gò Váp, Fr. Van Wouwe would restructure the Technical School and the Apostolic School for poor pupils, and build new workshops of electricity and mechanics, while waiting for the equipment on the way to be sent here.

Finally, at Fr. Majcen's insistence, the Council also consented on the sending of the lay brothers to Đà Lạt for two years' formation in fundamental theology, philosophy and pedagogy. All

this was on its way before it was blown away by the communists' victory in 1975.

Fr. Luvisotto and the Providence

When the Americans began their withdrawal, our economist Fr. Luvisotto came to them and obtained from them so many stuffs for the necessities of our poor boys. His venerable beard and his imagery language won the sympathy of all people. And all these goods he received from God's bounty were distributed also to the Đà Lạt Studentate and the poor.

Monthly retreats

In their monthly retreats, the confreres frequently came to the Phước Sơn Monastery where they had a quiet atmosphere to meditate, listen to the sermons and make confession. After lunch, they had a round table discussion on the renewal and the carrying of the planned tasks.

The beginning of the great development between 1973 and 1975

At the beginning of the school year 1973-74, Fr. Majcen was officially appointed rector of Thủ Đức house for a 3 year term. He had a number of complicate duties to face with.

The first problem was about the interreligious aspirantate where we had 200 Salesian aspirants in Forms 10 to 12 and 150 aspirants from other congregations (Franciscans, Jesuits, Redemptorists, Domus Dei, John of God, Benedictines, Blessed Sacrament, John the Baptist, and diocesan seminarians...). They followed the State education programs in various section: A (Natural Sciences), B (Maths), and C (Languages).

them, Catholics were imperialists. As he was involved with the RVN Army, Fr. Quí said he would leave Vietnam once the communists arrived. The foreign Salesians in Vietnam kept posing this question: "What should we do?"

Nominations of new bishops

From its experience in China, the Holy See hurried to nominate a bishop for every diocese *sede vacante* and an assistant bishop for every diocese. For the Diocese of Đà Lạt that was *sede vacante* after the death of Mgr. Simon Hoà Hiền, Fr. Bartholomew Lâm, CSS, was nominated bishop. The consecration of the new bishops was made on St. Joseph's feast day, March 19. The Holy See recommended the pastors to stay with their flocks where the communists occupied. Frs. Massimino and Majcen had promised to the bishop of Đà Lạt they would stay with their Salesian confreres.

Hopes or illusions?

On March 6 1973, Fr. Massimino wrote to the Rector Major that the confreres in Vietnam numbered 141, mostly under 30 years old, including Fr. Ty, the vice delegate. Out of them 21 were Vietnamese priests, 64 clerics, 19 novices in Đà Lạt, and foreign Salesian lay brothers and missionaries. The Salesian works were developing at full speed, and even if the communists were preparing for a large scale attack, it was believed that the nationalists would resist successfully and therefore the Salesians were determined to stay at their places and continue their apostolate.

In the meanwhile on the radio and on the press abroad, there was news that the defeat of the RVN was approaching.

There was news of a surprise attack of the communists in Ban Mê Thuột on March 10 1975, while in Đà Lạt the situation was

**Anniver-
sary of the
Salesians
in
Vietnam**

An expiation pilgrimage

The Thủ Đức community decided to make a pilgrimage to the Fatima shrine near the Bình Lợi Bridge. The confreres walked with their rosaries in hand. It seemed that everybody sensed a great disaster was approaching the Salesian works and the whole of Vietnam.

We prayed that merciful God and Mary most holy be always with us whatever danger would befall.

After a long walk under the burning sun, we arrived at Fatima, a very large pilgrimage land with a church, several chapels and sites for pilgrims. The site was at the bank of a river taking in fresh breath for pilgrims at the shrine.

Here the aspirants and the confreres had their own recollections and then gathered for a Mass. Beside us, several other groups of pilgrims also came, all full of confidence in Mary of Fatima, their only remaining hope. All prayed the rosary, made confessions and attended Masses. By groups or individually they came here to pray instead of going to La Vang where Our Lady had appeared but where the church had been destroyed by war.

A ceasefire during the Tết holidays

At the Tết, cannons and gunfire stopped. But the silence made people tremble. Our Fr. Vincent Quí, a captain and chaplain, invited Fr. Majcen to enjoy the Tết in Biên Hoà. At lunch, Fr. Quí notified him of the news that if the communists won the war, they would expel all priests and missionaries because, according to

Together with the cleric aspirants, there were also lay brother aspirants who came from Gò Vấp because Fr. Thomas Har had returned to Hong Kong. Apart from the aspirantate, there was also a hostel for the confreres attending the State universities. In addition, assistants were sent here for their practical training: they helped to assist the boys while attending some professional courses.

The Rector Major Fr. Ricceri's canonical visit

Fr. Ricceri, the Rector Major, came to Thủ Đức, accompanied by two Superior Councilors Fr. Dho and Fr. Viganò, and by the Provincial Fr. Machuy and Fr. Acquistapace. He was welcomed by all the community and the superiors of other congregations whose students were studying at our aspirantate. We had the honor to have the presence also of Archbishop Nguyễn Văn Bình, the Superior of the Lasalle Brothers and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA). The Rector Major praised the FMA for their admirable Italian and exhorted our aspirants to learn Italian beside English and French. Fr. Majcen had a talk with the Superiors on the formation of the Salesian aspirants.

Inauguration of the Đà Lạt Studentate

In Đà Lạt, Fr. Massimino with the collaboration of Fr. Stra and Fr. Lagger had completed the building of the Studentate and they were awaiting the Rector Major's visit. Fr. Ricceri went to Đà Lạt with Fr. Mario Acquistapace, and Mgr. Carretto, a Salesian bishop in Thailand. They talked with the Nuncio in Vietnam and with the Thailand and Philippines Provincials. Fr. Majcen also accompanied them on another car together with some confreres. Arriving in Bảo Lộc, Fr. Majcen's car got a serious accident without anybody being gravely hurt, thanks to God's Providence, and they came to Đà Lạt very late into the night.



On November 11 1973 the inauguration took place solemnly. In the midst of the Đà Lạt community including the Rector Fr. Massimino, Fr. Stra, Fr. Lagger and all the students of philosophy and theology and the lay brothers in formation, the Rector Major cut the inauguration band and declared the Don Rua Studentate opened, in the presence of the Bishop, the Director and teaching staff of the Pius X Pontifical Atheneum, several parish priests and the civil authorities. After a party with an artistic performance, the



Celebratio ns of Fr. Majcen's 70th Birthday and the 30th

good helper. Besides, Fr. Fabiano Hào and Fr. Michael Phùng were house councilors. Fr. Peter Aarts and Fr. Michael Bảo were confessors. The total number of confreres was 27.

Fr. Majcen was septuagenian

Fr. Majcen's 70th birth day was celebrated very solemnly. Fr. Ty had an initiative to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the beginning of Salesian works in Vietnam and the event of the split of Vietnam from the Chinese Province. Invited were representatives from every house, the FMAs, the VDBs, and the president of the past pupils. The celebration took place in great joy and solemnity. No one expected it would be the last great celebration at Thủ Đức. In fact, tragedy fell on Vietnam six months later.

guests were guided for a tour of the new building with 80 rooms, a pretty chapel, a hall and a large refectory. Besides, there were spacious playgrounds.

The development of the Oratories

Full of zeal, the confreres soon organized the oratories not only at Thủ Đức but also at Tam Hải and Xuân Hiệp. The confreres who were students at university and the aspirants organized games for the children, gave them catechism lessons and concluded every oratory session by distributing them biscuits and sweets before dismissing them. Besides, we had also oratory programs at other places such as at the prisons and rehabilitation centers.

The trade schools

There were numerous idle children in the streets. The lay brothers in specific formation proposed to Fr. Majcen to open some simple workshops to teach them some useful trades. Fr. Majcen agreed and Fr. Luvisotto obtained from the American camps some useful tools. The lay brothers were happy to help the children and in the meantime to be enriched in their competences.

Masses for the departed on November 2 1974

At the beginning of November 1974, people flocked to the cemeteries, the Military Cemetery of Biên Hòa in particular, to visit and pray for their loved ones who had been killed in this war.

The Salesian community of Thủ Đức, headed by Fr. Majcen, also went to our Salesian Cemetery at Tam Hải to pray for our departed confreres. They stood and prayed before the tomb of Bro. Peter Nguyễn Anh Hùng, an assistant at Gò Vấp School, who had just been drowned in swimming in May 1974.

We also prayed the rosary for our departed, especially for Mgr. Kerec, SDB, a missionary in Guangsi, China, who died in

1974; Fr. Braga, died in 1971; Mgr. Hiền, 1974; Mgr. Cassaigne, 1974; Fr. Dupont, 1945; Bro. Borri, 1966.

Thanksgiving Mass

Fr. Majcen was so happy to attend the thanksgiving Mass of his two newly ordained priests, Fr. Peter Đê and Fr. Michael Phùng who had just graduated from the Pius X Pontifical Atheneum.

Christmas 1974

Christmas was celebrated solemnly as in previous years. Among our guests was a Buddhist monk named Thích Trí Dũng, head of a pagoda near our house. He wanted to attend our midnight Mass and also our Christmas gifts gathering. He was very happy to get a gift.

The last canonical visit of the Provincial Fr. Machuy

In the visit, we deliberated on the last details of our upcoming split from the Hong Kong province. Fr. Machuy wanted the return of all the Chinese confreres to Hong Kong, but an agreement was made to keep some of these confreres in Vietnam for some time. There was a consultation on the choice of the possible delegate of the Rector Major in Vietnam and his vicar. The consultation gave two names: Fr. Massimino and Fr. Majcen as delegate and Fr. Ty and Fr. Hiên as vice-delegate.

Then they went to Hong Kong: Fr. Massimino and Fr. Ty for a consultation meeting regarding SDB Vietnam, while Fr. Mario Acquistapace and Musso to stay there permanently. Fr. Majcen was very sorry that he hadn't known that Fr. Mario would never return to Vietnam, otherwise he would have a ceremony held to show our gratitude to Fr. Mario for all he had done to Vietnam for so many years, first as a Provincial (1952-58), then as Provincial Delegate for Vietnam (1958-74). He was a great apostle of Mary

Help of Christians, the Mother of Don Bosco. Fr. Majcen and all Vietnamese Salesians are immensely grateful to Fr. Mario Acquistapace.

Vietnam became a Delegation of the Rector Major

Vietnam had long been prepared to be split from the Hong Kong Province, and now this was approved by the Rector Major, Fr. Ricceri by a decree dated July 12 1974.

The Vietnamese Delegation comprised the following communities:

1. Đà Lạt: The Studentate for Philosophy and Theology. Rector: Fr. Massimino.
2. Tram Hành: The Novitiate. Novice Master: Fr. King.
3. Trạm Hành: The Apostolic School. Rector: Fr. Hiên.
4. Gò Vấp: The Technical School. Rector: Fr. Ty.
5. Tam Hải: Youth Center. Fr. Donders.
6. Thủ Đức: Interreligious Aspirantate – Specific Formation for Lay Brothers – Hostel for University Confreres. Rector: Fr. Majcen.

Fr. Luigi Massimino was appointed Delegate of the Rector Major. Fr. Ty: Vicar.

Fr. Majcen's tasks at Thủ Đức in 1974-75

Fr. Majcen's tasks included: management of the interreligious aspirante; management of the Hostels for the lay brothers in specific formation and university Salesian students; management of the Oratory; spiritual director for the FMA and their oratory; in charge of the Volunteers of Don Bosco (VDB). These were very heavy tasks; in addition, he had also responsible for the correspondence with benefactors in Vietnam and abroad. In the house, he had Fr. Luvisotto, vice-rector and economer, as a very

Slovenians in Austria, two pretty houses were built, one for the kindergarten and the other for catechism classes, while the upper floor was reserved for the meetings and feast activities. This new building was christened St. Versiglia School and was blessed by the bishop in a solemn ceremony. Seeing that the place for worship was not complete, Fr. Majcen and Fr. Tsang took another step to build a church for the faithful, with Fr. Majcen started and Fr. Tsang later completed it.

In Taiwan evangelization was not easy. Catechism was not allowed at school, but could only be taught outside the classes. The Taiwanese children were not inclined to Christianity because they had been attached to Buddhism or their traditional beliefs or superstitions.

Various celebrations in 1977

Invited, Fr. Majcen went to Kowloon for the 25th anniversary of the erection of Tang King Po School. The celebration was extremely solemn with the presence of many Salesians who had been working there and numerous teachers and alumni. Fr. Majcen also went to Lo Tung for the 40th anniversary of the Camillians' work in China, first in Chaotong, then in Lo Tung. Together with Fr. Majcen, the Camillian Fathers and Dr. Janez recalled their adventures in the beginnings and the beautiful relationship between the Camillians in Chaotong and the Salesians in Kunming.

25th Anniversary of Salesian Works in Vietnam

From Taiwan Fr. Majcen received in 1977 the news on the "25th Anniversary of Salesian Works in Vietnam", and then on the take-over of our Don Bosco Thủ Đức house.

Fr. Majcen and Fr. Giacomino had come to Hà Nội on October 3 1952, therefore in 1977 the Salesians in Vietnam wanted to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of Salesian Work in Vietnam. Fr.

rice and industrial plants. The religious had to go to Củ Chi, a remote district of Sài Gòn, for agricultural productions.

The people could not publicly protest for fear of revenge; they had to obey and comply to the orders and to praise the new regime.

The Apostolic Nuncio was criticized by some protesters and was expelled from Vietnam, under the pretext that he no longer had any role in Vietnam now that the Cardinal Trịnh Như Khuê could manage all the affairs of the Vietnamese Church.

All people had to register for their residence. Fr. Majcen had to declare his Yugoslavian nationality and his Slovenian ethnicity.

Moreover, no one could move from one place to another without the government's permission, which as very difficult to get and the priests could almost never get one. It was lucky for the Salesians because knowing it beforehand, they had previously dispersed in various locations.

The last days of May and the first days of June

On the last Sunday of May the VDBs came. Fr. Majcen helped them to make the monthly retreat and instructed them on their new life style to adapt to the new regime. The VDB candidates numbered 12, who were nurses, tailors, secretaries, teachers, and kindergartners...).

Life in the novitiate

Fr. Majcen managed to keep the novitiate in place but it was frequently harassed by the security men through investigations and noisy announcements on the loudspeakers which made the novices very difficult to recollect. The novices also used waste lands for cultivation.

Confreres who left the Congregation

The new director of the our former Technical School invited our lay brothers to continue to teach with the promise of a high salary. Some of our confreres with extravagant ideas were pleased with this promise and asked for the consent of Fr. Ty, delegate of the Rector Major. The latter answered them that we could not serve both masters and therefore, if they would not continue to be Salesians, they could ask for a dispensation of their vows.

Seven of them applied for and were granted the dispensation and within a short time some of them got married.

Vietnam's entrance into socialism since January 1976²

On Christmas news came from Sài Gòn that the Salesians' morale in Vietnam was very high. On December 24 1975, Fr. Ty signed the document handing our Technical School over to the government. Our Orphanage, however, is still well run by the Salesians under the direction of the good Fr. Huỳnh. At Bến Cát, the Salesian community earned their living by growing vegetables and raising pigs, chickens, and geese. At Thủ Đức we have 70 teenager aspirants who go to state schools half a day and do manual work for the other half. At the Tam Hải novitiate there are 12 novices under the direction of Fr. Majcen. At Ba Thôn, 30 kilometers from Sài Gòn, we have a community and the headquarter of Fr. Ty, delegate of Fr. Rector Major. He also assumes the role of a parish priest. At Đức Huy, 70 kilometers from Sài Gòn, we have 8 clerics under the rectorship of Fr. Hiên who is also a parish priest. These clerics both study and work. This is the characteristic life style of our Salesians in Vietnam: they work to earn their living while continuing their study and religious formation. At Đà Lạt we have 42 cleric students with Fr. Thêm and

² From *Bollettino Salesiano* April 1 1976.

Vietnam, he managed to perform this task very well. Thus he became its "interim" superior and was introduced as such to the public. With Fr. McCabe's consent, he was responsible for the running of the school and discipline, the admission of the pupils and the contacts with benefactors. The pupils were either orphans or abandoned by their broken families, a kind of children so loved by Fr. Majcen.

In Tainan

His help to Fr. McCabe was not continuous; his chief responsibility was in Tainan where he heard confessions not only of the Salesians and the FMAs, but also of the pupils and parishioners. In their confessions, he used Don Bosco's language for the Salesians and FMAs, but for others he spoke Chinese. He also went to Chiuchow where there was a group of Salesians Cooperators who were effectively helping their parish priest, a Maryknoll missionary, through teaching catechism to the children and helping other activities of the parish, as well as organizing the Salesian feasts and the annual procession in honor of Mary Help of Christians.

The remote churches

The Salesian parish territory was very large in which there were some deteriorating churches. Specifically they were the churches of Guangmou, Thukku, Kwiyong. Fr. Tsang led him to examine them and see how to restore them.

At Guangmou there was a small chapel, a catechism room and an infirmary. All were destroyed by storms and insects for many years. Fr. Fassit, an Austrian, came from Tainan once every month to serve at the infirmary and did a lot of good there. Nearer to our school was the Thukku with a small church, a room for the priest and a catechism house. With the aids from Fr. Matko and the

during his recovery he had an opportunity to talk with Fr. Crotta and Dr. Janez. Through them he was aware of their past adventures and their hopes in the future. He also greatly admired Janez's completely disinterested service of the patients, the poor in particular. Then on his return to Taipei, he met the Provincial and the confreres who were gathered to discuss on the renewal.

Return to Tainan

Fr. Majcen returned to Tainan to have the happy New Year holidays with the confreres, teachers and pupils. He was very pleased with the family spirit here which greatly facilitated their apostolate. He diligently performed his tasks as a nurse and confessor; he was fond of mixing with the pupils and talking with them. Among their vernaculars they used to speak with each other, he understood the mandarin Chinese very well but less the Fukien and Hakkian. He often talked by writing since he had learnt a lot of Chinese characters and remembered them quite well. In the afternoons and leisure time, he wrote down his memories on the Salesian works in Vietnam and within two years he had written up to 1200 pages which he later sent to the Generalate and the UPS in Rome.

Working at the Boys' Town of Fr. McCabe, a Maryknoll missionary

The zealous Fr. McCabe had founded at Sang Yi near Miu Li a Boys' Town which he ran with the sole aid of a tough lay assistant and a widow as cook. The good priest had requested Fr. Tomati to find someone who could help him when he was away to preach the retreats or for health reasons or some other engagements. Fr. Majcen was entrusted with this task and he went to Sang Yi to work with Fr. McCabe. Since he had a good knowledge of this form of "Boys' Town system" and through his previous acquaintance with some charitable organizations when he was in

Fr. Khói. Here also, the students have three classes in the morning and one hour work in the garden for vegetable production... At Thanh Bình parish, we have 6 brothers with Fr. Tiêm. At Liên Khương we have 12 brothers under the guidance of Fr. Uyễn, a PAS graduate. The brothers both work and study. Some are going to be ordained priests and deacons soon.

The number of confreres in 1975 was 141, then in 1976 some foreign Salesians were expelled and the total number was 131. 7 Salesians had left the Congregation but in compensation we had 12 novices under the direction of Fr. Majcen. At the Củ Chi New Economic Zone, we had a number of lay brothers and clerics under the leadership of Bro. Hiển, a Sài Gòn Technology University graduate.

Except Fr. Vincent Quí, a military chaplain, and Fr. Peter Cho who both had immigrated in USA, all other Vietnamese Salesians remained in Vietnam.

The novitiate was moved to Tam Hải, Thủ Đức

Fr. Fabian Hào won favor with the government officials by offering two buses and several smaller cars in the garage. He also let them use the dining hall and the dormitory for the training of their security men. These had good discipline and kept the rules set out by Fr. Hào. The remaining areas of the house were still available for our aspirants.

At the Tam Hải house, Fr. Hào also offered the government the use of the Savio house and the facilities there. The place then became a big garage at the State usage.

In compensation, Fr. Hào got permission to move our novitiate to Tam Hải, at the house built by Fr. Donders. Fr. Majcen had his novices transform the house into a more quiet place with a dormitory, a classroom, a refectory, and a room for the novice

master who was frequently ill... Besides, there were also domestic work for the novices with the help of Fr. Đệ, Fr. Bá, Bro. Thuộc and the novice assistant, with the raising of pigs, rabbits, hen, ducks and geese... These also provided the novices with very interesting occupations.

Pastoral activities with neighboring parishes

Fr. Majcen made visits to neighboring parishes where he asked the parish priests to let the novices do pastoral activities of an Oratory including catechism classes and Masses. He contacted in particular the parish of St. Francis Xavier whose faithful were very pleased with our novices' activities. Fr. Majcen also visited the Benedictine monastery nearby where he asked the Benedictine superior to be the confessor for the novices and the novice master, and to preach monthly retreat to the novitiate.

Fr. Majcen also asked the Khiết Tâm Lovers of the Cross to take care of the novitiate's cooking. They sent some of their novices to come and look after the kitchen as well as some other occupations.

Doing labor duties

All citizen, even the Salesian religious and aspirants and the FMA had to do their labor duties in the irrigation works. These were very hard work and also dangerous due to poisonous snakes in the fields while all the tasks were done manually without any machines. The workers weren't paid and had to take their own meals with them.

A currency change

One day there was an order for the currency change. The amount of money allowed to be changed was extremely limited and with this policy, the State managed to establish equality in the

had been baptized by Fr. Majcen in Kunming on the feast of St. John Bosco. On the following day Fr. Majcen was introduced to the numerous smart pupils in lines together with their teachers. He was invited to address to the audience, and before the microphone he spoke in Chinese with a Yunnan accent. It was for him a very courageous act, because it was the first time he spoke in Chinese before the public after so many years. The Salesians then made known to the audience his curriculum vitae. At this technical school, he was a nurse and an assistant to everybody, and a confessor to the Catholic pupils. He was also a confessor of the Salesians and the FMAs who were working in Tainan in a very large kindergarten. He also preach monthly retreats to them. In this period, he also assisted Fr. Ho in a parish nearby. He visited Mgr. Chen and immediately received from the bishop the necessary faculties. He also had to start another task entrusted by his Superiors to write down the history of the Salesians in Vietnam. But he had to postpone this task to prepare for his imminent operation.

His days in Lo Tung

Before Christmas, he went to Lo Tung to have a medical diagnosis and get ready for the operation. On this occasion he recalled together with the Camillians and Dr. Janez the beginnings of the Camillians' apostolate in Chaotong with Mgr. Kerec in the difficult days before and after World War II and after the rise of the Communist regime. They also talked about the good relationship between the Salesians and the Camillians, between Kunming and Chaotong.

Fr. Majcen very happily spent Christmas with the Camillian community and Dr. Janez's feast-day two days later. In the same afternoon of Dr. Janez's feast day, Fr. Majcen underwent the operation. It was very successful but on a few days following the operation, he felt very painful. His situation soon improved and

rector of Aberdeen Technical School, invited him to attend the 60th birthday of Fr. Stank Pavlin.

In Taiwan

From November 1976 to March 1979. Two months later Fr. Majcen got a visa to Taiwan, and on November 7 he flew to Taipei where he was taken to the Don Bosco Center by Fr. Matthew King, his former socio in Vietnam, Fr. Pomati and Fr. John Ma. There was here a parish, a youth center, a kindergarten and a printing house. Fr. Ma, the parish priest, invited him to say a Mass on the following day in Chinese, the language he had not spoken for 25 years. Then he went with Fr. King to the Fujen Catholic University which had 10,000 students. It was here that he had opportunity to see again the former professors of the Pius X Pontifical Atheneum in Đà Lạt.

A visit to the Lo Tung Hospital

He went with Fr. King to Lo Tung, an area lying on the Pacific shores. The Camillians who had been working in Chaotong between 1946 and 1952 had come here to run a big hospital from 1952 through 1957. At this hospital there was Fr. Crotti, a great friend of Fr. Majcen since they were in Kunming, and the renown doctor Janez also worked here. As a fellow countryman, Dr. Janez was born not very far from Ljubljana and he talked in a perfect Slovenian that helped Fr. Majcen remember his mother tongue which he had not spoken for years. After a careful check, the doctor said he had better undergo a prostatic operation right after Christmas.

In Tainan

A few days later, accompanied by Fr. King, Fr. Majcen took a six hour express train to the technical school in Tainan. The building had been designed by Fr. Bosco Chow Ving Sang, who

country in which all became poor alike! Luckily for us that Fr. Bá had previously heard of this and he had used our money to buy a great amount of stuff and incorruptible things to resell later for money so that nothing was lost to us.

Fr. Majcen as a friend of Tito

Fr. Majcen was the only Yugoslavian citizen in Vietnam and was considered the only Yugoslavian subject of President Tito. One day an official of the Education Department came to talk with him about Yugoslavia. Fr. Majcen told him about what he had known in his visit to his country in 1958 and 1972, and about society and education in his country.

Later they invited him and Fr. Hào to a dinner in Thủ Đức. Fr. Majcen was truly impressive when he saw before him a roasted pig which he wondered how they could have it. Then there was the dinner with the songs of the revolutionary soldiers and our aspirants' brass band and speeches. After all had some first class French wine, they invited Fr. Majcen to speak. It was really difficult for him to speak about the new regime in the presence of our aspirants: he could not speak out his true thoughts: to praise or to condemn it? So he proposed to speak about his honor to see President when he was in Kunming in 1938.

"As you know, one day in 1938 in Kunming, China, I saw President Hồ Chí Minh when he came out from a hotel near our school, where there was the headquarter of the Liberation Army. President Hồ smiled at me, shook my hand and greeted me in French: "Comment allez-vous?" Then he apparently wanted to ask me something more but the Chinese soldiers hurriedly took him away in their jeep. But now in 1975, after so many years, President Hồ still seems to smile at everybody in all the houses in Sài Gòn and he is smiling at all of us who are here now."

And all the participants applauded Fr. Majcen's speech!

August

In August Mgr. Seitz was taken to Sài Gòn for departure. He was the last French bishop to leave Vietnam.

On August 27, the Đà Lạt security summoned the professors of the Pius X Pontifical Atheneum and of our Studentate for a session.

September

Two days later, Fr. Massimino, Fr. Stra, Fr. Lagger and Bro. Bullo suddenly came to Tam Hải. They had to sign on a declaration of leaving Vietnam by their own will, and they were obliged to part on the next day. Their short appearance seemed to make Fr. Majcen stop breathing. All these four people flew to Bangkok from where Fr. Massimino and Fr. Stra went to Hong Kong, while the other two to Rome. From Rome, Bro. Bullo could send news about Fr. Majcen to Fr. Vode and Fr. Majcen's sisters.

The schools taken by the government

On September 9 1975 Mgr. Bình officially handed our Gò Váp Technical School over to the government where they had already moved in for a time. There remained to us Salesians only the Orphanage with 121 orphans, under the responsibility of Fr. Huỳnh and some lay brothers. Since he was officially invited to take care of the Orphanage, Fr. Huỳnh received an appropriate salary.

The Công Giáo và Dân Tộc Magazine

The magazine was run by the Catholic Solidarity Committee that had as purpose to call for the combination of the faith lived with the reconstruction of the country. On its numbers, there were long articles written by Fr. Girardi, a Salesian professor at PAS in Rome, on the communism. It was providential that Fr. Majcen had

At hospital

The Provincial offered him some activities, but before he could start working, he needed some medical check at the St. Paul Hospital. He spent 4 days in hospital to cure his enteritis. Further diagnosis did not reveal any specific diseases except for some symptoms of prostatitis and blood circulation disorder at his feet as a result of his disease affected in 1968 when he was in Trạm Hành. His clearest problem was exhaustion, and the doctor's prescription for him was complete rest.

He left hospital on August 1 and came back to the Provincial house where the Provincial provided him with necessary clothings.

On August 15 Fr. Massimino was named rector of the Shawkiwan studentate and Fr. Majcen was sent to the rest house where he was offered a very nice room. In those days, he got from the Camillians in Taiwan an invitation to come and have his cure at their hospital. Fr. Matthew King also invited him to visit the Technical School in Tainan and Fr. Tohill requested him to write down the Salesian works in Vietnam. And he was willing to comply immediately.

He also spent 5 days in Macao where he was happy to see again the confreres who had been working with him in Kunming before 1952. Thanks to Fr. Martin's zealous help, he got a passport. He thought he could stay and work with his language knowledge he had learnt in Yunnam. With the Provincial's consent, he began to apply for a visa to Taiwan. But the visa procedures was not easy because he had a Yugoslavian citizenship and the Taiwanese government was against the communists. He eventually had recourse to the sponsorship of the Salesians and the Camillians who were working in Lo Tung.

On November, Fr. Francis Tse (an aspirant under Fr. Majcen's rectorship at Tang King Po School, Kowloon), who was currently

CHAPTER 44: FR. MAJCEN'S LAST YEARS OF MISSIONS (JULY 23 1976 – APRIL 24 1979)

Four days in Bangkok

In Bangkok, Fr. Majcen was taken by the Salesians to the Savio School. As Fr. Huynh had sent a telegram to the Rector Major and to the Hong Kong Province on the day before, the Rector Major ordered the Salesians to get an air ticket for Fr. Majcen because he had got only 5 US\$ from Fr. Huynh for his check-in at the Bangkok airport, all his money having been left to the Salesians in Vietnam. Due to his illnesses, he had to see the doctor for several times. Apart from his visit to the Savio School with 2000 students, Fr. Majcen also visited the Don Bosco Technical School where he admired the modern facilities and had opportunity to see Bro. Jecovit whom he had known in China many years ago. Then he went to the hospital where Bro. Amici (a Camillian religious who had been working with Mgr. Kerec in China) was working. The brother gave him a tonic injection and the two then recalled to each other their memories of their past life in China. After some more visits on 25 and 26, he took some rest and wrote letters. On 27, he took the Air Siam for Hong Kong. When on board, he fell gravely ill and almost died by a heart stroke.

Upon his arrival in Hong Kong, he was welcomed by the Provincial Fr. Wong, Fr. Massimino, his past pupils and his friends. As he didn't have a visa to Hong Kong, his past pupils managed to settle the procedures for his entry by declaring that he had come from Vietnam.

had an opportunity to talk with the Rector Major, Fr. Ricceri, who had instructed Fr. Majcen on the deviations of some of our professors in Rome regarding religious life and religious obedience which made them dispensed from their religious vows and their obligations in the Congregation. Thus Fr. Majcen understood the problem and he explained to our Salesians the orthodox teaching of the Holy See. As Salesians we do not do politics; we observe the State law in what do not go contrary to Catholic conscience.

Feast of St. Andrew

That year the confreres and past pupils wanted to celebrate Fr. Majcen's feast day and they asked for the government's permission to gather at Tam Hai. There were 65 participants who came not only to celebrate their novice master but also to learn the rule of conduct in this situation to be always loyal to the Church.

Before Christmas 1976

Before Christmas, the government organized a meeting with the Catholic Bishops to diffuse the government's desire to have the Catholics' cooperation. The bishops promised to cooperate in their Christian conscience and in the spirit of the Encyclical "Pacem in Terris". They said there were different interpretations of many words such as "freedom". In general, however, we could come to a fair consensus. After the meeting there was a party with champagne, and there was at least an apparent agreement between the government and the Catholic Church in Vietnam.

Christmas

At Christmas, the soldiers were ordered to cooperate with the Christians for a good celebration of this feast of peace. Fr. Hào invited the communists to a party in the novitiate community.

Fr. Peter Bá's crisis

Fr. Majcen's vicar (socio), Fr. Bá, dreamed to become parish priest of Tam Hải, because he like these parishioners. But as the parish priest and Mgr. Bình refused, Fr. Bá was displeased. Moreover, he was not supported by Fr. Ty, so he asked to be dispensed from the vows and with this dispensation he applied to be incardinated in the Vĩnh Long diocese. Fr. Peter Đê came to replace him as a socio and was appointed to succeed Fr. Majcen. Fr. Đê had a good help from the cleric Hung, the novices' assistant.

Later, Fr. Bá had a row with the village head and knew that he would be expelled from his location. He fled and hid himself in a remote land where he found a boat to escape. He met the Thai pirates and only by his knowledge of Italian and English languages could he come to Rome, where by Fr. Tohill's intervention he could go to Canada where he became a parish priest of a Vietnamese parish.

1976: the political elections

In April there was an election for the new regime. There were two political tendencies: the Northerners following the Stalinist regime model wanted a unified Vietnam with the mainstream communism. The Southerners with lawyer Nguyễn Hữu Thọ followed the Tito's model and wanted a communist State in the Chinese model. With his Yugoslavian citizenship, Fr. Majcen was the only foreigner with voting right. After consultation with Mgr. Bình, he went to vote, being aware that his individual ballot was meaningless because everything had been imposed. In fact, the Stalinist tendency won and a list of the new government leaders was quickly declared. Lawyer Thọ was awarded a medal of honor and then withdrew to the background together with his mates.

them and gave them some massage. I touched his feet and they were also getting colder.

I told the nurse to call me in case of emergency or need of help, as I was resting on an armchair.

The nurse tried to check his pulse while there was no clear signs on his face. A few minutes before midnight she saw that Fr. Massimino didn't breathe any more. She immediately called for other nurses and a doctor who was passing before the door. The doctor checked and affirmed that his heart had stopped beating. The nurses took the cardio-aid nearer but the doctor said it was useless, he had died already. I looked at the clock: it was 11.57 pm. Fr. Massimino died on Saturday, the day in honor of Our Lady.

I gave him the last blessing. Then I phoned to Fr. Joseph Zen, who I thought would call Father Provincial. But he instead called Father Rector and went straight to the hospital. Only then did both of us phoned to the Provincial who then phoned to the Rector Major.

His condition appeared to be good. Then a doctor came and seemed to be pleased with the patient's condition. After a while, the nurse Sofia took leave. I said the rosary together with him, but he could just move his lips to show that he was following. That was a Saturday. We meditated on the Glorious mysteries. Around 7.00 pm, Fr. Joseph Zen and two clerics Dominic Leung and Paul Leung came together with Fr. Nicola from Taiwan.

Fr. Nicola told Fr. Massimino: "Blessed are you!"³ the phrase Fr. Massimino used to say to everybody, especially in the Shaukiwan community. But Fr. Massimino did not appear to answer to this greeting. He just followed by moving his lips when I and the two clerics were reciting the rosary.

After the rosary ended, Fr. Nicola and the two clerics went home, leaving me and Fr. Joseph Zen with him. One of the nuns who was asked said that he had slept well the night before and there was no worry for tonight.

At first we thought we both had better go home. But then I saw him breathe harder and harder, so I decided to stay with him overnight. When asked, the doctor said that the breathing difficulty was due to the assumption of too much tonic resulting in the overwork of the body.

Before Fr. Joseph left, we tried to recite the Compline in Latin by heart without succeeding to finish it. So we sang the "Jesu dulcis memoria". We didn't know whether Fr. Massimino was following it.

I remained alone with the nurse who was sent by Father Rector to assist him in the night. The nurse seemed very worried about his pulse. She called for the doctor who just ordered to use a cardio-aid device for him. He became too weak to raise his hand, so he made a sign for me to take his hands which were then quite cold. I took

³ "Beato Lei."

Priestly ordination in Đà Lạt

Well knowing the government's religious policy, Mgr. Lâm of Đà Lạt foresaw that the religious life would soon be constrained, so he decided to call the theology students to the priesthood and diaconate.

After consultation with Fr. Majcen, Fr. Ty presented 5 candidates to the priesthood and 4 to the diaconate. The ordination rites were performed at our small chapel away from the Đà Lạt cathedral. A few days after the ordination, some newly ordained priests came down to celebrate their thanksgiving Mass with Fr. Majcen to Tam Hải. One of the celebrant, Fr. Joseph Hinh, gave a very good homily on our allegiance to the Pope. After the Mass, Fr. Hinh proposed to go to his father's village to say Mass there. "Have you got the permission?" Fr. Majcen asked him. "Yes, everything had been arranged by my father." Thus Fr. Hinh solemnly celebrated his thanksgiving Mass at the chapel of his village. After the Mass there was a happy gathering of the people outside the chapel to congratulate him. But on his way back to Sài Gòn he was arrested on the ferry and was put in prison for 11 years without any trial. After he was released, he was allowed to stay at his village where he became a parish priest. The parish became a Salesian parish where he served and comforted the faithful who were living far from the city and formerly without a priest to take care of them.

May 1976

In May there was a scrutiny meeting to vote for the novices' first profession. The scrutiny was made strictly and only 8 candidates were admitted to the profession. All the confreres who got permission were present together with 20 FMAs and about 10 VDBs. After the profession ceremony, Fr. Van Wouwe and Fr.

Luvisotto prepared a big party for the participants, and this was the last happy gathering of the Salesians.

June 1976

Fr. Majcen's health grew worse: diarrhea, prostatitis and exhaustion. He could not take in food. The Lovers of the Cross daily gave him a tonic injection. Some confreres suggested him to leave Vietnam following the government's push, but he insisted to stay and die in Vietnam with the Vietnamese, and consequently no one ever mentioned it any more.

After a while, Fr. Ty, delegate of the Rector Major, told him that the delegation had intended to open a new novitiate course (course XVII: 1976-77) and he therefore had to prepare a training program for the novitiate with the participation of Fr. Đê who would get experience to succeed him. With great effort, Fr. Majcen prepared the novitiate program, and he especially marked the important places in the Italian and French books he had received from Fr. Vode to help Fr. Đê with material for the conferences.

July 1976

On July 16 1976 Fr. Majcen started giving conferences to his 13 new novices. Fr. Đê also attended the conferences, recalling to mind Our Lord's warning: "But as for that day or hour no one knows it."

On July 20, the VDBs came for their monthly retreat. Fr. Majcen spoke quite long on the role of the Head Sister³ according to the Rule and her duty was in the service of the formation, under the guidance of Father Assistant (or his successor, Fr. Đê). The good Sister Phượng made her confession together with other sisters then wrote down all the conference. After they had lunch together

³ "Sulla sorella maggiore".

was diligent and fervent both in prayers and deeds. He had greatly contributed to the Chinese Province and Church throughout the 58 years of his life, and he deserved the admiration of all.

His body was placed at the Hong Kong wake house. The Requiem Mass was celebrated at 8.00 pm, March 15 1991 and the Funeral Mass at 9.00 am, March 16 (Saturday), at St. Anthony Church, 69A Pokfulam Road, then his interment followed at the Happy Valley Cemetery at 11.15 am. Fr. Massimino's last words were recorded here.

Saturday, March 9 1991

I [Lanfranco Fedrigotti] came to the Canossa Hospital at about 6.20 pm. In Fr. Massimino's room there was Ms. Sofia, the nurse of the Carlo Braga community. Fr. Massimino was still conscious but he breathed and spoke with difficulty.

He asked me to give him the blessing of Mary Help of Christians and I did as he wished. He also asked me to give him absolution after my reciting the act of contrition with him. Then I asked him if he wanted to receive holy communion. He told me to do it quickly. I rushed to the hospital's chapel, took the host and Fr. Massimino communicated devotedly. After receiving communion, he raised his hand three times repeating: Thank you, thank you, thank you!

After a while, I had some more exchange with him. I asked him: "Are you tired?" He answered: "Yes". I loudly told him: "You have to rest! Learn to live as an old man!" He replied: "How can I? I've never had any rest in my life..."²

I saw in his briefcase a lot of blank paper and envelopes, to write at any moment when he was well enough.

² "Non ho mai riposato in vita mia."

He spent all his life in the formation of young people who aspired to become Salesians. After a careful preparation for his ministry, he was devoted to the teaching of philosophy and theology. He also taught maths and sciences with remarkable results. He had been novice master, rector of formation houses in Hong Kong and Shanghai for many years. He had also been a parish priest of St. Anthony Church in Hong Kong for several years.

Between 1962 and 1968 he was Provincial of the Hong Kong-Vietnam Province. In 1970 he was sent to Vietnam as rector of the formation house in Đà Lạt, and later he became Provincial Delegate of the Vietnam Provincial Delegation.

In 1976, after his expulsion from Vietnam, he spent his last years at the Shawkiwan house of formation.

Fr. Massimino played an important role in the development of the Salesian works in Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, and Vietnam. During his 6 year term as Provincial, he had brought life to the constructions of or sent his Salesians to the following places:

- 1963: St. Anthony School in Hong Kong.
- 1963: Our Lady of Coloane Village, Macao, for the care of unfortunate patients.
- 1963: Salesian School in Taiwan (Tainan).
- 1964: Erection of Don Bosco Parish in Taipei (Taiwan).
- 1965: Tang King Po College at 25 Kennedy Road, Hong Kong.
- 1968: Kwai Chung Technical School, now called the Salesian Don Bosco Ng Siu Mui.
- 1970: Don Bosco Studentate in Đà Lạt, Vietnam.

Fr. Massimino was a simple, humble religious. He lived up to the peak of his religious life, and was extremely exemplary in his faithfulness to his religious and priestly commitment. He was strict and demanding to himself, but very kind and helpful to others. He

with the novices, Fr. Majcen gave them another conference, and at the end he was completely exhausted and had to lie on bed.

At that moment an employee from the foreign affairs office brought him an invitation letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, asking him to come to their office at 8 am the next morning to receive an “important notification.” Already knowing its content, Fr. Majcen exhorted the VDBs for the last time. They all cried to bid him farewell and asked for his blessing.

Early on 21, he still gave a conference to his novices then took breakfast and came to the foreign affairs office where all the missionaries had been summoned. After a short while, an officer told the missionaries that the government was grateful to the missionaries for their work in Vietnam, but because they had passports from pro-American governments, they had to leave this country. As for Fr. Majcen in particular, the officer congratulated him for having formed good Salesians. Under the leadership of the Cardinal of Hà Nội, they would continue their work. He also told him that if he wished to come back to Vietnam, he could declare on paper that “I want to come back to Vietnam,” the VN government would consider it and would grant him a visa. Although he knew that it was useless, Fr. Majcen did as the officer said.

The last farewell

Because Fr. Ty was currently in Đà Lạt and could not be present, the economer Fr. Huỳnh helped Fr. Majcen in all he needed. He also prepare US\$ 5 for Fr. Majcen’s tax at the Bangkok’s airport, his air ticket, his inoculations and the necessary payments.

On July 22, Mgr. Bình invited all the missionaries and foreign sisters (the last group of foreign missionaries including the MEP, PIME, SJ, the Missionary Sisters of Mary and Fr. Majcen the

Slovenian) for a farewell party at the seminary. The archbishop expressed his gratitude for the work the missionaries had done in Vietnam. He also thanked Fr. Majcen for the establishment of the Salesian Congregation in Vietnam. He said: "Thank you, you have good Salesians who could guide the Salesians of Don Bosco Family."

All the guests drank to the last champagnes which brought a new vitality to all of them, in particular to Fr. Majcen who at these last moments was so tired and sad.

Then Fr. Majcen came home, bid farewell to the FMAs, the Benedictine Fathers and the parish priests in the neighborhood. In the afternoon the Salesians in Sài Gòn gathered together for a farewell party to Fr. Majcen.

The last day, July 23 1976

Early in the morning, Fr. Majcen gave a last conference to all the confreres. He repeated the exhortations he had said in Kunming: "At any cost, love the Blessed Sacrament, Mary Help of Christians and the Pope." After taking a coffee, he blessed everybody but could not say a word because he was so moved. He blessed Fr. Đê, his successor, then shook hands with everybody, crying. He got in a car that took him to the city airport. There he performed the check-in procedures. Although it was late, he was checked very carefully to see whether he took with him forbidden letters or money. While he was talking with Fr. Hào, Fr. Phùng, and Fr. Huỳnh, two big buses approached to take the passengers to the plane. From the bus' window, Fr. Majcen painfully waved his hand to the people who remained. On board the airplane, Fr. Majcen's seat was close to the window. When the airplane was hovering over the city, Fr. Majcen looked at the Salesian Houses of Gò Vấp and Thủ Đức for a last time and gave his blessing. It was around 13.00 on July 23 1976. From his heart he sent out his

Delegate of the Vietnamese Delegation.

Actually Fr. Massimino was Delegate of the Rector Major in Vietnam between 1974-75 and was the first Rector of the Don Rua Studentate between 1971-75.¹

Specifically Fr. Massimino played a decisive role in maintaining the Salesian presence in Vietnam even after the South was lost to the Communists in 1975, and he actively continued to help in the formation of young Vietnamese Salesians.

After being forced to leave Vietnam to return to Hong Kong, in the name of the Rector Major, he assumed the responsibility of providing material needs to the Vietnamese Delegation, especially in the difficult field of formation and apostolate. He continued maintaining the correspondence, raising funds and exhorting all his sons in Vietnam. He was really a loving mother and father who loved all his sons and gave all his time and energy to the Salesian works in Vietnam. His merit made him one of the three great patriarchs of the Salesians in Vietnam: Majcen, Massimino, Acquistapace.

What follows is an account on this great son of Don Bosco, written by Fr. Lanfranco Fedrigotti at 3.00 am on Sunday, March 1991.

"Fr. Luigi Massimino, SDB, was born on May 2 1907, and died peacefully at midnight of March 9 1991 at the Canossa Hospital in Hong Kong, aged 84.

He was born in Cavour, Northern Italy, on October 5 1923 and was ordained priest on May 1 1932. He came to Hong Kong on February 2 1933.

¹ The following account was written by Fr. Lanfranco M. Fedrigotti in Hong Kong at 3.00 am on Sunday, March 10 1991. This English translation is from the Vietnamese version, having no access to the original account.



CHAPTER 43: FR. LUIGI MASSIMINO AND HIS LAST MOMENTS

Fr. Massimino, the first Delegate of the Vietnamese Delegation of the Rector Major, is a great Salesian of the Vietnamese Province. He was an immediate formator of the first group of Vietnamese scholastics when he was rector of the Cheung Chau Studentate of Philosophy. Then he was nominated Provincial of the China-Vietnam Province before he was succeeded by Fr. Alexander Ma. Later he went to Vietnam as rector of the Studentate of Philosophy and Theology in Đà Lạt for the confreres in formation and as Provincial Delegate of Vietnam. After Vietnam split from the China Province to become a Delegation of the Rector Major, he became

loving farewell: **Good-bye Vietnam! Good-bye my novices and Salesian sons. Mary Help of Christians keep their faith and protect the Salesian Congregation of Don Bosco in Vietnam.**

Whenever he recalls this flight Sài Gòn-Bangkok of July 23 1975, Fr. Majcen always seems to hear again Jesus' beatitudes and applies them to his situation: "Blessed are those who are persecuted, who are rejected..." And at the end of his Memories of Vietnam, Fr. Majcen recorded three beginnings and three endings in his three missionary episodes:

I. The first beatitude

The First Beginning "Alpha" Day: Feast of the Nativity of Our Lady 1935, Fr. Majcen on his journey Trieste, Italy to Hong Kong then with Fr. Braga to Kunming, Guangshi, China (with Mgr. Kerec). The First Ending "Omega" Day: August 27 1951, from Kunming, Shiuchow to Guangdong, then to Hong Kong on the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows in 1951.

II. The second beatitude

The Second Beginning "Alpha" Day: On October 3 1952 Fr. Majcen from Macao to Hà Nội amid a bloody war, on the feast of St. Therese of the Infant Jesus. The Second Ending "Omega" Day: August 1954, Fr. Majcen from Hà Nội to Hong Kong and was appointed rector of Tang King Po School in Hong Kong.

III. The third beatitude

The Third Beginning "Alpha" Day: in South Vietnam, including:

1956: Beginning of the first group of aspirants and postulants in South Vietnam.

1960: Fr. Majcen as novice master of the first Vietnamese novitiate.

1961: Religious profession of the first novices in Vietnam (Fr. Majcen as patriarch of Salesians in Vietnam).

The Third Ending “Omega” Day: On July 23 1976 Fr. Majcen left Vietnam after experiencing the last historical events here.



Fr. Majcen was ordered to leave Vietnam after 22 years of work, leaving 120 Vietnamese Salesians. He was the last foreign Salesian to leave on July 23 1976.



Fr. Majcen's last novice to make profession, the cleric Minh, now a Verbum Dei priest. Behind were Fr. Majcen and Fr. Fabiano Hào, both very worried.



In a farewell party, Fr. Luvisotto sang the “Preface of the hens”. It was the last feast where everybody was present.

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Fabiano Hào, the rector, invited all the Salesians, the FMAs, the VDBs, the novices and other religious for the celebration at Thủ Đức. The participants numbered 300. A Redemptorist Father made a speech extolling Don Bosco as a great educator of youth even in our times. Then there were a big party in which Fr. Hào's 'good friends' (the local communist authorities) were also invited. After the great day, Fr. Hào reported it with great enthusiasm to Fr. Majcen in Taiwan. Unfortunately, just a short time later, Fr. Ty sent Fr. Majcen this message: "Fr. Fabiano Hào is hospitalized. All the aspirants are ill." In fact, our house in Thủ Đức was taken over just a few days later. Thủ Đức Don Bosco house ceased to exist. The reason for Fr. Hào's arrest and imprisonment (hospitalized) was that he had given shelter to a person hunted down by the police. And all the aspirants were sent to their homes (are ill). Our house was changed into a "Training Center for the HCM Communist Youth". And our confreres were allocated into 14 new Salesian communities.

Fr. Majcen invited to Australia

A Franciscan Father in charge of the Slovenians in Australia wrote a letter inviting Fr. Majcen to come and work in Australia. The Archbishop approved the invitation and the Provincial was willing to receive him in the Australian Province. Fr. Majcen consulted his Provincial, Fr. Zen, and the Regional Councilor Williams and then the latter's successor Fr. Thomas Panakhezam. While his local superiors were hesitating, Fr. Panakhezam decisively told Fr. Majcen not to go to Australia because of his poor health and old age, and also because of the kinds of work there. Instead, Fr. Panakhezam said he had better stay in Taiwan to complete his history of Salesian works in Vietnam and prepare for a vacation in his own country.

The Boys' Town in Chaochou

Fr. McCabe's Boys' Town was moved to Chaochou, at the former hostel of the German Dominican Fathers. Fr. Majcen came there to help and substitute Fr. McCabe and by this he got acquainted with Mgr. Kaohsieung, the Dominicans in Pintung, and other benefactors of the Boys' Town. At Christmas 1978, when Fr. McCabe fell ill and was brought to hospital in emergency, the Maryknoll superior came to Fr. Majcen and asked him to go immediately to the Boys' Town because he could not for the moment send any other. Fr. Majcen and his rector, Fr. Peter Tsang, of the Technical School, came to see the bishop who was very pleased to grant Fr. Majcen all the faculties he needed to administer a small parish nearby. Then accompanied by Fr. Tsang, Fr. Majcen went to the Boys' Town where he was introduced by Fr. McCabe as an interim rector for some months.

The Regional Councilor, Fr. Panakhezam, came for a canonical visit to Taiwan and he stopped at Chaochou for some days. Bishop Kaohsieung and the Maryknoll Provincial insistently begged the Salesians to assume the running of the Boys' Town. The Regional Councilor, after a careful study in the spot and hearing the opinion of the superiors in Taiwan, decided to accept it and thus the Boys' Town became a Salesian work. As Fr. Majcen was then preparing for his vacation in his country, Fr. Panakhezam asked Fr. Majcen to propose a confrere who could be rector of the Boys' Town. Fr. Majcen proposed Fr. Francis Tsang, who had been working in Vietnam, and so Fr. Tsang at once came there to help Fr. Majcen and prepared himself to substitute him. In the meanwhile the Provincial announced to all the province our acceptance of this work and appointed Fr. Tsang as rector of the Boys' Town.

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A farewell

Fr. Majcen went to Taipei to apply for an exit and re-entry visa to Taiwan. He had thought this would take long, but he instead received the visa within a few hours and so he could not have time to rearrange all his notes. He hurried with the packaging and on March 12 he flew to Hong Kong where Fr. Martin bought his air ticket Hong Kong-Rome-Hong Kong. A delay of his flight by a strike in the Italian Airline Company gave him opportunity to bid farewell to the confreres in Macao and Hong Kong, and on March 18 he departed with a promise to return in September.

In Rome

Upon his arrival in Rome, he at once went to the Generalate at Pisana and presented his historical notes to the Rector Major Fr. Viganò who invited him to present them at the Center for Research in the Salesian History at the UPS. The Center wanted these documents to be published, but Fr. Tohill said we had better wait because the events were still too recent. Returning to Pisana, he had all these documents photocopied in three copies, one to be kept at the Central Archives, another at the Center for Research at the UPS and the third copied to be brought to Slovenia.

Fr. Majcen took leave of Fr. Tohill and flew to Trieste to continue his journey. He arrived in Ljubljana at 11.00 on April 25 1979.

With this Fr. Majcen ended his missionary life. He had intended to pass half a year in his home country for health recovery and rest, but while he was in Austria, in the Slovenian parish of his benefactor Fr. Matko, he was exhausted. When brought to hospital in Ljubljana, he was found to have a diabetis at high risk and was prescribed by the doctor to be treated and to rest for a long time. He suffered for not being able to return to Taiwan before his re-entry visa expired, he still hoped he could return to China after a

year's cure and rest. However, complying to his superiors' decision, however, he remained in Slovenia and was incardinated into the Ljubljana Province.

Although he could no longer stay in a missionary territory, Fr. Majcen continued to exercise his priestly apostolate and above all, to be a promoter of missionary activities in his homeland.

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LIST OF SALESIAN MISSIONARIES WORKING IN VIETNAM

1.	Acquistapace	1952-1974	Gò Vấp, Thủ Đức
2.	Aartz	1961-1974	Thủ Đức
3.	Braga	1930-1952	China-Vietnam Provincial
4.	Bragion	1953-1954	Hà Nội
5.	Borri	1957-1966†	Thủ Đức, Gò Vấp (+ 1966)
6.	Bohnen	1953-1955	Hà Nội
7.	Bogo Generoso	1953-1975	Thủ Đức, Gò Vấp, Đà Nẵng
8.	Balan	1962	Gò Vấp
9.	Bullo	1962-1975	Gò Vấp, Trạm Hành
10.	Cuisset	1953-1961	Hà Nội, Ban Mê Thuột, Thủ Đức, Gò Vấp
11.	Callens		Gò Vấp, Thủ Đức, Trạm Hành, Đà Lạt
12.	De Muleneare	1959-1976	Gò Vấp, Thủ Đức
13.	De Marchi	1958-1974	Gò Vấp
14.	De Groot	1960?	Gò Vấp
15.	Donders	1957-1975	Thủ Đức, Gò Vấp, Tam Hải
16.	Delanoe	1963	Thủ Đức
17.	Giacomino	1952-1954	Hà Nội
18.	Guarino	1956-1957	Thủ Đức
19.	Haar	1962-1972	Gò Vấp
20.	Hau Paul	1963-1975	Gò Vấp
21.	King Matthew	1963-1975	Trạm Hành, Đà Lạt
22.	Luvisotto	1957-1976	Thủ Đức
23.	Liu	1959-1963	Gò Vấp
24.	Loh (Lu)	1956-1963	Gò Vấp
25.	Lagger	1959-1975	Thủ Đức, Gò Vấp, Đà Lạt, Trạm Hành
26.	Loots		Thủ Đức
27.	Majcen	1952-1954 1956-1976	Hà Nội Thủ Đức, Gò Vấp, Trạm

			Hành, Tam Hải
28.	Massimino	1962-1975	Đà Lạt
29.	Ma Alexander	1968-1974	China-Vietnam Provincial
30.	Musso	1957-1974	Thủ Đức, Đà Lạt, Trạm Hành
31.	Nardin	1957-1964	Gò Váp
32.	Parscau	1963-	Thủ Đức
33.	Smith	1963-	Gò Váp
34.	Song Ignatius	1959-1964?	Thủ Đức
35.	Stra	1956-1975	Thủ Đức, Gò Váp, Đà Lạt
36.	TTchong	1957-1976	Gò Váp, Trạm Hành, Đà Nẵng
37.	Tsang Francis	1961-1975	Gò Váp, Thủ Đức
38.	Scheu VS	1959-1963	Gò Váp, Trạm Hành
39.	Tohill	1958-1962	China-Vietnam Provincial
40.	Van Wouwe	1960-1975	Thủ Đức, Gò Váp
41.	Urbinis ?		

PROVINCIALS

1.	Braga	Provincial	1930-1952 China-Vietnam
2.	Acquistapace	Provincial	1952-1958 China-Vietnam
3.	Tohill	Provincial	1958-1962 China-Vietnam
4.	Massimino	Provincial	1962-1968 China-Vietnam
5.	Ma Alexander	Provincial	1968-1974 China-Vietnam
6.	Phêrô Đệ	Provincial	1989-1995 Vietnam
7.	Gioan Ty	Provincial	1995-2001 Vietnam

PROVINCIAL DELEGATES

1.	Majcen	Prov. Delegate	1965-1968
2.	Acquistapace	Prov. Delegate	1968-1974
3.	Massimino	Prov. Delegate	1974-1975
4.	Gioan Ty	RM Delegate	1975-1989

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 IN THE FOOTSTEP OF DON A. MAJCEN
 A SALESIAN MISSIONARY
 IN CHINA AND VIETNAM**
 LJUBLJANA 1989

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RECTORS

1.	Majcen	Rector	Thủ Đức, Trạm Hành, Gò Vấp
2.	Bogo	Rector	Thủ Đức, Gò Vấp
3.	Acquistapace	Rector	Thủ Đức, Gò Vấp
4.	Massimino	Rector	Dà Lạt
5.	Tchong Matthew	Rector	Trạm Hành, Đà Nẵng
6.	Van Wouve	Rector	Gò Vấp
7.	Lê Hướng	Rector	Gò Vấp, Thủ Đức

CHAPTER 45: SOME OTHER MEMORABLE SALESIANS IN VIETNAM

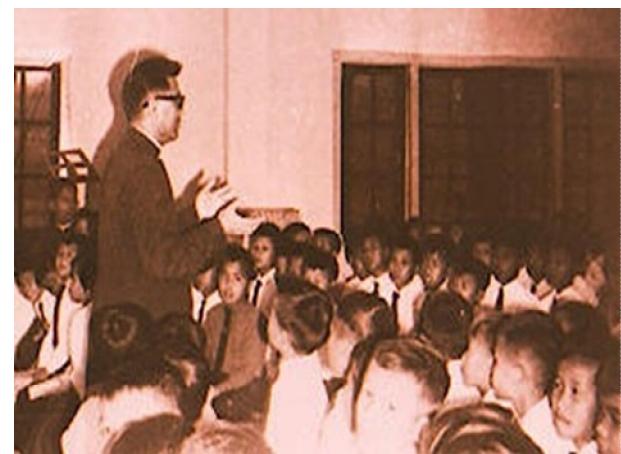
FR. MATTHEW TCHONG (CHA CHUNG) (1923-1982)

Born: August 15
1923 in
Hsienhsien, Ho
Pei, China.

First Profession:
August 16 1949
in Hong Kong.

Ordination:
July 1 1957 in
Bollengo, Italy.

Died: April 13
1982 in Macao.

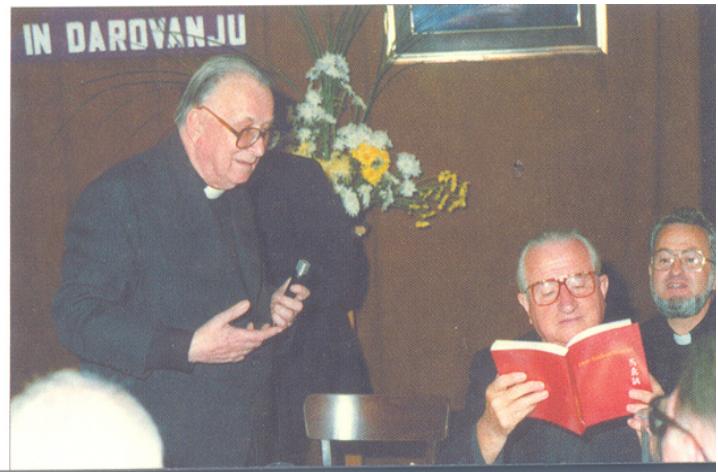


Young Matthew was received by Fr. Mario Acquistapace as a novice at the Don Bosco House in Beijing. Being a zealous young man in earnest service of the young, Matthew easily adapted himself to the very poor life at the Salesian house in Beijing. After the novitiate, by Mary Help of Christians' inspiration and grace, he could really resume his education. After his first profession in Hong Kong, he was sent for his theological studies in Bollengo, North Italy, where he was ordained priest on July 1 1957. As a new priest, he returned to his Province and was sent to Vietnam for missions. He did his best at Don Bosco Gò Váp and Trạm Hành, as a rector of the Apostolic School at Trạm Hành, Đà Lạt, in very hard conditions of a Vietnam in war.

He was rector of Trạm Hành in the late 1960s through early 1970. Then he was sent to Đà Nẵng to prepare for a new Salesian house there.

After 1975 he returned to Hong Kong to take charge of a Re-education House handed over by the Portuguese government in Macao to the Salesians in the Isle Coloane. He continued his mission until 1980 when he fell ill. He underwent an operation on his liver and was prognosticated to survive for one more year. Actually he survived for more than two years. During this time he went to say goodbye to all the Salesians in Taiwan and his relatives in the Chinese mainland. Upon returning to Macao, he felt his illness worsening. He died at the St. Januarius Hospital on April 13 1982 at the age of 59.





And Fr. Viganò enjoying reading Fr. Majcen's history revised by Fr. Rassiga.

FR. MARIO ACQUISTAPACE (1906-2002)

Born: 1906

Died: September 25 2002

Fr. Mario Acquistapace died on September 25 2002 at the Braga Old People's Home in Hong Kong at the age of 96.

He left his country Italy for China on July 16 1926 and came first to Macao. Ordained priest in 1931, he was appointed a teacher in Hong Kong. In 1947 he was sent to Beijing to establish a Salesian house there. He gathered the poor and abandoned children. He spent all his time to instruct and give spiritual guidance. In the late 1940s, China fell under the control of Mao Zedong and the communists.

In the night of September 24 1952, Fr. Mario was expelled from China, being declared by the Mao's regime as a *persona non grata*. Before leaving the mainland, he bid farewell to many of his pupils whom he had spent his best years to serve. He was the last Salesian missionary to leave Beijing, but not all the Salesians ever quitted. While the foreign missionaries left the mainland, many Chinese Salesians remained and lived in the "underground" Church. Unfortunately for many years we haven't heard anything about them. The expelled missionaries went to Vietnam, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan.

**CHAPTER 45: SOME OTHER MEMORABLE
SALESIANS IN VIETNAM**



Between 1952 and 1958 he was Provincial of the China-Philippines-Vietnam Province. By the end of his term as provincial, in the Philippines there had already been Salesian schools in Tarlac, Victorias, Mandaluyong, Malakati, the Boys' Town in Cebu, and the parish Tsan Lidefonso. All these prospered and became famous. In spite of the difficult financial and travelling conditions of the post war years, Fr. Mario managed to make the canonical visits every year in the Philippines. Then he came to Vietnam and worked in Sài Gòn.

In Vietnam in particular, Fr. Mario could serve for a longer time. In 1952 he visited Hà Nội where the Salesians had begun an Orphanage at Thái Hà Áp, but once again, with the communists' victory in Vietnam in 1954 and the partition of the country: the North under the communist regime and the South under the republic regime, the Salesians had to leave Hà Nội.

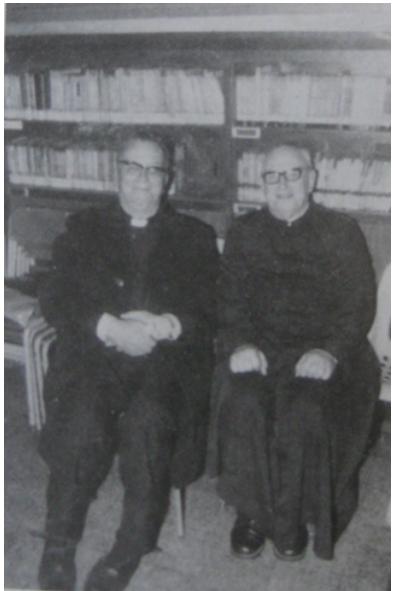
**CHAPTER 45: SOME OTHER MEMORABLE
SALESIANS IN VIETNAM**



**Fr. Ricceri,
Rector Major
with
distinguished
guests on the
Inauguration
Ceremony of
the Don Rua
Studentate in
Đà Lạt, 1973.**



**Fr. Viganò,
who
entrusted
Fr. Majcen
with the
writing of a
history of
the Salesian
works in
China-
Vietnam,
met him in
his country.**



**Fr. Mario Rassiga (right),
the Salesian historian who
revised the works of Fr.
Majcen (left)**

Coming to the South, Fr. Mario continued his apostolate with his youthful enthusiasm and optimism. With a few confreres at the beginning, he contributed to build the houses of Thủ Đức, Gò Vấp and Trạm Hành. At Gò Váp, the Orphanage could shelter 600 boys.

He continued his service to the poor and only stopped in 1974 when he was obliged to leave Vietnam before the imminent arrival of the communists in Sài Gòn. He went to Coloane Isle, near Macao, where he collected the relics of the Vietnamese and Japanese Martyrs and opened the Center of the Martyrs' Relics. He stayed in Coloane until 1990 then went to the Braga Old People's Home for the aged Salesian confreres in Hong Kong. He continued to work until his last days, receiving visits from his friends and past pupils who came to receive his spiritual guidance. He called on everyone to live a lively faith.

FR. GENEROSO BOGO (1917-1991)

Born: 1917 in Brazil.

Died: 1991 in Jaraguá do Sol, Brazil.

Fr. Generoso Bogo was among the Salesian pioneers who worked longer in Vietnam, from 1953 to 1975. Already in 1953 at the Orphanage at Thái Hà Áp in Hà Nội, he was appointed to assist Fr. Majcen as a prefect of studies and to share his life with the poor orphans, then to accompany them to the South in 1954 after the partition of Vietnam, through Ban Mê Thuôt, Sài Gòn, to Thủ Đức and Gò Vấp.

As a prefect of studies, he lived close to his boys, spoke Vietnamese beautifully, and also took care of the legal documents both civil and religious of the orphans. He had a very clear and fresh voice, was good at teaching songs and spoke an elegant French with a Brazilian accent.



As a Councilor General for Missions, Fr. Tohill (*standing*) has since 1977 initiated the collection of historical data... and Fr. Majcen has carried it out by writing down a history of Salesian Works in China and Vietnam, a legacy of St. Martyr Mgr. Versiglia. Fr. Rassiga (*on wheelchair*) has revised it. It was a blessing of Mary Help of Christians.

**CHAPTER 45: SOME OTHER MEMORABLE
SALESIANS IN VIETNAM**



Fr. Antonio Ciglar's spiritual help has led Fr. Majcen to complete the task entrusted to him by Fr. Tohill

**CHAPTER 45: SOME OTHER MEMORABLE
SALESIANS IN VIETNAM**



He had been for many years rector of the first Salesian aspirantate in Thủ Đức and then rector of the Don Bosco Technical School in Gò Váp.

A short while before 1975 he was sent to Đà Nẵng together with Fr. Tchong to prepare for a vocational school in the diocese of Mgr. Chi who had known the Salesians when he was in Bùi Chu before 1954.

When Đà Nẵng was lost to the communists in April 1975, Mgr. Chi recommended both Fr. Tchong and Fr. Generoso to return to Hong Kong. Fr. Generoso came back to his home country Brazil and died in 1991 in Jaraguá do Sul, aged 74.

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**CHAPTER 45: SOME OTHER MEMORABLE
SALESIANS IN VIETNAM**

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With the dynamism of a young priest who always lived close to the Vietnamese young people right from the beginning of the Salesian works in Vietnam, Fr. Generoso Bogo is among the forefathers of the Salesians in Vietnam.



**DON
BOSCO GÒ
VÁP**

Fr. Generoso
Bogo, Rector,
with his
Salesians: Fr.
Bảo, Fr. Stra,
Fr. De
Meleuneare
...

**CHAPTER 45: SOME OTHER MEMORABLE
SALESIANS IN VIETNAM**



1973.

Fr. Mario
Acquistap
ace's
greeting
address on
the Visit of
the Rector
Major Fr.
Ricceri,
accompanie
d by Fr.
Viganò and
Fr. Dho,
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