

CHAPTER 15

GM'S PROJECTION OF INDIA

During the golden period of Christian missionary undertaking, the eyes of many missionaries and missionary groups were on India, the birthplace of quite a few ancient religions, with its teeming millions. It would appear that the "time" of India had come to turn in a big way to the message of the Gospel, and the Church wanted to avail itself of this opportunity. Besides, India with all that made it so peculiar and distinct from every other nation in the world had a particular fascination for the Europeans.

Reports on India occupy the greatest space in GM. Eugenio Valentini lists about 603 articles found in GM on India.¹ Besides these, GM dedicates 11 issues almost fully to this vast peninsula: June 1951, July 1951, November 1951, February 1952, July 1952, May 1953, January 1954, March 1954, December 1954, September 1955 and April 1958. Three of these eleven issues deal with India in general, while the others deal with certain particular zones.²

The over all presentation of the Indian sub-continent

Within the abundant information on India in GM, a division could be made between articles that deal with India as a whole, and the other articles that deal with specific regions. While the attention of the general type of articles is focussed more on the Hindu India, that of the second category of articles is on the various

¹ As in the case of articles on China, so too in the case of articles on India, not all the articles on India are listed in the collection of Valentini.

² The India of GM includes Burma, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. The Salesian missionaries reached India in 1906, long before Independence and division of the Indian peninsula.

tribal groups, especially those of North East India. Obviously there is a gradual development from depicting individual aspects of the Hindu Society, to projecting an over all picture of the same society.

Caste system in India

One of the features of the Hindu society that is highlighted by GM both in the period before World War II and in the period after it is the existence of the caste system. Though not all the reports come directly from the pen of the salesian missionaries working in India, obviously they reflect the missionary's point of view, as even the articles compiled by the editors are taken from some missionary periodicals.³

In a summary of two articles from two missionary reviews, GM in April 1924 presents the two extremes of the Indian Hindu society: the Brahmins and the Pariahs. The motive is obvious: to put in relief the great difference between the two groups. In the Hindu society, the Brahmins enjoy the highest and the most important status. The Brahmin is considered to be an incarnation of the divinity itself. "The Brahmin is the first creature of God, the master and king of creation, the incarnation of religion. Everything exists for him and he is by law above everything else."⁴ The other castes treat them with due veneration. For the missionary, instead, the article continues, this group is "the true caste of the proud! Rarely does it happen that any of them convert to Catholicism." The pariahs form the other extreme of the caste system. They are employed in doing the meanest of jobs. They are the despised, untouchables of the society. Anyone who comes into direct contact with them incurs religious impurity! As a result

³ The reports offered by GM are in no way scientific presentation of the origin, nature, significance of the caste system. The missionary views this system of social differences between various groups of people as a negation of the basic evangelical values of justice, equality and above all of love. The evil of the system does not consist in the existence of various classes, but in the inhuman treatment of the low caste and the casteless people, and that too for no fault of theirs. There is no other solution for this unjust situation, except the elimination of the system itself! The missionary is the champion of the down-trodden, and the propagandist of a social revolution.

⁴ *Gli estremi dell'India*, in GM 2 (1924) 4, 59.

they live in miserable sheds, segregated from the other castes. Their only friend outside their caste is the Catholic missionary.

In September 1925, in a report again compiled from other missionary reviews, GM asserts that the caste system, in spite of the social chaos it engenders, and the injustice it perpetuates, is the foundation of the social life of India! The distinction of classes does not depend on the religious differences, is instead a social fact. It is so deep rooted that in spite of all efforts by the missionaries, it persists even in the Church.⁵

In August 1927, Garneri focuses on the inhuman treatment afforded to the pariahs. According to the report, the pariahs are the descendants of the ancient inhabitants of the Indian peninsula, who were subjugated, enslaved and gradually hinduized by the Aryans. Garneri paints a vivid picture of the miserable condition of the Pariahs. They own little that they can call their own. They live in ghettos of their own, separated from all other castes. They don't even have access to the temples or to the priests. They are the real untouchables of society.⁶

In 1937, the salesian missionary Cignatta again describes the effects of the caste system on the society of India, especially on the low caste people. He notes that these pariahs cannot pass through certain streets; they cannot even wear a shirt! They are forbidden access to all places used by the other castes, even the temple, the well, the hotels etc. A pariah can never change his caste either through education or by acquiring riches; born a pariah one dies as a pariah!

Cignatta notes that there are four main castes in India: The Brahmins who form the priestly class, the Kshatriyas who form the class of the warriors, the Vaishyas who form the group of merchants and farmers and the Shudras who form the group that

⁵ Cfr. *Le Caste in India*, in GM 3 (1925) 9, 200-201.

⁶ Cfr. GARNERI D., *Un Problema Indiano*, in GM 5 (1927) 8, 141-142. In this particular report, Garneri's attention is turned more to the urgency of the mission among the Pariahs. While the Pariahs respond well to the care of the Catholic missionaries, and there is a movement among them towards the Catholic Church, there are also other missions moving in to this camp: the protestants, the Muslims and even the Hindus themselves.

do the menial jobs.⁷ Besides these four main divisions, each caste has its own subdivisions. The missionary notes that this evidently unjust social structure is what Hinduism has created in India.⁸

Cignatta also speaks about the efforts of Mahatma Gandhi and of Ambedkar in bringing about a social revolution. These untouchables are in search for a religion that would guarantee them justice and equality.⁹

An article in December 1954, though it reasserts the deep roots of the caste system in the Indian society, paints a gentler picture of the Brahmins. Through the various Catholic educational institutions, a new social awareness is created among the children of the high castes. Although the Brahmins do not easily accept baptism, they have a great appreciation and veneration for Christ and the Gospel.¹⁰

This sympathetic attitude towards the Brahmins is also noticed in a small report of January 1955. It notes that often the more intelligent, educated and well-behaved portion of society belongs to the caste of the Brahmins. From infancy a Brahmin is taught to respect himself and be worthy of his high status. Reverence and obedience to the teachers are essential virtues of the Brahmin. They are given an ascetic training in their youth as GM notes, "They are obliged to abstain from all meat, from the use of all perfumes, from the use of sandals, shoes and umbrella, from anger, avarice, dance and songs and from lies."¹¹ According to the report, true to their formation, quite a few of these Brahmins become true ascetics.

⁷ The Shudras and the casteless people form together the group commonly called pariahs.

⁸ Evident exasperation with this "ill-fated institution" created and supported by Hinduism makes the missionary remark that for this social evil created by it, Hinduism does not deserve the name of "religion". He states, "It is not a religion, instead a contagious disease." CIGNATTA, *Un Problema di Strategia Missionaria*, in GM 15 (1937) 1, 12.

⁹ Here again GM, through the writing of Cignatta, highlights the Muslim threat. The author reports that various groups of untouchables have embraced Islam, and the Muslim missionaries are very operative among them. Cfr. CIGNATTA, *Un Problema di Strategia Missionaria*, 12-13.

¹⁰ Cfr. *Le Alte Caste Indiane e il Cristianesimo*, in GM 32 (1954) 12, 2-3.

¹¹ *Il Bramino*, in GM 33 (1955) 1, 17.

In December 1960 Luigi Del Nievo Squeri, a missionary in India again describes the social structure based on caste system, prevalent in India, after the constitution had legally abolished it. The succinct description of the life of a low caste sums up all that GM had said earlier about the same.

The Shudras are the untouchables of the society, and occupy the lowest place in the society. [...] No Shudra has the right to acquire any property. His life is of little value, and his personality does not count. He lives solely to serve those of the higher classes. He is born in a world of degradation and misery, ignorant and without ideals, he dies in that world without any regret or any lament. In the villages, the Shudras live in a separate section practically at the periphery of the village or at times even in a place more distant from the village. Their habitations are humble hovels without light, darkened by smoke. To them are reserved such works as cleaning the roads, cleaning the public toilets, burning or burying the dead, working in the tanneries etc. Their pay is as much as what a stingy man would give in charity.¹²

In the May 1965 issue, where there is quite an extensive write up about Hinduism, the editors present again a short write up about the caste system. According to this report, the Aryans form the three high castes of Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas; the Shudras are the Dravidians who were subjugated by the Aryans. Besides these four, this particular report introduces the caste of the Chandalas who are the casteless people commonly known as pariahs, and the Mletchas who are the foreigners. The article also exposes the mythological roots of caste system. According to Hindu mythology, the Brahmins were born from the head of Brahman, the Kshatriyas from the shoulders, the Vaishyas from the stomach and the Shudras from the feet. And the casteless people do not have their origin in Brahman.¹³

¹² DEL NIEVO SQUERI L., *La Dura Vita dell'Intoccabile*, in GM 38 (1960) 12, 6-7.

¹³ Cfr. *La Legge della Casta*, in GM 43 (1965) 5, 22.

The religious division of the Hindu society

One of the curious practices among the Hindus, that GM reported in November 1924, was that of bearing some marks on the foreheads. These marks are not worn as decorations, instead they have a religious significance. Chief among the Hindu gods are Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver and Shiva the destroyer. Among the Hindus, some are devotees of Vishnu (Vishnuvite) while others are devotees of Shiva (Shivites). The Vishnuvites have three vertical lines on their foreheads, the lateral lines usually in white and the central line in rose in honour of the goddess Lakshmi, the wife of Vishnu. The Shivites instead have three horizontal lines on the foreheads.¹⁴

Certain features of the Hindu society in India

One of the feature of the Hindu society, which appeared a little ridiculous to the missionary that was picked up and projected in the pages of GM, was the veneration afforded to the cow. Ravalico writing in May 1928 says, "Here in India, the cow is given a veneration which touches the level of fanaticism"¹⁵ The missionary continues to say that there have been so many bloody inter-religious feuds just for a cow. For the Hindu, the cow is the seat of divinity and has an important role to play in all their religious manifestations. About these religious manifestations Ravalico continues in the same report,

The cow is the protagonist of many semi-religious festivals. In these cases the poor beast is subjected to a long and meticulous process of cleansing: horns are adorned with orange blossoms and a garland of jasmine is put around its neck, the back and sides are decorated with paintings which represent all the divinities of the Indian Olympus! So adorned it is lead triumphantly along the paths of the city and made the object of veneration of the passers by who are obliged to

¹⁴ Cfr: *I Contrassegni della Sèeta Hindu*, in GM 2 (1924)11, 169. Besides pointing to the curious practice of drawing these lines on the foreheads, the article points to the divisions in Hinduism itself, the differences that exist in the society, and the difficulty of the missionary in comprehending the Indian mentality and culture.

¹⁵ RAVALICO L., *La Vacca da Punto di Vista Indiano*, in GM 6 (1928) 5, 94.

show their veneration for it by bowing their heads and at times even by prostrating themselves to the ground.¹⁶

Ravalico mentions in the same article that this religious veneration is manifested also in allowing the cow to roam about freely in the streets and to lie down where it wants, even when it obstructs the traffic. The Hindu will neither disturb it nor chase it away! For the Hindu, to kill a cow is a major crime, and only a bath in the Ganges will cleanse such a person from the religious impurity incurred by such an action.

Ravalico, again in July 1928, reports yet another practice in India that for the missionary obviously was ridiculous: the veneration afforded to the monkey. The author writes,

India is a country of contradictions and paradoxes, where side by side with the high philosophical concepts of the Vedas one also finds a flowering of the meanest and most humiliating patterns of thought: among these latter it is enough to remember all the cult given to the animals. [...] After the altar to the cow, the elephant and the serpent there is yet another that is erected to the monkey, this stupid quadruped made to imitate that which is basest and vilest in the human person.¹⁷

The author notes that this worship of the monkey is based on the great Hindu epic: the Ramayana. It is the monkey that helped Rama to liberate his wife Sita from Rabon. In some areas of India, feeding the monkeys, especially those found around the temples, is considered a great act of virtue. As temples constructed and dedicated to other gods and goddesses, they are also dedicated to *Hanuman*, the monkey god. One such temple is found precisely in a small island in the Brahmaputra river, near Guwahati.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ravalico notes the contradiction inherent in this ridiculous practice. While an animal like the cow is favoured with so much respect and veneration, the poor pariah is treated with absolute contempt! An unintelligent animal is more important than man, the king of creation!

¹⁷ RAVALICO L., *La Scimmia dal Punto di Vista Indiano*, in GM 6 (1928) 7, 137.

¹⁸ Cfr also RIGHETTO S., *Un Quadrupede nell'Olimpo Indiano*, in GM 13 (1935) 2, 32. Righetto again puts in relief the treatment that these animals receive from a fervent Hindu as opposed to the treatment that the untouchables receive from the same fervent Hindu. The pariah is left to die abandoned, while the monkey is treated with all care, attention and veneration due to a god!

Another curious feature of the Indian society that GM projected for its readers, is the snake charmer who makes the round of villages and towns. It is something unimaginable that a man with a rudimentary flute can have so much control over these venomous creatures, he can make them swing to the music from his flute, take them in his hands and even wear them around his neck as some would wear a garland! And even when the missionaries have problems with some of these unwanted visitors in their compound, the snake charmer can be of great help to capture them!¹⁹

In December 1930, GM publishes a small report of Ravalico where he speaks of certain common sights in the public squares of the cities and villages of India.²⁰ It is not uncommon in India to see some barber rendering his service in the public square. At the call from the mosque, the Muslim will prostrate himself on the ground even in the market place! A fakir will lie on a bed of nails in a public place! One may even see devotees who have painted their face with cow dung! With all its religious diversities, India is a land of great religious toleration and liberty.²¹

Mendicants and fakirs

Another personage in the Indian society that drew the attention of the missionary was the mendicant.²² According to M. Fossati, besides the common beggars, there are the ascetics who live on the charity of the people, but have a religious role in the society.

¹⁹ Cfr. RAVAPPA S., *Il Signore dei Cobra*, in GM 7 (1929) 9, 177-178. An article from G. Sperindio, missionary in India, in March 1967 speaks of the same practice, and notes that the snake charmer with his collection of snakes, is still a very common sight in the villages and towns of India. Sperindio also notes that in India there is a cult to the snakes, practised by Hindus, Buddhists and animists. There are also temples dedicated to the snake in various corners of India. Cfr. SPERINDIO G., *L'Incantatore di Serpenti*, in GM 45 (1967) 3, 25-27.

²⁰ Obviously the missionary's attention is drawn to these sights precisely because in Italy the things he narrates are done in places assigned to them, and certainly not in public squares.

²¹ Cfr. RAVALICO L., *Il Barbieri in Piazza*, in GM 8 (1930) 12, 246-247.

²² The term "mendicants" has been used here precisely with the intention to distinguish them from the ordinary beggar, who takes to begging because of lack of all means of livelihood.

In general they are clam, happy by nature and contended with little. One meets them almost everywhere: in the cities, in the villages, in the market places. There are various types of these ascetics. There are the *Dasari* who perform some religious ceremonies among the *pariahs*. He is also a kind of a doctor and astronomer for the lower castes. Normally he is a worshipper of Vishnu. The *Panchagas* are the ones consulted to know the propitious time for various undertakings. They instead are worshippers of Shiva. The *Jangama* belongs to the caste of the Shudras and is a worshipper of Shiva. His job is to perform various blessings to the households. The *Jogis* are the real fakirs – the highest class of the mendicants and the true ascetics. They leave all they have and retire to solitude to pass their time in meditation.²³

In March 1934, A. Maschio gives a more detailed description of the fakirs and their life. According to the author, they profess to tend to the highest perfection with methods known to them. Their aim in life is to arrive at a complete absorption in God. The means that they use to arrive at such a sublime goal are: total detachment from the world, severe fasts and penance, and dedication to contemplation.²⁴

A confession of a fakir, reported by Vallino Innocenza, a missionary in Assam, gives an insight into the genuine thirst of these ascetics for God, and the extend to which they push their penance. He is reported to have said,

I am a priest of the pagan gods; I have passed my whole life in sacrifices, prayers and prolonged fasts. Yet nothing had served my poor soul, athirst with a longing for truth, with the comfort of having found it; my heart remained ever so dry and cold. All my life I took upon myself the obligation of making the round of the villages every Saturday, on my naked knees, not bothering about the climate or the inclemency of the weather or for that matter any other obstacle of any type. I did all that with the only motive of knowing the true God at least at the point of my departure from this life.²⁵

²³ Cfr. FOSSATI M., *Mendicanti del India*, in GM 9 (1931) 5, 92-93.

²⁴ Cfr. MASCHIO A., *Una Pittura Indiana di Cristo*, in GM 12 (1934) 3, 45-46.

²⁵ VALLINO I., *Alla ricerca del Vero Dio*, in GM 14 (1936) 3, 57.

The face of independent India

Obviously in the reports on India after the World War II, there is a shift from focussing the attention on mere curiosities to highlighting general trends in the society, evidently with the motive of greater missionary commitment in the region.

India – a country that searches for God

At the threshold of an era of an independent India, GM projects the image of a country that is deeply religious. It asserts that the history of this great nation points to one constant factor: a constant search for God. India is the birth place of two major world religions, Hinduism and Buddhism and of many other religions found in the sub-continent itself. One fourth of humanity has received its religion from India! Sanskrit literature, one of the most ancient in the world, is practically all religious. Ramayana and Mahabaratha continue to be two of the great religious epics of the world. About this deep rooted tendency to the divine, GM notes,

No other nation has searched for God for such a long time and so tenaciously through the mysteries of the universe. India, in its poverty, has populated its plains, mountains, the beaches of its lakes and the banks of its rivers with monuments to the divinity.²⁶

The missionary's perception of Hinduism

It would seem unfortunate, according to GM, that this great nation finds itself enslaved by Hinduism. Even though the great majority of the Indian population draws its religious inspiration from Hinduism, the future of India does not lie in this religion. Hinduism offers little opening to redemption and to hope. The social evils that are apparently the fruits of this belief belie its redemptive character. In April 1947 GM states:

Hinduism does not give any hope of redemption. Thousand years of its history is nothing but a proof of its sterility. What help can one expect from a religion that has produced the

oppression of the lower caste, the cruel tyranny of untouchability, the horrors of child marriage, the confusion of its temples dedicated to thousands of gods, none of whom offer an example of virtue, instead only shameful scandals? Hinduism has obliged the Hindu to perceive life as an existence without significance, which is prolonged through a series of births and rebirths and ends in the same point of the circle from which it had started. In India love and friendship are nothing more than a dream which is for ever destroyed by death.²⁷

Continuing in the same line, in 1952 GM notes that what the Hindu faith generates in its believers is an over all pessimism and melancholy.

We who live in pagan territories for years now can affirm that the pagan faith is a religion of despair. One searches in vain on the faces of the pagans – be they Hindu, Muslim or Animists - for those expressions of serenity and joy so characteristic of our Christians. The pagan is sad and melancholic. All his action and even his songs are pervaded by that sadness which has its source in that lack of faith and fatalism. He feels himself oppressed by a Being who is cruel and relentless. He is terrified by a multitude of evil spirits who persecute him continuously and whom he does not know to propitiate.²⁸

The developed nature of Hinduism

The reports on Hinduism presented in GM after the World War II, in some way bring to light the underlying tension between presenting its insufficiency as a means of salvation and presenting

²⁷ *L'India in Cerca di Dio*, in GM 25 (1947) 4, 7. Certainly GM does not want to give an impression that, because of such an enslaving religion, the Hindu is a bad person. Instead the editors take pain to report that in spite of his faith, the common Hindu is a good person. There is a natural goodness in the Indian that overcomes the effects of his faith. "But the Hindu is good and better than his religion! The Indian is naturally good and gentle." *L'Induismo*, in GM 25 (1947) 4, 6.

²⁸ *Seminatori di Gioia*, in GM 30 (1952) 7, 4. The author's purpose is show that the missionaries are the true sowers of peace and joy. Although no reference is made directly to Hinduism, the remark applies primarily to Hinduism, that pagan ambience of which the missionary speaks.

²⁶ *L'India in Cerca di Dio*, in GM 25 (1947) 4, 7.

what is good and beautiful in it. So Oderico Berti, a missionary in India, in December 1954, observes that Hinduism in India is not just a primitive religion. On the contrary, it is one of the most systematic religions of the world, with its gods, scriptures, sacraments, mysticism, monks, saints, doctors and priests, and with a history of about 5000 years! The popular nature of Hinduism, with its temples, feasts and ceremonies seem to satisfy the religious aspiration of the people. Hindu philosophy, widely praised even by the Westerners, is well developed and on par with any ancient philosophy.²⁹

In May 1965, an article on Hindu theology exposes some of the fundamentals of Hindu faith. The aim of human life on earth, according to Hinduism, is to reach a stage where one is absorbed into the Absolute: Brahman. This stage is called *nirvana* which is a happy state of the soul where there is no more action and no more desires. Only the really perfect arrives at *nirvana* immediately after death. The law of *Karma*, which is basic to Hindu religion, says that a person will merit *nirvana* if he has lived truly according to the divine law, and has reached true perfection even in this life. If not, he will be re-born in the form of some other creature, till he makes reparation for all the mistakes he committed. If one rebirth is not sufficient, the person will be subjected to a series of rebirths, till that required purification is reached. The way to avoid the series of re-incarnations is that of asceticism, meditation, devotion to the various gods and goddesses, and detachment from every earthly thing.³⁰

In the same issue of GM, the editors make a brief presentation of the Hindu Sacraments. As the Christian sacraments accompany a person through the process of his growth, the Hindu religion

²⁹ Cf: BERTI O., *Il Dramma della Conversione dell'India*, in GM 32 (1954) 12, 4-17. The articles is surely not written to praise Hinduism. The adequacy and greatness of the Hindu religion accounts for a greater resistance from the Hindus, and greater fatigue from the part of the missionary.

³⁰ Cf: *Teologia Indù*, in GM 43 (1965) 5, 18-19. Written for school-going boys and girls, the article does not discuss in depth the Hindu belief. It presents very briefly the general outlines of the ancient belief.

accompanies and marks the different stages of the growth of the person. The Hindus call these sacraments "*Samskara*". They constitute the religious ceremonies for the birth, the infancy, adolescence, man-hood, old-age and death of a person. *Namakarana*, the rite of imposition of the name, is the first of the *Samskaras* and is performed few days after the child is born. *Annaprāsana* is the ceremony by which the baby in the sixth month is given solid food for the first time. *Chudakarma* is the first haircut of the baby that takes place when the child is 3 years old. *Aksharabyasa* is the ceremony of initiation to study, to knowledge and marks the beginning of a period of discipleship with some learned person. *Upanayana* is the rite which consists of consigning the sacred cord at the initiation to the science of the Aryans. At the end of the period of study and discipleship, the boy leaves the guru and re-enters the family and this re-entry into the family is marked by the rite of *Samavartana*. *Vivaha* is the marriage ceremony. And the last rite is *Shradha*, the rite of funeral.³¹

In the general presentation of the various aspects of Hinduism in May 1965, GM gives a short write up on the Hindu family. The author of the article highlights the religious ambience that reigns in the Hindu family. The family is the centre of the religious life of the practising Hindu. Every event in the family is given a religious overtone. The father of the family, besides being the first in authority, is the object of true veneration, and maintains the family in the ancient traditions. The respect shown to the father obviously has a religious tone. In traditional families, after the ritual bath in the morning, the children bow down in front of the father to touch his feet and take his blessing before setting out for their daily activities. It is customary even to make a ritual offering of flowers to him.³²

³¹ Cf: "*I Sacramenti Indù*", in GM 43 (1965) 5, 24-26. Here again the point of the author is not to equate the Hindu sacraments with those Christian. The report aims to show the difficulty of converting a Hindu on simplistic arguments like, "We have sacraments, while you don't have them!" The article also seems to point to the need of the missionary to know in depth the Hindu faith and practice, to be able to present the Christian faith in the right light.

³² *Vita Religiosa*, in GM 43 (1965) 5, 28-29.

India the "land of famine"

One of the aspects of the Indian society that has been very much highlighted by the GM in the post World War II period is its poverty.³³ The April issue of 1947 presents a vivid picture of this poverty that pervaded the teeming population of India:

Only 39% of the Indians are sufficiently nourished. 41% of them live on a frugal diet. And 20% are starved! The majority of Indians live on a single meal a day. And if by a "meal" one understands one of our ordinary meals back home, then these do not have even one such meal! The government of Bengal frankly confessed: "The major part of the workers is reduced to a diet with which not even the rats would be able to survive more than five weeks!" In the last quarter of the last century, 32.5 million Indians died of famine. In 1943, only in Bengal famine claimed 3.5 million victims!³⁴

In fact one of the sections of the same article is sub-titled "The land of famine". This same title is used of India in the May issue of 1950, in the article "In India" – the social question.³⁵ Another article in July 1951 asserts that famine is the real wound of India. In fact the article is titled "The wound of India: famine".³⁶

Vanni Desideri Giorgio, in July 1951, writes about his impression of the misery that he encountered on his arrival in India. He says that during his journey from Bombay to Madras he and his companions were literally assaulted, in various railway stations, by groups of young boys begging them for some coins. The journey from the Railway station of Madras to the residence of the Archbishop of Madras served to re-enforce the same impression of poverty and misery of the people of the place. He writes,

³³ One would think that this emphasis on this particular aspect of independent India reflects the true concern of the missionaries with problems that really assailed the Indian society. Poverty and under development were certainly problems that the independent nation had to tackle on a priority basis. From the various reports in GM, one would get an impression that after India's independence, missionary work in the country, tended to emphasise more than before, on this aspect of caring for the poor.

³⁴ *Tre Facce dell'India Misteriosa*, in GM 25 (1947) 4, 5.

³⁵ *In India – la Questione Sociale*, in GM 28 (1950) 5, 8.

³⁶ *La Piaga dell'India: la Fame*, in GM 29 (1951) 7, 8-9.

The face of misery in all its crudeness manifests itself immediately. Along the way hundreds of beggars without a roof over their head, children naked and semi naked lying on the footpaths while the busy and noisy crowd walk along intent on their own business, deaf to every cry of these poor people!³⁷

GM of March 1954 carries a write up of Mons. Marengo Oreste where the Bishop speaks of the miserable condition of the people in his diocese. He speaks of his own personal experiences to impress on the mind of the readers "the bleak and absolute misery which prevails in a good part of my diocese, especially among the tribals of the hills."³⁸

Dances of India

In November 1966, with various photos and illustrations, GM presented a general picture of the various Dances in India. The article notes that in India dances are believed to have had a divine origin. Dance is considered the art of the gods and goddesses. Man learnt the art of dancing from these gods and goddesses. In the earlier times, dances were always connected with the temples and had some religious content and significance. Indian classical dances are not just rhythmic movement of the body; every movement, every gesture conveys a meaning, and the dance in its totality tells a story, often religious in character.

The four main classical dances of India are: Katakali, Bharata Natyam, Manipuri dance and Kathak. Katakali is found mainly in Kerala. It has always a religious theme, and is always connected to the temples. Bharata Natyam was earlier a religious dance, but slowly it lost this religious character and today is a profane dance.

³⁷ VANNI D. G., *Attraverso l'India Misteriosa*, in GM 29(1951) 7, 5.

³⁸ MARENGO O., *Ho Compassione di Questo Popolo*, in GM 32 (1954) 3, 14. Even in the period before the war, there were reports on the poverty that pervaded the Indian society. But the emphasis then was more on the abandonment of children brought about by the misery of the families. Parents were in a way forced to send away their children from their families to find some work and some means of sustenance. Some of the parents were even compelled to sell their children into slavery. Cfr. *Piccola Martire*, in GM 13 (1935) 2, 33; PANCOLINI F., *Il Mio Nome è Soltanto Kim*, in GM 25 (1947) 4, 10.

Manipuri dance is found in the state of Manipur in NE India. It is usually connected to the temples, though the themes of the dance are not always religious. Kathak is the dance of North India, of very ancient origin. Under the Muslim rulers it acquired certain elements of Persian and Arabic cultures and a profane character. Besides these classical dances, there are what are called the popular dances that characterise the various regions and various ethnic groups of India.³⁹

The Assam Missions

The single mission that has received most publicity through the pages of GM is that of Assam. Luigi Ravalico, who has the credit of being the missionary who has written the greatest number of articles for GM, laboured in this mission. Although he did not limit his writings to Assam, the major portion of what has been written by him deals with this region. In all probability the novelty and diversity of the region, and a truly prodigious growth of the mission, accounted for the publicity accorded to Assam.

Assam and its inhabitants

One of the first reports on Assam is a reprint of a write up of Verbockhaven S.J.,⁴⁰ published in «Missioni Belghe della Compagnia di Gesù». The Jesuit missionary highlights the natural beauty and diversity of the region. The Brahmaputra runs across the length of the region from East to West. Great stretches of tea gardens alternate with vast paddy fields. Yet the region preserves much of its rich natural forests. The central valley surrounded by hills presents the picture of a true natural amphitheatre. The footnote to this article by the editors of GM notes that the name “Assam” in Sanskrit means incomparable, without equals. And the footnote continues that Assam, true to its name, is a land of

³⁹ Cfr. *La Danza Indiana*, in GM 44 (1966) 11, 19-23. This write up on the Indian dances, highlights the rich cultural heritage of the nation, and seems to be meant to attract young missionaries to this vast peninsula.

⁴⁰ GM notes that Verbockhaven was a missionary in Assam for many years. The article is definitely written after the Salesians took charge of the mission, as it speaks of the initiation of the Salesian apostolate in the region.

marvels: it has vast forests with various types of costly trees, its flora is perhaps the richest in the Indian peninsula, and it produces a great variety of fruits. It is the home of tigers, elephants, rhinos, wild buffaloes and snakes of all types!⁴¹

Verbockhaven in his write up mentions that various groups belonging to the Mongolian family occupy the mountainous regions of Assam. He makes special mention of only the Khasis. However the editor's footnote mentions that there are about 167 tribal groups in Assam and among them mentions the Garos, the Nagas, the Kukis, the Manipuris, the Bodos, the Mikirs, the Abors, the Khamtis, the Angamis, the Daplas, the Mishmis.⁴² Mons. Fernando writing in November 1946 calls the region a true “paradise of the anthropologist and ethnologist.”⁴³ In 1951 presents the region as a “mosaic of races and religions”.⁴⁴

In June 1952 Fausto Pancolini a missionary in Assam gives a description of the people of Assam. He divides the whole population of Assam into two broad groups: the Indo-Aryan population of the Assam plains and the many tribal groups of Mongolian origin who occupy the mountainous region. He describes the people of the plains in these terms:

[...] They are noted for the regularity of their complexion and the height of their facial angle. Their face is round and symmetrical, nose slightly aquiline, broad forehead and thin lips. They are short in stature and of a brown complexion. Almost all the people of the plains profess Hinduism. [...] They have a sharp intelligence and love to study.⁴⁵

And this is the way that he gives a general description of the tribals of Assam:

⁴¹ Cfr. VERBOCKHAVEN SJ, *La Prefettura Apostolica dell'Assam*, in GM 1 (1923) 3, 38. The idea of an incomparable land is taken up again by GM in June 1951, and in May 1962. Cfr. *L'Assam, Terra Incomparabile*, in GM 29 (1951) 6, 3; *Paese Senza Eguale*, in GM 40 (1962) 4, 26-28.

⁴² Cfr. VERBOCKHAVEN SJ, *La Prefettura Apostolica dell'Assam*, in GM 1 (1923) 3, 38.

⁴³ FERRANDO S., *Vigorosa Ripresa*, in GM 24 (1946) 11, 106.

⁴⁴ Cfr. *Mosaico di Razze e Religioni*, in GM 29 (1951) 6, 4.

⁴⁵ PANCOLINI F., *Gli Abitanti dell'Assam*, in GM 30 (1952) 6, 6

They are of a faded yellowish complexion, almond shaped eyes, nose small and little flat, projecting cheekbones, broad face, thin lips and black and flowing hair. They are a little smaller than the medium stature and do not have beard at all.⁴⁶

The Khasis

The Khasis are the first tribal group that the Salesians came into contact with in the mission of Assam.⁴⁷ In the May 1923 issue of GM, Gil A., a pioneering missionary of Assam, gives a small general description of the people. He writes,

These people who are the object of the love and care of the Salesians in Assam, have all the characteristics of the Mongolian race: short stature, narrow forehead, small eyes, colour – faded yellow. [...] The Khasis have a quiet and happy character, but they resent any provocation.⁴⁸

Gil continues that little is known about the history of this race before the British occupation of Assam. The author classifies the tribe as idolaters.⁴⁹ They believe in one God, the creator and preserver of the whole universe. Their sacrifices, however, seem to be directed to the evil spirits who they believe are the cause of various illnesses and misfortunes. The Khasis believe in a life after death. Obviously one of the social traits of the group that made easier the work of the missionaries was the fact that the Khasi society was casteless. The strict matriarchal system of family prevalent among the Khasis appeared to the missionaries as a particular characteristic of the tribe. Of this matriarchal system Gil writes:

The woman is the object of much esteem among them. She is the true queen of the family: she rules and governs the homes, while the husband wears more the aspect of a guest.

⁴⁶ PANCOLINI F., *Gli Abitanti dell'Assam*, in GM 30 (1952) 6, 6

⁴⁷ The German Salvatorians established the headquarters of the Assam mission in the hill-station of Shillong, the most important city of Khasi hills. Much of the missionary enterprise of these pioneering missionaries was in favour of the Khasis.

⁴⁸ GIL A., *I Khasi*, in GM 1 (1923) 4, 57.

⁴⁹ This particular remark of the missionary does seem to be true as there are no idols in the Khasi religion.

[...] All the riches of the family are in her hands. [...] Children depend on her always, and in the case of the death of the mother the children are looked after by the family of the mother and do not stay with the father as would be the natural thing.⁵⁰

Certain superstitions and practices of the Khasis

After the general description of the tribe, GM's interest extends more to particular features of its beliefs and customs that could whet the interest of the readers in this people. So, in August 1924 there is a report on the Khasi point of view of the lunar eclipse. The author notes that the Khasis believe that the fading away of the moon during the lunar eclipse, is occasioned by some heavenly monster that is trying to swallow up the moon. To avoid such a universal disaster, during the lunar eclipse, the Khasis come out of their homes, beat drums, tins and anything they can get hold of, and in this way make the maximum noise possible, with the intention of driving away the said dragon.⁵¹

One mysterious and seemingly diabolic aspect of the religious beliefs of the Khasis, practised by a very limited number of families, was the secret worship of “*Thlen*” – a legendary serpent. Stephen Ferrando brings this belief to the notice of the readers of GM in February 1927. He notes that “*Thlen*” – the diabolic serpent, is worshipped with the sole motive of increasing the wealth and material prosperity of the family. What is detestable about this worship is that it consists in offering human blood to this serpent.

⁵⁰ Cfr. GIL A., *I Khasi*, 57-58. Giulio Costa in January 1960, in his general description of the Khasis makes special mention of this matriarchal structure of the Khasi family. Costa writes, “Among the Khasis the woman is the queen and the mistress of the house.” The defect of the system consists in the fact that the father of the family exercises little authority over his own family, and over his own children, and in the obvious disparity between the treatment afforded to the female and the male children. However, Costa notes that in the public administration of the society as a whole, it is the men folk only who wield authority. It is the norm that women do not participate in the village assemblies, or other public legislative or administrative assemblies. Cfr. COSTA G., *I Khasi della Terra*, in GM 38 (1960) 1, 26.

⁵¹ Cfr. *Un'Eclissi di Luna tra i Khasi e gli Hindù*, in GM 2 (1924) 8, 116-117.

In case human blood is not available, the worshippers offer hair or even a piece of the dress of an unhappy victim, with the certain effect that the victim falls ill and dies, if not succoured in time and in the right way. Obviously this practice accounts for killings of innocent victims. Even among the Khasis it is considered to be a detestable practice, and when cases of such worship are discovered, severe punishment is meted out to the family that rears the "Thlen".⁵²

Gil A. in 1923 wrote in conclusion of his general presentation of the Khasis, "For their character, their morality, their social life, the Khasis are the more suited to become very good Christians among all the various groups of Assam."⁵³ This belief of the missionaries was further strengthened by certain contents of the religious belief of the Khasis. Thus Mlekus in January 1935, narrating the Khasi legend of the cock, notes that the Khasis have a profound notion of sin and the consequent need for satisfaction for sin. Although the sacrifice of the cock is a reparation for sin, it is only a temporary measure. The Khasi belief already pointed out to a future saviour, who would in some way substitute this temporary measure, and deliver the people from sin and all its effects.⁵⁴

From some of the early reports of the missionaries of Assam, it would appear that the great poverty that existed among the common people, at times drove the families to give their own children as guarantee for loans. These children became the property of the creditors till the family redeemed them by paying back the loan. The poverty of the family often made repayment of the loan impossible, and the child remained a perpetual slave.⁵⁵

One of the interesting feature of the Khasi social life that Ravalico reports in 1927 is their "shifting market" system. The author rightly notes that the market is the synthesis of the Khasi's social life, it is the sum total of all their commerce. The curious thing

⁵² Cf: FERRANDO S., *Serpenti Assamesi*, in GM 5 (1927) 2, 33.

⁵³ GIL A., *I Khasi*, 58.

⁵⁴ Cf: MLEKUS, *La Leggenda del Gallo*, in GM 13 (1935) 1, 16-17.

⁵⁵ Cf: MAZZETTI G., *Piccolo Mandriano*, in GM 4 (1926) 6, 115-116.

about the Khasi market system is that the merchants with their merchandise keep moving from one big centre to another apparently with the motive of reaching all the corners of the region! There are eight such big market centres, and the market makes a round of these centres within the time span of eight days. Every day is a market day, but in a different centre. And this circle continues uninterrupted. No centre will have a daily market. Because of this particular character, the market day is the occasion to meet friends and relations who come together to the market centres. Even the days of the week are named according to the place where the market is held on that day! One could rightly say that the Khasi week has eight days. The principle market is that of Shillong.⁵⁶

Khasi funeral rites

Yet another of the curious practices of the Khasis that definitely drew the attention of the missionaries was the way that they disposed of the dead, and the memorial stones they erected in their honour. In December 1928 Antonio Alessi gives a quite detailed description of the ceremonies that follow the cremation of the dead body. The missionary notes that as a rule, the Khasis cremate their dead. But what is really specific to this tribal group, is the way that they dispose of the few bones that are left behind after the cremation. They are collected usually in earthen pots and placed in a temporary grave for some time. The temporary grave consists of few stones placed above the ground in the form of a small circle. The earthen pot containing the bones is then placed in the middle of this circle. A big round flat stone is then placed on top, resting on the circle of stones below.

The funeral rite does not end with placing the bones to rest in this temporary grave! After the cremation, the relations observe three days of rigorous mourning. Every morning of these three days, they visit the grave and offer rice, banana and beetle nut on it, for the soul of the departed person. These close relations do not even wash themselves during this period. The door of the house is left open day and night in case the departed soul wants to return

⁵⁶ Cf: RAVALICO LUIGI, *Il Mercato di Shillong*, in GM 5 (1927) 5, 87-88.

to the original home! On the third day, they go through a process of divination by the breaking of eggs, to understand the cause of the death of the person concerned. Then the whole family proceeds to take a bath, and wash the few possessions of the dead person. A month after the cremation the family offers a solemn sacrifice in honour of the departed soul: the rich sacrifice a pig, while the poor offer a cock. And this brings to an end the period of immediate mourning for the dead.

But the bones of the dead cannot be left in these temporary graves. They must one day join the common grave of the family. Alessi reports that among the Khasis, each family had a common depository of bones called "*maw shiing bah*" which means literally the great-bone-stone. When many persons are dead in the same family, and their bones have been buried in the temporary graves, the heads of the family gather to decide on transporting all these bones to the common *maw shiing bah*. On days prefixed by this assembly, each of the families with the dead members, carry the bones of their dead to their own homes. The relations and friends of the dead person arrive at the temporary grave. They collect back the bones that remain in the earthen pot, wash them again and cover them in a mantle. A lady, a close relation of the dead person, carries the bones to the house, paying careful attention never to turn back all during this procession to the house. On their arrival in the house, the bones are placed in a corner prepared for it, and sacrifices are offered to the dead person. The whole family partakes of the meal prepared from the animals offered to the dead. When all the families with dead members, have finished bringing the bones to their homes, on a day fixed by the clan, the bones are brought solemnly to the "*maw shiing bah*" and placed along with the bones of their ancestors, not to be disturbed again. This ceremony is again followed by a great banquet.

Something characteristic of Khasi villages, and of the footpaths leading from one village to another, are the memorial stones erected to the dead in these villages, and along these paths. Alessi says that since the Khasis had no scripture, the only way to transmit the memory of the dead heroes was that of erecting memorial stones in public squares, or along the paths, or in market

places in honour of the dead. Usually there are two memorial stones, one that stands erect and is often considerably tall, and another at the foot of the vertical one, placed in a horizontal position. The ceremony of transporting the bones to the *maw shiing bah* usually ended with the erection of these memorial stones.⁵⁷

The cremation of the king of Cherrapunji

What is described above is the ordinary Khasi funeral rite. It involves the family and the village. But the cremation of the King of Cherrapunji, according to the report of Alessi in 1929 is a Khasi national event. The author writes: "It is an extraordinary event, a ceremony which marks an epoch for the whole Khasi Hills. It is unique for its majesty and grandiosity of ceremonies."⁵⁸

The missionary who worked in the station of Cherrapunji gives a detailed description of this great national event among the Khasis. He remarks that there are two parts in this great ceremony of the cremation of the king of Cherrapunjee: the coronation of the new king which takes place in the evening prior to the day of cremation, and the cremation of the dead king's corpse.

A successor is chosen immediately after the death of the king. Though recognised by the state authorities, for the subjects of the kingdom he remains just an administrator till he is officially crowned. Because of the great expenses involved in the function, this takes place a few years after the death of previous king.

For the period between the death and the official cremation, the corpse is preserved in the royal family. In earlier times the body of the king was preserved in pure honey. At the time of writing the article, Alessi notes that another method is followed to preserve the body. The body is enclosed in the trunk of a tree. Through a small opening, the trunk is then filled with a local alcoholic drink made from fermenting rice. The body is kept enclosed in this alcohol for three days. On the fourth day, it is

⁵⁷ Cf. ALESSI A., *Monumenti Funerari Khasi*, in GM 12 (1928) 12, 232-233.

⁵⁸ ALESSI A., *La Cremazione del Re di Sohra*, in GM 7 (1929) 9, 174. Sohra is the Khasi name for Cherrapunjee.

taken out, washed and dried in the sun till it is really dry. Then the corpse is immersed in lemon juice, and is finally closed in a coffin and ceremoniously preserved in the royal family, usually in the bed room.

When the successor has collected the finance sufficient for the ceremony, he assembles the *dor-bar* (the council of ministers), and the *dor-bar* fixes the date for the function, and sends messengers to all parts of the kingdom to announce the event. Then starts the preparation for the event. The days of preparation are days of feasting and dancing for the people of Cherrapunjee.

On the day of the coronation, the king and ministers first offer expiatory sacrifices to placate the dead king. Before the coffin of the dead king, many pigs are sacrificed by the various ministers and the incumbent king. These sacrifices serve to give a final adieu to the dead king, and send his soul to live permanently with his ancestors who have preceded him.

After this great ritual, the whole group enters the house where the religious ceremonies are to be conducted. Only the ministers along with the king enter the house. All the rest remain in the courtyard outside. When everything is ready, the prime minister places on the head of the king elect, the turban, and placing his hands on the head of the king pronounces a formula of coronation. The other ministers then in turn place their hands on the head of the king to confirm what has been said by the first minister. After this the new king recognises the ministers, by giving each one a piece of red wool, a turban, one rupee and a bottle of liquor.

The whole group proceeds to the market place, there to offer a solemn sacrifice of 12 goats. After this sacrifice, the people of the various villages, present at the function, proceed to pay their respects to the king and to the ministers. This is the end of the first part of the ceremony.

In the morning of the next day, the king, the ministers and the people assemble in front of the house where the dead body of the previous king is kept. A group brings what will be the big container in which the corpse will be taken to the place of

cremation, and in which it will be burnt. The container is all decorated for the occasion. Before the procession moves to the hill of cremation, a cock is sacrificed. The body is placed in the container and the last preparations are made for the procession to start. At the start of the procession, a black goat is again sacrificed. The procession slowly winds to the hill of cremation amid loud shouts and frequent bursting of crackers etc.

On reaching the place of cremation, the container is placed on the pyre prepared in anticipation. Here again the ministers renew their allegiance to the new king and the whole group give themselves to dancing around the pyre. Only towards evening, the new king lights the pyre. There is a general shouting, and bursting of crackers again at this solemn moment. The crowd watches for a moment, and then slowly disperses.⁵⁹

The Garos

The reports about the Garos and the Salesian work among this tribe come directly from pioneering missionaries who worked among this group, especially A. Pianazzi and A. Buccieri. Of these, it is Pianazzi who supplies more information about the general characteristics of the Garos, their customs and beliefs. Buccieri tends to project some particular events, or some particular needs of the mission.⁶⁰

In seven subsequent issues of GM starting in May 1945, the editors present a drawn out write up of Pianazzi about the Garos and the missionary work among them. Pianazzi describes the Garos in the following way:

⁵⁹ Cf. ALESSI A., *La Cremazione del Re di Sohra*, in GM 7 (1929) 9, 174-176; 7 (1929) 10, 196-198.

⁶⁰ In November 1940 Buccieri gives a short history of the initiation of the Salesian mission among the Garos. He describes the difficulties that the first missionaries, Pianazzi and Rocca encountered, especially from the Baptists who had in some way obtained the monopoly of evangelising this tribe. Cf. BUCCIERI A., *Consolanti Risultati*, in GM 18(1940)11, 168-169. In September 1945, Pianazzi himself describes the initial difficulties that he had to face in his mission among the Garos, and the opposition and persecution by the Baptists. Cf. PIANAZZI A., *Nella Terra dei Garo*, in GM 23 (1945) 9, 88-90.

Face round, smooth, without beard and moustache, of medium stature, but sturdy and robust; two sparkling almond shaped eyes, a broad blue turban around the forehead, a loin cloth around his waist: the picture of a Garo in the semblance of a mild lamb, not withstanding the double edged sword or the spear which they rarely put away when on a journey. The womenfolk are not very different except for the sword and a little more of garments which however do not in any way obstruct their movement. The showy ornaments of metals which they wear around their neck make up for the scarcity of dress! By character they are jovial, frank and intelligent.⁶¹

According to Pianazzi, "Garo" is the name by which the other groups around them call this tribe. However they call themselves "*Achik*" which means "people of the hills" or simple by "*Mande*" which means human beings.

The report of Pianazzi states that before the British subjection, the Garos were famous warriors, greatly feared by their neighbours, bringing down destruction and death especially on the plains people surrounding them. They were known as ferocious head hunters.⁶²

Certain customs of the Garos

One of the curious practices of the Garos that Pianazzi speaks of, in his report, is that among the Garos one does not ask the name of the other. The father or mother is known as the father or mother of so and so. So a married man who does not have children, does not have a name! It is not strange for the Garos even to change their names occasionally. Even in the case of animals, it is believed to be imprudent and offensive to call an animal by its name.

As for the marriage custom prevalent among the Garos, Pianazzi points out what apparently looked strange in their practice. The girl chooses a boy and makes her choice known to her relatives. One of these makes the proposal to the boy. Even if the proposal is acceptable to the boy, he pretends to refuse it at the beginning and pretends to evade the attempts of the relatives to

⁶¹ PIANAZZI A., *Nella Terra dei Garo*, in GM 23 (1945) 5, 54.

⁶² Cf. PIANAZZI A., *Nella Terra dei Garo*, in GM 23 (1945) 5, 54-55.

force this relationship on him. A group of friends have to search for him and bring him to the fiancée, and then the marriage takes place. In case of genuine refusal, the boy has to run away thrice from the friends who try to bring him to the girl. After the third time, the boy is left in peace. Among some sections of the Garos the proposal is made in a different way: a relation of the girl offers a plate of cooked rice to the boy desired by the girl. If the boy concerned accepts the offer, he eats this plate of rice, otherwise he refuses it.⁶³

Pianazzi reports that the Garo family is matriarchal. The lady is the only proprietor of the goods of the family. It is her sir-name that the children inherit. The father of the family has the right to administer the goods of the family. But at the death of the wife, the man loses everything, even his children and the whole family: the children are cared for by the close relations of the mother. Often, a short time after the death of the wife, the man remarries, and forms another family.⁶⁴

Garo religious notions

Pianazzi reports that the Garos have an idea of a single God who is good and who has created the universe and everything in it. However, their attention is turned to this good God just once a year, when an annual sacrifice is offered to him. But as for the rest, their whole religious life is centred around placating the hordes of evil spirits who occupy the universe.

Pianazzi again reports a peculiar belief of the Garos concerning salvation. It is the Garo belief, the missionary notes, that the good god saved their tribe by becoming a monkey and dying on a cross! To commemorate this event, annually they have the feast of the monkey, when a monkey is crucified. This type of

⁶³ Cf. PIANAZZI A., *Nella Terra dei Garo*, in GM 23 (1945) 6, 64-65.

⁶⁴ Cf. PIANAZZI A., *Nella Terra dei Garo*, in GM 23 (1945) 6, 64-65. The children are considered to be the part of the wealth that belongs to the family of the mother. And for this reason, at the death of the mother, they belong to the same family, and not to the father who is of another family! So at the death of the mother, usually some of her sisters take possession of the children!

crucifixion of the monkey is practised also on other occasions. It is not altogether uncommon to find a monkey crucified at the entrance to a Garo village. The monkey has thus become a sign of good omen for them.⁶⁵

The Garo houses – their food

Speaking of their habitation, Pianazzi says that the Garo villages are invariably found on the slopes of the hills. The houses are all grouped together. These houses are always made of bamboo. The whole house is raised up, and rests on wooden pillars. When the Garo works in the fields, he constructs small houses on top of trees, to protect himself from the wild animals, especially from the elephants which invade his fields. The houses are noted for their cleanliness. In Each village there is what is called the *nokpante*, the dormitory for the young people. The missionary in his visits to the different villages is often housed in the *nokpante*. Usually the Garo villages are very distant one from another, and there are no roads linking up these villages.

Rice is their common food. They do not have elaborate preparations of rice. At times rice with sufficient water is put inside a piece of raw bamboo and closed with some leaf, and then thrown into the fire. When the bamboo is almost burnt, the rice inside is well cooked, and has a taste all its own! Milk is considered as impure. One of their favourite dishes is a plate of dog's meat. They eat even snakes.⁶⁶

The Nagas

It is through the report of Ravalico in 1929 that the readers of GM make their first acquaintance with the Nagas of North East India. The title itself of the article "*I Nagas - Cacciatori di Teste Umane*" (The Nagas – hunters of human heads) reflects the thought pattern behind the report. Ravalico notes that the name "Naga" is probably derived from the Sanskrit word *nanga* which means naked, and adequately reflects their way of dressing. They are a

hardy type of people, with little regard for the beautiful and the aesthetic. Ravalico writes:

The Nagas are not much bothered about natural beauty: they are happy provided they can find some wild meat in the forest, some little fish in the river or a bunch of bananas. They are not worried too much about dress: some tattoo on the face and on the chest is more than sufficient.⁶⁷

Naga – the warrior and head hunter

Their savage nature so much inclined to war, is shown especially in the way that they construct their villages. Ravalico asserts: "The Naga village has a warlike appearance."⁶⁸ In their primitiveness, the Nagas do everything possible to make their villages true impregnable fortresses. Fence of stone blocks and trunks of trees surround the village. To cast fear into the enemy, they display the human heads taken earlier in capture.

Ravalico highlights two characteristics of the Nagas: their sense of vendetta, and their lack of cleanliness. The missionary notes, "Revenge is a sacred thing among the Nagas." Memories of age old offences are maintained in the family, and children are required to avenge the offence received by their ancestors. As regards the second characteristic the missionary writes, "They are the total negation of cleanliness. It is a cause of boasting for them to have over their person a crust of dirt of considerable thickness!"⁶⁹

However, according to Ravalico, the one single tribal trait for which they are greatly feared and hated, is their practice of head hunting. Head hunting is a sport among the Nagas. A young man is considered an adult when he can bring home a human head! And the village headman is invariably elected from among those who have the most number of human heads to their credit. Girls choose their husbands from among those who have greater number of such trophies. Cowardice is a trait so much despised among the Nagas.

⁶⁷ RAVALICO L., *I Nagas Cacciatori di Teste Umane*, in GM 7 (1929) 8, 157.

⁶⁸ RAVALICO L., *I Nagas Cacciatori di Teste Umane*, 157.

⁶⁹ RAVALICO L., *I Nagas Cacciatori di Teste Umane*, 157.

⁶⁵ Cf. PIANAZZI A., *Nella Terra dei Garo*, in GM 23 (1945) 6, 65.

⁶⁶ Cf. PIANAZZI A., *Nella Terra dei Garo*, in GM 23 (1945) 7-8, 76-77.

Religious beliefs and social practices of the Nagas

According to Ravalico, the Nagas have some vague ideas of God and of after life. As they believe that even the dead need light and air, they do not bury the dead, instead just expose the body on a tree, or on some platform made for the purpose.⁷⁰

A two page write up on the Nagas, compiled seemingly by the editors, in the May 1948 issue of GM give more information about them. This compilation notes that although the Nagas are a somewhat homogeneous group of people, there are various groups among them with their own proper languages and customs. And often they are in war among themselves.

The Nagas, according to the report of May 1948, are a very democratic people. Even the decisions taken by the village leaders need to be ratified by the village assembly. And in the village assembly every one has the right to speak. Another positive character of the tribe is the great respect paid to the women.⁷¹

Yet another important characteristic of the Naga society reported by GM in May 1948 is the existence of the "Morung" – the hostel for men. When a boy completes six or seven years of age, he is sent to this hostel, which exists in every village. Here these young boys are taught the Naga way of life. Only men are admitted into these hostels for the young boys. The girls too have their own hostels.

Speaking of the religious beliefs of the Nagas, the report of 1948 confirms the report of Ravalico. They believe in one God, in the life after death, in the punishment of the wicked and reward of the just. But their attention is turned to placating the evil spirits who cause them all kinds of harm. One thing peculiar about the

⁷⁰ Cfr. RAVALICO L., *I Nagas Cacciatori di Teste Umane*, 157-158.

⁷¹ In March 1953, Fausto Pancolini, writing about the Nagas, highlights again their democratic society. Quoting a certain professor Davis, the author asserts, "Every village is a small republic and every person has as much value as any other. It would be difficult to find a people more democratic in their nature: leaders are not missing among them, but their authority is very limited." PANCOLINI F., *Le Tribù Aborigene dell'Alto Bramaputra*, in GM 32 (1954) 3, 16.

Naga religion is the fact that they do not have priests and other religious ministers.⁷²

The report of Fausto Pancolini in June 1952 corroborates what Ravalico had written in 1929. Pancolini makes mention of the all out effort of the Nagas to defend their villages from any possible aggression. The missionary asserts that the Nagas do not belong to any recognised religion. Their religious notions are very vague. What has impressed the writer about the Naga society is the state of being in constant conflict among the various groups and villages.⁷³

In December 1957 Umberto Marocchino, a missionary in Nagaland, presents again a short description of the Naga village and the Naga home. Besides confirming the reports of Ravalico and of Pancolini, he mentions that it is the Naga custom to construct the granaries just outside the villages, so that in case of a fire, the grain is not burnt.

According to Marocchino, the Naga house is divided into three parts: the open portico in front, the central room with the fire place, and the dormitory. The front portico is used for pounding and cleaning the paddy. The room with the fire place in the centre is the true heart of the Naga house. In this part are exposed the various trophies of the family, including the human heads. The dormitory is divided into various cubicles, and serves the different members of the family.⁷⁴

The March 1964 issue of GM again carries a report of Umberto Marocchino about the Nagas, and about the state in the Indian Union formed for the Nagas: Nagaland. The missionary notes that about twenty distinct ethnic groups with their own languages and customs form this greater group of Nagas. There are no big cities and towns in the region. The Naga lives in his village, and there are about 860 of them at the time of reporting. Marocchino states that the characteristic of every village is the home for the unmarried boys – the *morung*. The missionary describes the institution in these words:

⁷² Cfr. *Nagas*, in GM 26 (1948) 5, 8-9.

⁷³ Cfr. PANCOLINI F., *Gli Abitanti dell'Assam*, in GM 30 (1952) 6, 6-7.

⁷⁴ Cfr. MAROCCHINO U., *I Villaggi Naga*, in GM 35 (1957) 12, 13.

The morning is the club and the gymnasium of the young people. It is here that they get together for their heated discussions, to learn their songs and their dances, to train themselves in the use of the lance and the knife: the traditional arms of the Nagas. It seems that the Naga youth have a particular inclination towards living together.

This last report of Marocchino in some way contradicts the previous reports in what regards the religious beliefs of the Nagas. Marocchino asserts,

Those who know Nagaland through the descriptions of passing journalists and ethnologists, full of wars and headhunters, will be surprised to know that the Nagas, though they are animists, have a profoundly religious spirit and a very clear concept of God and of eternal life. They call the Supreme Being: Kepenoupfu, which means "one who has generated us".⁷⁵

As regards the disposal of the dead, Marocchino in this report of 1964 says that the Nagas bury their dead with much solemn ceremonies. As they believe that the soul of the dead person will have a long journey to make to the permanent abode of the dead, having to cross rivers and combat various enemies, it is their custom to place in the graves useful instruments, dresses and even a little money.

Manipur

It is in the issue of December 1957, dedicated to the diocese of Dibrugarh, North East India, that GM presents for the first time, the mission of Manipur.⁷⁶ GM presents the state of Manipur in these terms,

Manipur with its beautiful valley of Imphal, its lakes and the unbeatable crown of its mountains is without doubt the most characteristic and picturesque region of East India. A

⁷⁵ MAROCCHINO U., *Nagaland*, in GM 42 (1964) 3, 8-9.

⁷⁶ The salesian missionaries started to visit the villages in Manipur in 1948. In 1953 over 200 Tangkul Nagas were baptised by Ravalico in the village of Hundung. But only in 1956 could the missionaries establish themselves permanently in Imphal. Cf. *Un Giovane il Primo Missionario del Manipur*, in GM 35 (1957) 12, 6-7.

good 7/8 of the area is occupied by a chain of mountains and hills which surround it on all sides and form its beauty and its enchantment.⁷⁷

The mountains are inhabited by various Naga groups while the central valley is for the most part occupied by the Meitheis. According to the report of December 1957, even these Meitheis were originally of Tibeto-Burmese origin, they were gradually Hinduised, though retaining some elements of their earlier beliefs and customs. Of the people of Manipur, the report states,

They are the most free and happy people of Assam. In this they are very close to the Burmese and like them love gaudy colours, music, song, happy living and dance. They are also the most clean and hardworking of all. Every one works in Manipur: perhaps the womenfolk more than the men. In the fields, at the handlooms, in the markets the Manipuri women bring honour to themselves.⁷⁸

Manipuri dances

According to the same report of December 1957, the one great pastime of the Manipuris is dance. "In Manipur every one dances!" Manipuri dance, in fact, forms a part of the classical dances of India. There are three types of dances in Manipur: "*Thabal Chongba*", "*Lai Harba*", and "*Rash Lila*". "*Thabal Chongba*" is danced during the Hindu festival of Holi. Men, women, young boys and girls and even children dance in circle, accompanied by some singing. "*Lai Harba*" which means joy of the gods, is danced in front of the protecting god of the village and describes the origin of the world and the love affairs of the gods. The third is the *Rash Lila* which is the classical dance of the Manipuris. It describes the love affairs of the god Krishna.

The people of Manipur and their occupation

In February 1966 GM presents a report of Pietro Bianchi with beautiful colour photos about the people of Manipur. The

⁷⁷ *Un Giovane il Primo Missionario del Manipur*, in GM 35 (1957) 12, 6-7

⁷⁸ *Lo Stato del Manipur- Giotello dell'India*, in GM 35 (1957) 12, 5.

missionary notes that even the very name Manipur signifies “land of jewels”. According to Bianchi the Northern hilly tracts are occupied by various Naga groups like the Maos, the Marams, the Zemis, the Tangkuls, the Kabuis and the Marings. In the southern hilly region live other non Naga tribal groups like the Lushai, the Hmars, the Chotes, the Moyons, the Kukis, the Chins. And the central plateau is occupied by the Meitheids.

Bianchi reports that the chief occupation of the people of Manipur is the cultivation of rice. In their families the ladies weave their dresses. The houses of the Meitheids are some what comfortable though made from material available in the forest. But the Naga houses are low and dark, full of smoke because of the lack of any chimney. Often the domestic animals like cows, chickens, ducks, and even pigs find a corner in the Naga house along with human beings. The Meitheids are for the most part vegetarians while the Nagas eat everything; dog meat being one of their specialities.⁷⁹

As regards the passion of these people for dance and song, the author writes:

After their work, the Manipuris give themselves to their hobby of song and dance to which they are deeply attached. Every tribe has its own songs and dances. The traditional patrimony is today enriched with much enthusiasm on the part of the young with western music and dance. The young people pass much time at night in singing and dancing. The dances of the tribal groups of the mountains have a more warlike character, while those of the Meitheids are more rhythmic and refined.⁸⁰

Conclusion

The missionaries were social explorers! Their mission was to preach the Gospel; but like any good farmer, they were well familiar with the land in which the seed had to be sown. They

differentiated with good soil and bad, and even in the good soil their eyes were open to the weeds which could easily suffocate the wheat. So intend on their mission, they were not great respecters of what they deemed as evil. They were not in the foreign lands to implant a western culture among the indigenous people. But neither were they there to perpetuate the local culture in all its shades and colours. They sought to Christianize the local cultures, and also to localize Christianity.

Objectivity is the mark of good journalism. To a great extent GM possessed this great quality. And in objective reporting of the Indian reality it served as a great instructor of its vast readership. It certainly created and maintained interest in the Indian continent among the young Italian boys and girls. Nay more, it served as a bridge of compassion and good will between the readers and the Indian reality. Creating aversion in the minds of the young readers was not the scope of the periodical. Even reports, which today may seem to be a little disparaging, were printed on the pages of the review to awaken sympathy and impress on the minds of the young the urgency of the mission in this country.

One cannot but be lost in the mine of information contained in the pages of GM. The impact of this information on the readers could not have been just minimal. It exposed the Italian youngster to a world so different in culture, religion and social life. The first hand experiences of the missionaries served as great resource books of information about many tribal groups, particularly in those times when there was practically nothing written about them.

⁷⁹ Cf. BIANCHI P., *Manipur; Terra dei Giotelli*, in GM 44 (1966) 2, 8-10.

⁸⁰ BIANCHI P., *Manipur; Terra dei Giotelli*, 10.

the Salesian presence was initiated in 1939 by the salesian province of Calcutta,¹ GM presents Burma as part of India. However, its charm consists precisely in its being different from India.

CHAPTER 16

GM'S PRESENTATION OF SOUTH EAST ASIA

For centuries the Far East was untouched by Christianity, and remained a part of the globe unknown to the West. Daring missionaries ventured into this region time and again. But their efforts bore little fruits, and their courageous undertakings were not continued by others. With a greater ease in navigation, and with the European colonization of some of these regions and establishment of trade and commerce with the others, this region opened up also to Christianity. The Salesians in their missionary expansion were aware of the urgency of evangelizing this region, and launched into the Far East with great missionary audacity and daring.

The comparatively new missions of China, Japan, Thailand, Burma, Vietnam and others provided much material for the missionary periodical of the Salesians. Reports coming from them then had a special fascination, particularly due to the diversity of cultures, religions and social habits. Moreover, even the missionary work itself had its own particular characteristics in these regions, encountered peoples so far unknown, therefore posed new problems, and demanded new ways of approach. The missionary undertaking in these regions had a thrill all its own. The salesian missionaries in this region were not slow to send reports of their actual experiences for publication in the pages of GM and thus arouse in the hearts of the young that desire to venture out and join their ranks.

This chapter will deal with the way that GM presents about some of the more important Salesian missions in the Far East.

Burma

Burma got its independence only in 1948. Prior to that, it was a British colony and part of the British Indian Empire. Since

Since the initiation of the Burmese mission almost coincided with the outbreak of the World War II, most of the articles on Burma appear in the period after the War. There is much space dedicated to the presentation of the history of the Church in this predominantly Buddhist country. The various reports speak of the great work done by the different religious families in the country.²

Burma and its people

Antonio Alessi, one among the pioneering salesian missionaries in Burma, presents a beautiful picture of Burma in November 1951. He writes:

Burma is called the "land of flowers, colours and smiles". The Burmese are the most affectionate group of people of the East, always smiling and fond of bright colours and beautiful flowers. They call their land "Suè pii do" (an adorned land). This is the impression which a foreigner gets upon entering Burma in autumn when from Bhamo in the North to Victoria Point in the South one contemplates nothing but an immense rice field of golden yellow colour and thousands and thousand of pagodas projecting into the sky with their golden domes.³

¹ In July 1939 GM published the report of Ravalico about the arrival of the Salesians in Mandalay and the start of their work in favour of the young. Cf: RAVALICO L., *I Salesiani in Birmania*, in GM 17 (1939) 7, 128-129. After the world War II, Antonio Alessi, the missionary in Burma writes again about the arrival of the Salesians in the country, and the hardships they endured during the period of the war. He projected a bright future for the Salesian mission in the country after the war. Cf: ALESSI A., *Don Bosco in Birmania*, in GM 29 (1951) 11, 2-3. However, a write up from the editorial in 1966 speaks about the communist take over of the country, and the expulsion of the foreign missionaries. Cf: *Vento Rosso sulla Birmania*, in GM 44 (1966) 7-8, 10-12.

² For notices about the history of the Church in Burma Cf: *La Croce nel Paese delle Pagode*, in GM 29 (1951) 11, 8-9; DEL NEVO L., *La Croce tra le Pagode della Birmania*, in GM 31 (1953) 3, 6-7; *Crocevia dell'Asia*, in GM 33 (1955) 9, 2-3, 17.

³ ALESSI A., *Il Paese dei Sorrisi*, in GM 29 (1951) 11, 6.

Alessi continues that the Burmese are completely different from the Indians for their race, their religion and their language. The proper Burmese population are of Mongolian origin. Besides this majority group, there are also many tribal groups which live in the mountainous regions of the country.

Yet another report, seemingly coming from a missionary in Burma, of November 1951 speaks about the disastrous effects of World War II on this land. The country which prior to the war gave an impression of an over all well being, after the war presents a picture of desolation. The mines are deserted, the petrol wells abandoned and commerce brought to a stand still.⁴

Burma: the land of pagodas and bonzes

One of the things that caught the attention of the missionary, on arrival in Burma, was the great number of Buddhist pagodas and of the Buddhist monks. In November Giacomo Bertolino, a missionary in Burma writes, "In Burma, hundreds of pagodas project into the blue sky their decorated domes."⁵ In 1953 March GM publishes an article entitled "*Le pagode*", though anonymous, obviously coming from the pen of some missionaries in Burma. It says, "No religion in the world has so many temples as the Buddhists have in Burma. There are regions in which one finds thousands of them!" And the article closes with these words, "It is not for nothing that Burma is called the land of pagodas and monks!"⁶

The article continues that these pagodas are so numerous because of the Burmese Buddhist belief that the most meritorious action that one could perform was the construction of a pagoda. With the construction of a pagoda, one gains the coveted title of *paya-taga* which simply means constructor of pagoda. The *paya-taga* is considered a true saint, and all his sins are pardoned, and he is assured of reaching *nirvana* immediately after his death.

⁴ Cfr. *Ricchezza della Birmania*, in GM 29 (1951) 11, 5.

⁵ BERTOLINO G., *Gli Schiavi della Pagoda*, in GM 29 (1951) 11, 4.

⁶ *Le Pagode*, in GM 31 (1953) 3, 5.

Giacomo Bertolino in November 1951, writes about a quite curious group of people attached to the pagodas, called "the slaves of the Pagoda". The author says that the group had its origin before the British occupation of Burma. The Burmese rulers raided the near by villages of Thailand and brought away men and women, and bound them as slaves of various temples to do the cleaning and other menial jobs connected to the temples. Bertolino does not make any mention of how these slaves are got in the independent Burma, but notes that the group continues to exist.⁷

The Bonzes in Burma form a good portion of the population. Antonio Alessi in March 1953 notes that they are about 120,000 out of a total Buddhist population of 12 million. They are given the title of *pong-gyi* which means great glory, showing the great respect that the group enjoys in the society. One can become a true bonze only after he has completed 20 years of age. They live a life of meditation and asceticism. The bonzes live on the charity of the people, and the Buddhist Burmese considers it a great and meritorious act to give some charity to the bonzes. Alessi also notes that every Buddhist boy passes some time of his life in the monastery as a monk. This explains the great number of monks in the country.⁸

Burmese New Year

In the number of September 1955, which is almost entirely dedicated to Burma, GM presents an interesting report of the Burmese New Year. For the Burmese, the New Year's Day is the biggest national feast. It has a tone that is religious, social and recreational! It is also called the feast of the water. It occurs around the full moon day in April. It is common belief among the Burmese that the prince of the spirits descends to the earth for the inauguration of the New Year, and remains on the earth for three

⁷ Cfr. BERTOLINO G., *Gli Schiavi della Pagoda*, 4-5.

⁸ Cfr. ALESSI A., *I Bonzi*, in GM 31 (1953) 3, 4. In the same issue of GM there is an article of Maddoz-Vaz Viviano, a missionary in Burma, describing the ceremony of *Shinbyu* by which a boy is initiated into the life of the monks. It serves to corroborate what Alessi writes. Cfr. MADDOZ-VAZ V., *Il Shinbyu e il Na Dwin*, in GM 31 (1953) 3, 5.

or four days. The propitious day and hour and moment is announced in time by the monks, even the mode of his coming, and what he brings with him. On all these depends the nature of the New Year. The religious part consists in a visit to the pagoda and the ceremony of washing the statues of Buddha in the temples. However this part is neglected by most Burmese. For the most part the social feast consists in throwing water on each other as a sign of good wishes! No one is spared from this social custom.⁹

Japan

If one were to grade the different nations according to the number of articles written on them in GM, the third position would be occupied by Japan, immediately after India and China. And the credit for this goes first of all to Mons. Cimatti, the leader of the first group of salesian missionaries to Japan. Apparently he has written more in GM than any of the other leaders of the other salesian missions.

The presentation of Japan is evidently different from those of the other mission areas. Much space is dedicated to project the natural beauty of the country, the great qualities of the Japanese people, and there is ample information supplied about the various Japanese feasts. Since Christianity had undergone much persecution and suppression in this country, GM takes great pains to present the heroism of the pioneering missionaries and their flock.¹⁰ In the course of the years, GM also presented the flowering of the salesian mission in Japan.¹¹

⁹ Cfr. *Il Capodanno Birmano*, in GM 33 (1955) 17, 6.

¹⁰ For reports on the Catholic mission in Japan, its initiation, the various waves of persecution to which the Church was subjected, and its final establishment. Cfr. NERIGAR, *Precedendo i Nostri Missionari al Giappone*, in GM 4 (1926) 1, 3-7; CIMATTI V., *I Primi Martiri nel Giappone*, in GM 5 (1927) 1, 5-7; NERIGAR, *La Diocesi e il Vescovo di Nagasaki*, in GM 6 (1928) 1, 2-3; ARRI C., *Antichi Supplizi Giapponesi Contro i Cattolici*, in GM 11 (1933) 9, 200-201; *Le Missioni in Giappone*, in GM 27 (1949) 6, 3; *Le Missioni in Giappone*, in GM 29 (1951) 3, 5.

¹¹ Cfr. NERIGAR, *Precedendo i Nostri Missionari al Giappone*, in GM 4 (1926) 1, 3-7; *Echi di Cronaca*, in GM 13 (1935) 3, 56; *Rigogliosa Fioritura*, in GM 18 (1940) 12, 180-181; *Le Missioni Salesiane in Giappone*, in GM 29 (1951) 3, 7; *I Salesiani in Giappone*, in GM 33 (1955) 8, 9.

Japan – the land of the cherry in blossom

In one of his first reports about the country, Vincenzo Cimatti presents Japan as the land of the cherry in blossom. According to the missionary the season of the flowering of the cherry trees makes of the country sides an enchanting sight. It is not only the mere natural beauty that strikes the missionary, but more the attitude of wonder and contemplation manifested even by the young boys and girls in front of the great natural beauty of their land. The Japanese not only appreciate but are proud of their beautiful land.¹²

The Japanese' passion for nature

In August 1931 GM publishes an article of Margiaria, a salesian missionary in Japan, where the author speaks precisely of the passion that the Japanese have for nature. The missionary writes,

Among all people of the earth who love nature and enjoy it, certainly the Japanese hold primacy of place. Starting from the construction of their homes up to their smallest utensils, their dress, there is nothing that does not in some way or other manifest their love for nature.¹³

Not only that they have a great love for nature, but they seem to have a natural gift to produce a marvellous harmony from the correct blending of their houses and especially their temples with their natural surroundings. With their passion for nature, they arrive at not only maintaining the natural form of things, but contribute to make it even more attractive. This love for nature, according to the missionary, is reflected also in the Japanese art and literature. Their most loved pieces of art depict nature in its various aspects: mountains, lakes, flowers, birds etc. Singing the beauty of nature formed the content of some of the highest expressions of their literature. From ancient times it was the Japanese ideal to grasp the charm of every thing in nature. And it was common thought among them that the one who does not know and appreciate the beautiful in nature, does not know the human heart.¹⁴

¹² Cfr. CIMATTI V., *Ciltiegi in Fiore*, in GM 5 (1927) 5, 90-91.

¹³ MARGIARIA, *Il Giappone e la Natura*, in GM 9 (1931) 8, 149.

¹⁴ Cfr. MARGIARIA, *Il Giappone e la Natura*, in GM 9 (1931) 8, 149. Even an

In an article in March 1940 about the Japanese' love for nature, GM states,

The inhabitants of the "land of the lotus, the cherry tree and chrysanthemum" have such an aesthetic sense, so much so that in the ancient times this was their only guide in their spiritual life. The Japanese almost adore nature! Their country sides are made so attractive with the picturesque plantations of pines and other coniferous trees in such a way that the colours of their leaves form a most delightful range of colours.¹⁵

The same write up continues to say that yet another of the expressions of their love for the beautiful, is their love for floriculture. Every family maintains a little flower garden.

Elements of Japanese character

In January 1927, publishing an interview with a Japanese Jesuit, GM brings to the notice of its readers one great characteristic of the Japanese society, namely, their great respect for authority. In fact the Jesuit states, "They have a great respect for authority – it is the same as that which is inculcated by our faith. [...] They have a great veneration for those in authority especially the Emperor. Children have profound filial love for their parents."¹⁶

Obviously one of the traits of the Japanese which made deep impression on the pioneering missionaries was their sense of belonging to one single nation, and their national pride. Cimatti in 1927 writes that the Japanese are a people who consider themselves members of a single great family, and trace back their origins to their gods. They are strictly united to the authority of the emperor, who, according to the Japanese belief, guides the destiny of this

article in August 1963 speaking of Japanese poetry, notes that the Japanese people seem to have a natural inclination to poetry. The author of the article attributes this national tendency to their love for nature. He writes, "The reason for this poetic inclination of the Japanese is that they are in continual contact with nature, following the dictates of their religion which divinizes the forces of nature. And nature has been an inexhaustible source of poetic inspiration." *La Poesia Giapponese*, in GM 41 (1963) 8, 35.

¹⁵ *Sentimento Estetico in Giappone*, in GM 18 (1940) 3, 35.

¹⁶ *Intervista con un Gesuita Giapponese*, in GM 5 (1927) 1, 7.

great people by divine mandate. They believe that the imperial dynasty is descendant from the sun and the Japanese people are children of this imperial dynasty. They take great pride in an uninterrupted succession of 124 emperors! Their national pride spurs them to defend their land from every external enemy. In fact, Japan has been one of the few eastern nations not subjected to the western colonisers. The missionary says that the Japanese have a great capacity to absorb all that is good in the world, yet remain Japanese in spirit and in ideals. Cimatti writes in the same article:

This beautiful, strong and generous nation, in the midst of a more refined European civilization, maintains tenaciously its traditions in their wholeness, in the details of social etiquette, in their language, their dress and their food habits.¹⁷

In January 1930 GM publishes a write up of Cimatti on the Japanese etiquette. He notes that the natural beauty of the land, the sense of propriety inculcated in the children right from their infancy, contribute to create in the Japanese a profound sense of personal decorum. They display a habitually happy and smiling face. Their gracious and solemn way of greeting one another speak of the delicacy of their manner of life. Concluding the description of some particular ways of greeting etc, Cimatti writes.

In conclusion, one would say, it is a complex of delicate and gentle habits which are performed by the Japanese with such a grace that they are really worthy of admiration and imitation.¹⁸

Cimatti again in March 1930 returns to describe again the aesthetic sense of the Japanese people. He writes,

The aesthetic sense of this people is manifested in many forms, but among them all, in their love for flowers and their music. [...] The Japanese have many types of music. [...] They love to live in their open country sides, and unlike us, they do not like to close themselves up in the cities. On a background of green provided by their pines, cedars, bamboos etc. they love to see flowers, flowers and more flowers! The

¹⁷ CIMATTI V., *I Primi Martiri nel Giappone*, in GM 5 (1927) 1, 5.

¹⁸ CIMATTI V., *Spunti di Educazione Giapponese*, in GM 8 (1930) 1, 16-17.

plum-tree and the cherry-tree of spring, the lotus of summer, the chrysanthemum and rose maple of autumn! [...] Flowers in their homes, flowers in their civil and scholastic feasts, flowers painted and embroidered are simply manifestations of their great love for nature.¹⁹

According to what Albano Cecchetti, a salesian missionary in Japan, writes in July 1936, this extraordinary love of the Japanese for plants, flowers, animals etc. has a basis in the Buddhist belief that these too are re-incarnations of the spirits of the dead. Cecchetti too corroborates what Cimatti had written.

Those who cannot have a vast garden, make a small one in which the trees, the lake, the mountains are all present but in a miniature form. It is almost impossible to find a home without a little garden.²⁰

One great symbol of the unique beauty of Japan is mount Fuji. According to the report of March 1951,

It is the highest and the most characteristic mountain of Japan. It has a height of 3775 meters. It has the form of a solitary corn, majestic and resplendent, which rises above all other mountains. It changes its appearance every season of the year and even every hour of the day! Right from ancient times the Japanese called it "the insuperable, one who does not fear one's rivals". For its unique beauty they have attributed to it a religious significance and made it the symbol of Japan.²¹

The Japanese concept of the year

The missionary coming from the West, certainly discovers many features of the people in the east that are not in agreement with the west. One such feature of the Japanese culture was the Japanese

¹⁹ CIMATTI V., *Fiori e Musica in Giappone*, in GM 8 (1930) 3, 72.

²⁰ CECCHETTI A., *Il Giardino Giapponese*, in GM 14(1936) 7, 110.

²¹ *Il Giappone*, in GM 29 (1951) 3, 3. Evidently, the objective of presenting the natural beauty of the country, and the love of the people for nature, for flowers etc seems to be that of projecting a people with a gentle culture, a people that one would naturally be inclined to love. There are no harsh traits in the Japanese character! Lovers of nature, they could also be great lovers of the One who created nature and all the beauty in it!

concept of the year. In August 1956 GM carries an article of Mario Marega, a salesian missionary in Japan, about the Japanese calculation of the year. The missionary notes that the Japanese like the Chinese calculate time in circles of twelve years. The twelve years of the circle are designated by certain animals: Rat, Cow, Tiger, Leopard, Dragon, Serpent, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Duck, Dog and Wild Boar. There are certain superstitions associated with the various years. So they believe that the year of the monkey brings more misfortunes than the other years. There is a general apprehension for the year of the monkey. As a rule no young man or woman would like to get married in the year of the monkey. The year of the horse too is generally considered inauspicious. It is the common belief that a girl who is born during the year of the Horse will certainly bring death to the husband, when she will be married.²²

Japanese religion

The missionaries did not find the evangelisation of Japan an easy task. It was not the lack of interest of the Japanese in religious matters that accounted for this lack of success; instead, it was the great attachment of the Japanese to their ancient religion and traditions. At the beginning of an article on the religions of Japan in November 1924, one reads, "If there is a nation so attached to its religious traditions and so opposed to the Christian penetration, they say it is Japan."²³

Shintoism in Japan

The article quoted above proceeds to expose the two main religions of Japan: Shintoism and Buddhism. The report notes that Shintoism is the ancient religion of Japan and has about 190,754 temples all over Japan. Of this ancient faith, GM writes,

It is a pagan cult which is exclusively Japanese, the foundation of all sentiments of patriotism and of art, of the cultural ideals of this people as well as their science and progress. It admits an invisible word of mysterious powers who act on the ordinary course of nature and manifests themselves in all

²² Cfr. MAREGA M., *L'Anno della Scimmia*, in GM 34 (1956) 8, 14-15.

²³ *La Religioni nel Giappone*, in GM 2 (1924) 11, 172.

phenomena superior to those of nature. In fact, a storm, a lightning, a volcano, a distorted tree, a wild beast, according to Shintoism can have the importance of a *Kami*, that is an extramundane or divine thing.

But the real peculiarity of Shintoism as projected by GM seems to consist in its ancestor worship. The write up continues,

Shintoism recognizes in a particular way the ancestors as the *Kami*. They direct the major part of their cult to these ancestors and to the imperial dynasty as the descendants of the sun. Thus this religion of the Japanese has given extra weight and sacredness to the natural affection for the family and for the mother land.

The Shintoists are not idol worshippers, and there are no idols in their temples, instead there are some symbolic objects like the sacred mirror. The religious rites in the temples are performed by the bonzes.²⁴

The Shintoist temple

Mario Marega in January 1931 offers to the readers of GM a general description of a Shintoist temple. He says that the whole structure is made of wood. The temple itself had two parts. The first is the great hall called "*haiden*". It is the hall for the great religious reunions. No one enters here except on feast days. The second part is called "*honden*" and is the holy of holies. There is always a series of steps that lead from the "*haiden*" to the "*honden*". There is nothing in this holy of holies except a shelf with a metallic mirror in it. According to the ancient Japanese legend, when Amaterasu, the sun goddess, retired into some grotto and refused to illumine the universe, the mirror was the instrument that the other gods and goddesses used in the trick that these played

²⁴ Writing in the years close to the end of the World War II, C. Martelli, salesian missionary in Japan, also testifies to the great religious spirit of the Japanese and their attachment to their ancient beliefs. The missionary writes, "The Japanese people have a very religious soul. They are very much attached to the faith in which they were born and brought up even if it is false! An example of this one can find particularly in the countryside where Buddhism or Shintoism reigns uncontested." Cfr. MARTELLI C., *Vieni*, in GM 27 (1949) 4, 7.

on Amaterasu to make her come out of the grotto. And that is why the mirror is kept in this shelf.

Another characteristic of the Shintoist temple is that the way leading to the temple, is spotted with arches of wood or of stone, at regular intervals. In front of the temple there is a stone tub filled with water, with a ladle and a small towel placed near it. As they go to the temple to pray, they stop at the tub of water, draw out a little water with the ladle, wash their hands with it, wipe their mouth and proceed to the door of the temple.²⁵ In October 1934 GM publishes a report of Albano Cecchetti. Although the whole report is not dedicated to a description of the Shintoist temple, the author speaks of it in the beginning of the article. In comparison with the richly decorated Churches, with various altars, beautiful paintings and statues, candles and flowers, the Shintoist temple is cold and unattractive. The missionary writes, "Neither candles, nor pictures! No decorations and no altar! Much squalid and cold poverty is the true symbol of this religion without a heart beat, without life and without truth."²⁶

The Shintoist mode of prayer

Even the mode of praying of the people at these temples obviously seemed rather ridiculous to the missionaries. The August-September issue of 1930 carries a small write up on how the Japanese pray. They draw a little water from the stone tub in front of the temple, wash their hands, wipe their mouth and proceed to the door of the temple. At the door, they clap their hands to call the spirit who lives in that temple, make a profound bow and leave convinced that they have prayed!²⁷

Japanese Feasts

Among the elements of Japanese culture, obviously it was the various feasts of these people that occupied the greater space

²⁵ Cfr. MAREGA M., *Il Tempio Shintoista*, in GM 9 (1931) 1, 9-10.

²⁶ CECCHETTI A., *Tenebre e Luce*, in GM 12 (1934) 10, 195.

²⁷ Cfr. *Come Pregano i Giapponesi*, in GM 8 (1930) 8-9, 172. The article points to the lack of substance of this type of prayer. While there is a ritual preparation for the prayers, the act of praying itself seems to be absent. The purpose evidently seems to be to show up the emptiness of the pagan Japanese religion.

in GM. Description of these feasts of Japan is a recurrent theme in GM. The first report of the Japanese feasts start in 1928 and the last report is found in 1966, a year before the closure of the periodical. These write ups come from many of the salesian missionaries in Japan. Although at times, the various reports deal with the same theme, one notices that the latter reports in some way compliment the former ones.

The Japanese New Year

It is Mons. Cimatti who in April 1928 initiates what could be considered as a series of descriptions of the various feasts of the Japanese people, with a brief description of the Japanese' New Year's day. Cimatti says this "feast of all feasts" is marked by much activity both in the family and in the society at large. The houses, the shops and even the streets are beautifully decorated for the occasion. It is customary that every family plants branches of pine and of bamboo in front of the house. The pine and the bamboo stand for long life. Symbols of a long and happy old age like the lobster, fern and coal are kept suspended on a cord made of paddy straw, which is believed to keep away all evil spirit. Visit to relations and friends, exchange of gifts and preparation of special dishes, especially of *moci* – a Japanese rice cake - form part of this feast. The celebration last for three days.²⁸

The feast of "Koinobori"

Another Japanese feast of which Cimatti speaks is that of "koinobori". This is, according to the missionary, the Japanese feast of the children, and is celebrated some time in May. The mothers plant long bamboos in front of their homes. Big fishes of cloth or

²⁸ Cfr. CIMATTI V., *Le Feste Giaponesi*, in GM 6 (1928) 4, 71-72. The last report on the New Year's celebration is found in January 1966. This write up stresses that the Japanese New year is essentially a feast of friendship. And its peculiarity obviously consists in the traditional decoration of the house. Besides the lobster, the fern and the coal hung up on the doors of the houses, the article also mentions orange which again stands for continued happiness. According to this last report, the feast lasts for seven days, and on the seventh day the decorations are all taken down and are either burnt at the bank of some near by river, or thrown into the river. Cfr. *Buon Anno, Giappone*, in GM 44 (1966) 1, 1

of paper, all stuffed with gifts for the children, are hung up on top of these bamboos. When the gentle breeze fills up these fishes, the whole country side appears to be filled with flying fishes! For the Japanese these fishes are symbols of great vivacity and energy.²⁹

The feast of "Tanabata"

It is again Mons. Cimatti who gives the first description of the feast of "Tanabata". He simply states that it is a festival of Chinese origin, held in August, to celebrate the meeting of the stars of the constellation Vega. In front of their house, the Japanese, plant a bamboo and on its branches hang strips of coloured paper on which are written the wishes for the prosperity of the two stars which meet on the feast to celebrate their wedding. According to Cimatti it is essentially a family feast.³⁰

A cleric, Luigi Floran, missionary in Japan, in August 1933 explains the belief behind the meeting of the two stars. He says that there are two special stars, one that seems to travel from east to west, and the other that seems to move from west to east. And for laws of nature on a particular day of the year they come together. This meeting of the two stars was in the earlier times considered very propitious, good omen of great happiness and prosperity for the Japanese people. However later on, with the coming of various types of contagious diseases, the meeting of these two stars was considered responsible for these diseases. According to Floran, in the earlier times the feast was celebrated with great joy, while in the later period, it became an occasion to plead for rain so that the meeting of the two stars would not take place.³¹

²⁹ Cfr. CIMATTI V., *La Festa del Koinobori*, in GM 6 (1928) 9, 167. Cimatti himself in another article in March 1929, says that one of the specialities of this feast of the children consist in eating mutton, which for the Japanese is symbol of strength and prosperity. Cfr. CIMATTI V., *Piatti Speciali Giapponesi*, in GM 7 (1929) 3, 53. This feast is also mentioned by P. Escursell in March 1936 in his article that describes the great love and care that the Japanese lavish on their children. Cfr. ESCURSELL P., *Fanciullezza Giapponese*, in GM 14 (1936) 3, 40-41.

³⁰ Cfr. CIMATTI V., *La Festa di Tanabata*, in GM 6 (1928) 11, 207-208.

³¹ Cfr. FLORAN L., *Festa del Tannabata*, in GM 11 (1933) 8, 181. This second aspect of the meeting of the two stars being a bad omen, and the prayers being sent up for rain that such a meeting does not take place, is mentioned only by Floran.

Oreste Cosio, in the summer issue of 1966 gives a few more details of the feast that he calls "*Tanabata Matsuri*". He says that the feast is held on the 7th of July, and celebrates the nuptial of two stars: Arturo and Vega. For the Japanese Vega is the princess Shokuio and Arturo is her husband Kengyu. According to the Japanese legend, Shokuio was a royal princess, excellent at the art of weaving. While she was weaving a dress for her father, the king, she fell in love with a handsome young man, a guardian of cows. Out of his bounty, the king allowed their marriage. But they were so inseparable that the princess left off her weaving and the young man, his guarding the cows. Exasperated, the king separated them both and they were allowed to meet each other just once a year. This meeting takes place due to the kind favour of the magpies who construct the bridge between the two stars. But these cannot make the bridge in the rain! According to Cosio, on this feast the princess grants the prayers of those who wish to improve their skill at all fine arts. On this feast, the Japanese plant long branches of bamboos in front of their homes and on its branches hang strips of paper with some poetry written for the occasion. It is not uncommon to see hung up on these bamboos kimono in paper, in honour of the princess and models of cows in honour of her husband.³²

The feast of the dead

Although A. Margiaria makes a mention of the Japanese feast of the dead in his report "*Usanze Buddistiche in Giappone*" in November 1927, he does not give the details of the feast.³³ Luigi Floran too makes a mention of the feast in his write up on the feasts of Japan in August 1933.³⁴ It is P. Ecurseil who in November 1933 gives some details of the celebration. Ecurseil states that it is a feast celebrated by all Japanese, even though it seems to be of Buddhist

³² Cfr. Costo O., *La Festa delle Stelle Filanti*, in GM 44 (1966) 7-8, 24-26.

³³ Cfr. MARGIARIA A., *Usanze Buddistiche in Giappone*, in GM 5 (1927) 11, 203. Margiaria mentions that the cemeteries are all cleaned up for the feast and the individual tombs decorated. In different parts of the city, platforms are raised, where traditional dances are performed in honour of the dead.

³⁴ The only detail that he highlights is the belief that after the feast the dead return to the land of the dead riding a dragonfly. Cfr. FLORAN L., *Festa del Tanabata*, in GM 11 (1933) 8, 181.

origin. He says that the Japanese call this feast "*Bon*". More than a commemoration of the dead, it is a true feast of the dead because as the missionary says, "the memory of the dead brings joy to the Japanese."³⁵ Days before the feast, the shops put on sale various types of little lanterns that are needed for decorating the room with the altar to the dead found in every Japanese home, and for the procession intended to accompany the dead back to their original homes. According to Ecurseil this feast which lasts up to three days, is celebrated in honour of the dead, who according to the Japanese belief, return to their earthly homes on the days of this feast.

In November 1963 GM carries again an article on the feast of the dead in Japan, called "*Obon*". The report says that this feast is normally celebrated in July, the date depending on the moon, and lasts for three days at least. The cemeteries are all cleaned up and the tombs decorated for the occasion. On the evening of the first day the whole family goes to the tomb of their dead dear ones with a lighted lantern to accompany the dead back to their old homes. On reaching back to the house, where in the main room, the paintings of the dead are spread out on a mat; the dead are welcomed back to the family with all respect and reverence. And this atmosphere of profound respect for the dead is maintained for the rest of the feast. After the ceremony of welcoming the dead into their old homes, they are invited to participate in the family banquet. Plates are placed in front of the paintings of the dead. Portions of the meal are served in those plates too. During the meal, there are even lively conversations with the dead persons. At the end of the feast, the family makes a miniature boat and fills it with all kind of goodies and sends it down the river, to the sea and to the world of the dead!³⁶

³⁵ ESCURSELL P., *Il Bon*, in GM 11 (1933) 11, 235

³⁶ There is an evident departure from looking at this celebration as a mere superstitious practice to considering it as an expression of a gentle soul and of a profound sense of veneration of the dead. The author writes, "The Japanese commemorate their dead with ceremonies and rites which to us appear strange, but which reveal a gentle soul and a profound sense of veneration for the departed souls." And explaining the scope of the feast, he notes, "And the principle scope of it all is to perpetuate the memory of the ancestors and to stimulate filial piety." *Obon: la Festa dei Morti in Giappone*, in GM 41 (1963) 11, 34. (34-37). Strangely enough, Cimatti does not make any mention of this feast of the dead."

The feast of "Mamemaki"

In February 1935 GM publishes a small write up of Piacenza, missionary in Japan, describing the feast of "mamemaki". It is a feast to bid adieu to winter and welcome Spring. The feature specific to this feast is the throwing of a type of beans called "mame". The Japanese believe that the evil spirits are driven away by this throwing of these beans, and in their place the spirit of fortune and prosperity enters the house. It is done in every family. After the ceremony of throwing "mame" out of the house, the rest of the roasted "mame" is eaten by the family members. In the temples this ceremony is done on a greater scale.³⁷

The feast of "Hina Matsuri"

Although Cimatti makes a mention of the feast of the dolls in his write up about the various Japanese dishes,³⁸ it is only in March 1962 that GM presents a report about this feast. According to this report "Hina Matsuri" or the feast of the dolls is celebrated in every Japanese family with a baby, on the third day of the third month of the Japanese year. The child is the centre of the feast. The parents prepare the special sweets for the feast and buy the dolls. The dolls are exposed in the house on a decorated stand. They are not the ordinary dolls, but often are of great value, preserved for generations in the house. In ancient times the feast had a religious significance. It was believed that the sins of the owners of the dolls, pass on that day to the dolls and were carried away when these dolls were either put away or thrown into the river. It is a feast of the family, a time for the parents to manifest their love for the children, and a time for the children to grow in their filial affection for their parents. The feast seems to be of Chinese origin and in the earlier times, was celebrated only in the royal family.³⁹

³⁷ Cfr. PIACENZA, *Feste Giapponesi*, in GM 13 (1935) 2, 28.

³⁸ Cfr. CIMATTI V., *Piatti Speciali Giapponesi*, 53.

³⁹ Cfr. *Hina Matsuri*, in GM 40 (1962) 3, 40-43.

Indonesia

The first salesian mission in the Indonesian islands was started in 1927 at Timor. But two years later the Salesians had to retreat from this station. The mission of Timor was started again in 1948. GM offers much information about Indonesia, its people, their customs and beliefs.⁴⁰ The bulk of information about Indonesia is found in the period after the second initiation of the Salesian mission in Timor after the World War II. The two issues dedicated more to Indonesia are those of May 1951 and of November 1956.

Indonesia - the belt of emerald

Through various reports in the 1950s, GM presents the natural beauty and riches of the Indonesian archipelago. The periodical compares this chain of islands to a belt of emerald, for its luxuriant vegetation and for its immense natural riches. It notes that this belt of emerald is studded with a total of about 3000 islands, small and big, and has a total area, six times that of Italy. The climate is described as typically tropical, hot and humid, but not excessive. The island nation has only two seasons: the rainy and the dry. The island of Java, the most important of the islands, is the land of perpetual summer! The various products of the country are: rice, rubber, sugar cane, tea, coffee, tobacco, palm oil, pepper, and various types of spices. Fishing industry is well developed. Indonesia is also rich in petroleum, coal and other minerals.⁴¹

⁴⁰ GM presents a brief historical sketch of Indonesia, tracing back the origin of the main ethnic groups found in the nation to the three main migrations into these islands: the Malaysian, the Indian and the Arab. Mention is made of how the island nation was subjected to different European colonising powers: the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French, the British and again the Dutch. GM contains also reports about the efforts of the pioneering Catholic missionaries at evangelising the people of these islands. Cfr. *Andiamo in Indonesia*, in GM 29 (1951) 5, 3; *Cenni Storici e Influssi Esterni*, in GM 34 (1956) 11, 12-13; *Il Cristianesimo in Indonesia*, in GM 29 (1951) 5, 4; *Il Cristianesimo in Indonesia*, in GM 34 (1956) 11, 16-17; *Le Isole della Speranza*, in GM 41 (1963) 8, 7-11.

⁴¹ Cfr. *Giava, Isola dell'Eterna Estate*, in GM 29 (1951) 5, 10; *Indonesia*, in GM 34 (1956) 11, 8-9; *Produzione*, in GM 34 (1956) 11, 10-11; *L'Indonesia*, in GM 36 (1958) 3, 8-9.

To the lovers of nature and especially of forest life, GM presents the rich fauna of Indonesia. 68% of its total area of the country is covered with forest. Wild animals like elephants, tigers, monkeys, serpents of over 500 species, and crocodiles populate these forests. With its more than 350 species of birds, this country is a paradise for lovers of birds. The very rare species of the bird of paradise with its splendid mantle, found in some of the islands of Indonesia, makes the call to these islands all the more inviting.⁴²

The Indonesian population and their general characteristics

A report of May 1951 says that the major part of the population is Malaysian. There are sizeable groups of Indians, Chinese, Europeans, and Japanese.⁴³ The reporter describes the Malaysian section of the population in these terms,

The Malaysians are distinguished from the others for the shortness of their stature and for their physical vigour. [...] They are well-mannered even if not too talkative, respective of the thought and liberty of the others. Intelligence wise they are not too bright, and initiative wise they are timid. They lack resistance, are easily lazy and non-caring. They are cruel and superstitious at times even to excess.⁴⁴

The same report continues to say that the main aboriginal tribes of Indonesia are the Dayaks of Borneo, the Battas of Sumatra, the Alfurus of Celebes. These live in their semi-civilised state.

A report of August 1963 notes that every region has its own dialect. But the only language that has some literature is that spoken in Java. The common language imposed on the people is Indonesian Bahasa. According to the same report, more than 85% of the Indonesian population is Muslim, though for a good portion of this people their Muslim faith is nothing more than an external etiquette.⁴⁵

⁴² Cfr. *La Fauna*, in GM 29 (1951) 5, 7; *Uno Sguardo sull'Indonesia*, in GM 41 (1963) 8, 10-11.

⁴³ In November 1956 GM speaks of the various waves of migrations into these islands: the Malaysian, the Indian, the Arab, the European. Cfr. *Cenni Storici e Influssi Esternei*, in GM 34 (1956) 11, 12-13. These various immigrations explain the presence of various ethnic groups in the island nation.

⁴⁴ *Da Roma a Diakarta (Indonesia) in 63 Ore*, in GM 29 (1951) 5, 8-9.

⁴⁵ Cfr. *Uno Sguardo sull'Indonesia*, 10-11.

Indonesian Dance

A particular character of the Indonesian people reported in an article in November 1956 is their love for dance and song. The compiler of the write up states that dance and music occupy a place of great importance in the Indonesian culture. Indonesian dances seem to have drawn inspiration from the ancient Hindu epics ever since the Indian migration into the islands. In the course of the years, these themes have undergone certain changes to introduce the heroes and heroines of the nation into the otherwise totally Hindu religious themes. According to this report, there are four classical types of dances in Indonesia. *Halus* is the dance of those who belong to the class of nobility; it is the dance of the royal court. The movements are moderate and very gracious. The *Gagah* dance has as its theme the life and achievements of national heroes and of gods and goddesses. The movements are more rapid but still gracious. The *Kasar* dance instead depicts devils, demons and giants. Movements are fast and disordered. And the fourth class are the comical dances, where the movements are quite out of the ordinary, imperfect and often ridiculous. Besides these, there are also dances for various occasions like harvest, in different parts of the country.⁴⁶

Funeral rites in Indonesia

It is in the November 1956 issue of GM that the editors present the funeral rites of Indonesia. While in their religious components, these rites are faithful to the various religions of the country, the external rites acquire characteristics that could be called Indonesian.

The Indonesian Muslims have a funeral rite that manifests also elements of Hinduism and also of ancient animist religions of the islands. When a person dies, the body is laid out in such a way that the head is placed in the direction of the holy city of Mecca. Following a Hindu custom, incense sticks are kept burning near the dead body. When any one visits the dead, he vests always in black. Usually the visitors bring some gifts to the family by way of rice, or money according to the local use. When the relations and friends have reached, the body is washed. For the

⁴⁶ Cfr. *Danze Indonesiane*, in GM 34 (1956) 11, 14-15.

men folk the body is washed by the sons and the male relations, for the women folk instead, by the daughters and the female relations. The washed body is covered with a white cotton sheet and placed in the coffin while those around recite the prayers according to the Muslim rite.

At the time fixed by the family, the body is taken out of the house, but stops at the entrance for sufficient time for the young relations of the dead to make three rounds around the coffin. On the way to the cemetery prayers are said, and at the cross road coins are thrown in the air. One of those who accompany the body holds an umbrella opened, to protect the head of the dead from the sun! Among the things carried to the cemetery are a box of betel, a spittoon and a sleeping mat.

The body is not buried in the coffin! When the procession reaches the grave, the body is taken out of the coffin and placed directly in the grave. Often a niche is dug out in one of the side walls and the body is placed in that niche in such a way that the earth that is thrown into the grave, does not fall directly on the body itself!

The Muslims in Indonesia believe that the dead will have to undergo an examination of all what they have done on the earth. To help the dead person in this exam, before the grave is filled with the earth, those around the grave recite a series of pertinent questions and their answers. When the grave is finally filled with the earth, wooden markings are kept on the grave to mark the head and the feet. On fixed days after the death, the parents and relations gather to pray for the dead person.

The same amalgamation of rites and ceremonies has taken place also in the Hindu funeral rites in Indonesia. Like their Indian counterparts, the Indonesian Hindus cremate their dead, but according to a ritual quite different from the one followed in India. The body is carried to the place of the cremation in a high tower made of bamboo and adorned with strips of coloured paper. The funeral procession makes many zigzag movements, and turns round and round in circles every now and then, to confuse the spirit of the dead person if it ever wants to return to its earthly dwelling, and to direct it straight to the next world! On reaching the place of

cremation, the body is placed in a kind of a container made in the shape of various animals. For the Brahmin the container is made in the shape of a cow, for the Kshatrya it is in the form of a lion, for the Vaishyas it is in the form of some of the mythological figures, while for the Shudras the preferred figure is that of the fish.⁴⁷

Thailand

The Salesians took charge of the mission of Rajaburi in 1927. And from that year on wards, there are regular notices on Thailand and its people in GM. The articles evidence the attention of the editors on projecting the special features of the country like its natural beauty, its temples, the white elephant, its festivities etc. In keeping with its missionary nature GM makes sufficient mention of the history of the Catholic missions in the country.⁴⁸ Little space is dedicated to tell the story of the salesian missions in the region.⁴⁹

The natural charm of Thailand

According to a report of Cesare Castellino in April 1942, before June 1939 Thailand was commonly known by the name of "Siam" – a name given to the region by the Burmese, signifying "the land of the brown people". For Castellino, Thailand "is the classical East with all its splendour and all its charm."⁵⁰ Another report in February 1952 states:

⁴⁷ Cf. *Cerimonie Funebri*, in GM 34 (1956) 11, 20-21.

⁴⁸ Certain write ups like CASTELLINO C., *Thailandia*, in GM 20 (1942) 4, 36-38; *Roma-Bangkok*, in GM 26 (1948) 4, 5; *Il Paese dell'Elefante Bianco*, in GM 31 (1953) 4, 2-3, dedicate short paragraphs to the history of the Catholic missions in Thailand. These merely make mention of the most important stages of the progress of the work. A more comprehensive picture of the history of the missions in the country is given in the following narrations: *Le Missioni Cattoliche nel Siam*, in GM 29 (1951) 2, 8-9; *Il Cattolicesimo nel Siam*, in GM 37 (1959) 7, 10.

⁴⁹ There seems to be absolutely little about the beginnings of the salesian mission in Thailand. An article in July 1941 mentions that the prefecture apostolic of Rajaburi, entrusted to the Salesians, is raised to the status of a Vicariate Apostolic with Gaetano Pasotti SDB as the Vicar Apostolic. Cf. *Fausto Avvenimento*, in GM 19 (1941) 7, 106. And in April 1942 GM publishes a report of Cesare Castellino, missionary in Thailand, where the author makes a general presentation of the country and its people. In this report some space is dedicated to tell about the beginnings of the Salesian mission in the region. Cf. CASTELLINO C., *Thailandia*, 36-38.

⁵⁰ CASTELLINO C., *Thailandia*, 36.

The natural beauty of Thailand is insuperable. [...] The aerial vision of Siam presents a vast extension of green with silver ribbons here and there, and a few scattered dark spots. The sum total of colours is truly breath taking.⁵¹

For its exuberant nature, gifted with such great variety, Carlo Caretto, the brother of Pietro Caretto who was a salesian missionary in the country, wrote in April 1953, "Siam is a charming country, one of the most beautiful of the whole of the East."⁵²

A report in February 1952 presents Thailand as a true tropical garden with all kinds of tropical fruits. And because of the many rivers and streams that criss-cross the country, fish is found in abundance in the region. Yet another peculiarity of the country is that it has just three main seasons. The dry and hot season lasts from March to May, the rainy season from June to October and winter from November to February.⁵³

The various ethnic groups of Thailand

In September 1931 GM publishes quite a lengthy article of Giuseppe Pinaffo, illustrated with adequate photographs, about the various ethnic groups who live in Thailand. Pinaffo notes that according to the anthropologists, there are more than 30 ethnic groups in Thailand. However, he speaks only about the main groups. According to the missionary, the Semangs were the original inhabitants of the whole of Indo-China in times past. They are found in the Pattani and Nakhon Sritamarat mountains of Siam. This group is found also in the Philippines, in the Andaman Islands and in the Malaysian peninsula. Originally they lived a nomadic life in the forest, but later on they got accustomed to a more settled type of life. Normally they are short of stature. They are dressed very rustically. They do not undertake systematic cultivation, instead live on the fruits in the forest. Their weapons are bow and arrow and spear made of bamboo.

The Malaysians who belong to the group of Austro-Asians are found mainly in the southern part of Thailand. They are all Muslims

⁵¹ *Il Muang Thai*, in GM 29 (1951) 2, 4.

⁵² CARRETTO C., *Viaggio nel Siam*, in GM 31 (1953) 4, 10.

⁵³ Cfr. *Il Muang Thai*, 4-5.

and are deeply attached to Mohamed. The women here, do not cover their faces. This group is mainly engaged in the cultivation of rice and are good fishermen.

The Sakais who belong to the Mon or Peguano-Kmen group live in the south of Thailand. They are accustomed to tattooing and painting themselves. They know a little of agriculture; cultivate rice, tapioca, and tobacco. Their weapons are the bow and the arrow. The Kamuks belongs to the same ethnic group, and live in the region of Luang-Prabang. Groups of Cambodians, who came down from the North, Yunnan, in their movement towards Cambodia, have established communities also in Thailand. The monument to their sojourn through Siam is the famous ruins of Angkor.

The Annamite Christians who escaped from Vietnam during the period of persecution, form yet another major ethnic group in Thailand. They belong to the bigger Mon-Khmer family. They are famous in Thailand for the artistic mats that they make.

The Thais, from whom has descended the major part of the population of Thailand also belong to the great Mongolian, Mon-Khmer family. Probably their original habitation was the South West region of China - Yunnan, from where they were driven southwards. The Thai ethnic group is found also in Tonkino, in the Island of Hainanu and even in Assam. The Cantonese also probably belonged to this group of people.

Another separate ethnic group is the one of the Laozians. Except for the fact that they are ethnically different, there is nothing much that differentiates them from the Thai people, as they have adopted the customs and beliefs of the Thais. Thailand also has other ethnic groups like the Sam-Sams, the Carians and the Chinese.⁵⁴

The general Thai character

In his evidently very enthusiastic report on Thailand, Cesare Castellino, giving a general description of the Thais, says:

The Thais belong to the Mongolian race: of medium stature, they have broad shoulders, well developed chest, well

⁵⁴ Cfr. PINAFFO G., *Etnografia Siamese*, in GM 9 (1931) 9, 172-175.

proportioned body, short neck, broad forehead, black eyes, nose some what flat, hair black, smooth and short. They do not have beards.

By character they are happy, gentle, at times timid, very grateful to those who do good to them. They have a natural inclination to music also due to their own language which is all based on tones and the length of the syllables. [...] Thailand is the land of generosity, of feasts, of smiles and of eternal poetry.⁵⁵

The report of February 1951 adds to these above mentioned characteristics that of their love for sport. Among the traditional sports are boxing, the falcon fight (between male and female falcon), etc. This narration also states that the art of dancing is well developed among the Thais, so too theatre. They have a classical drama all their own that combines dialogue, song and dance.⁵⁶

The white elephants of Thailand

M. Alessi in an article in February 1941 writes that Thailand is one of the countries with a great elephant population. But the curious factor is that, Thailand is called the land of the white elephant; not merely because of the presence of a species more white in colour, but because of the special cult and the royal honour that is paid to it. Alessi notes that the Thais believe that the spirit of the great Buddha resides in the white elephant. As a result, a section of the royal palace is reserved to it with guards, servants, and pages at its service!⁵⁷

Thailand – a land of pagodas

A little column in the February 1951 issue of GM is dedicated to the Pagodas of Thailand, but it carries interesting information.

⁵⁵ CASTELLINO C., *Thailandia*, 36.

⁵⁶ Cfr. *Il Muang Thai*, 4-5.

⁵⁷ Cfr. ALESSI M., *Nel Paese degli Elefanti*, in GM 19 (1941) 2, 24-25. Cesare Castellino, speaking of a new white elephant that has been found in the Siamese forest, speaks of the veneration that is paid to this special animal. According to him, it is the Buddhist belief that every great Buddhist, during the process of the reincarnations, will pass necessarily through some white animals. And the greatest of these white animals is the white elephant. So it is the common belief that the white elephant is animated by some great hero destined to become a Buddha one day. Cfr. CASTELLINO C., *Un Nuovo Elefante Bianco*, in GM 25 (1947) 1, 13.

It says, "Siam is the land of pagodas. These are of all times and all styles!"⁵⁸ And unlike Japanese Shintoist temples, the report continues, these of Thailand have enormous statues of Buddha in them, are well decorated, and contain pictures and other statues.

According to another small report of April 1953, something that impresses a visitor of Thailand first is the great number of pagodas found in the country. The article states, "Thailand is known as the land of the white elephant, the land of pagodas and of the yellow gown."⁵⁹ The report continues that there are about 18,000 temples in the whole country, and as for the number of monks, one out of every 70 inhabitants is a monk! The great number of pagodas is also due to the fact that in the earlier times these pagodas served as school, hospital, centre for recreation, sports, and other cultural activities.⁶⁰

The Thai calculation of the year

According to Mario Ruzzeddu, salesian missionary in Thailand, the Siamese follow the Chinese and the Japanese mode of calculating the years, in circles of 12 years. Each year is called after an animal like rat, ox, tiger, leopard, dragon, serpent, horse, ram, monkey, cock, dog and pig. The traditional Siamese calendar follows the Buddhist era.⁶¹

⁵⁸ *Pagode e Santuari*, in GM 29 (1951) 2, 6.

⁵⁹ *Pagode e Toga Gialla*, in GM 31 (1953) 4, 13.

⁶⁰ The great number of monks can be understood in the light of a write up in July 1959 where the author, in the context of exposing the situation of the Church in Thailand, speaks also about the over all religious context of the country. He states that, according to the tradition of the land, every boy is obliged to pass a part of his life, before marriage, as a bonze. The period can be as short as 15 days, or as long as 3 months. Cfr. *La Situazione della Chiesa in Thailandia*, in GM 37 (1959) 7, 5-6.

⁶¹ Cfr. RUZZEDDU M., *La Festa del Re*, in GM 8 (1930) 3, 63-64. In a later report in April 1955 it is noted that there are four different systems of calculating the years in use in Thailand depending on the different eras. The Christian era is followed by the Government and by all who have commerce with the outside world. The Buddhist era is the one in common use, and initiates from the death of Buddha in 543 BC. The Ratanakosin era starts from the foundation of Bangkok in 1768 AD. It is just a national memory. And the civil era called also Chulasakarat has its origin in one of the ancient kings and starts in the year 638 AD. This too is not in common use. Cfr. *Curiosità siamesi*, in GM 33 (1955) 4, 14-15.

The Thai New Year's Day celebration

The one great Siamese national festival is the new year's day celebration, locally called Songkran. GM publishes a some what detailed account of Cesare Castellino of this particular feast with photos of the various phases of the celebration. Castellino says that the Thai New Year's Day falls on the first day of the fifth lunar month of the year. The festivities last for three days.

On the last day of the year, every Thai family cleans the house, throws out all things broken and out of use. Preserving such things would bring ill fortune to the family in the coming year! In the morning of the New Year's day, the people visit the various monasteries bringing gifts to the monks. And on that day there is the purification of the Buddha and of the abbot of the monastery, which consists simply in pouring lustral water over them. Then the young people pay their homage to the old, pouring perfumed water on their hands and making some presents. An interesting feature of the feast is the procession of the young people carrying little cages with birds inside, or vases containing little fish. The birds are set free in the forest and the fish in the river. According to the Buddhist belief, these birds and fish are re-incarnations of some persons, and it is a meritorious action to give them back their liberty! A characteristic feature of the New Year's celebration is pouring water on each other, as a sign of good wishes!⁶²

The Thai marriage rite

An article in April 1953, with adequate photos of the various stages of the ceremony, describe the Thai marriage customs. The report says that the Thais have a very simple marriage ceremony. The day propitious for the marriage is fixed by the monks after due divinations. The wedding ceremony takes place in the house of the parents of the girl. Usually a group of 5 to 10 Buddhist monks are invited to recite the prayers and perform the rites. When every thing is ready, the bride and the bridegroom are seated on two cushions at the centre of the main hall in the house. A person

⁶² Cf. CASTELLINO C., *Songkran, la Festa dell'Anno Nuovo in Thailandia*, in GM 42 (1964) 5, 37-40.

of importance, from among the guests, places a crown of flowers on the head of the couple, and bind together the right hands of the boy and girl with a simple white cord blessed by the monks. After this, the invited guests in turn approach the new couple and pour water on their joined hands, wishing them prosperity and joy. When every one has personally greeted the new couple, the bride and the bridegroom distribute rice to the monks. The newly wedded are then garlanded and this gives initiation to the festive meal for all the invited.⁶³

Vietnam

The first articles that appear in GM on this area, do not speak of Vietnam as such but of Indo-China. Vietnam comes to be named as such only after the World War II. While focus of the articles after the World War II on Vietnam is on reporting the condition of the Church under the communist regime, the articles prior to this period describe more the culture, the beliefs and traditions of the people of the region. However, there is not much write up about the region before the World War II. There is quite a bit of information about the beginnings of the Church in the region, especially in the period after the War.⁶⁴

Vietnam and its people

Through various articles entitled "Attraverso l'Impero d'Annam" GM presents in 1929, the report of G. Casetta on the

⁶³ Cf. *Matrimonio Buddista*, in GM 31 (1953) 4, 12-13.

⁶⁴ Through various articles, GM presents the story of the evangelisation of Vietnam, starting from the early efforts towards the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th century. It highlights the advantages that the missionaries harvested from the French colonisation of the region. It speaks of the effects of the Japanese occupation of the region during the period of the World War II. It takes up the history of the nationalist movement in Vietnam which finally culminated in the region's division and independence. Cfr. CASETTA G., *Attraverso l'Impero d'Annam*, in GM 7 (1929) 1, 3-4; *La Chiesa nel Vietnam*, in GM 26 (1948) 6, 2; *Vietnam*, in GM 26 (1948) 6, 8-9; *Il Viet-Minh*, in GM 26 (1948) 6, 11; *La Cristianità nel Vietnam*, in GM 32 (1954) 9, 2-5; *La Fuga Verso il Sud*, in GM 33 (1955) 6, 18-20; FERRARI L., *Vietnam Zona Esplosiva*, in GM 34 (1956) 2, 16-19; *La Chiesa nel Vietnam*, in GM 41 (1963) 3, 4-8; *Intenzione Missionaria di Febbraio*, in GM 45 (1967) 2, 3-4.

people of the ancient kingdom of Annam. The article speaks of the people of the region, their superstitions, their religious beliefs, their traditions, and of the story of the missions in this region. Casetta describes these people in the following way:

The Annamite people are hard working, sober, patient, attached to their village and respectful. [...] They are of short stature, have lean hands with long fingers, flat nose, small almond shaped eyes.⁶⁵

Their chief occupation is the cultivation of rice which is their staple food. Their common drink is tea.

Vietnamese superstitions

What impressed the missionary seems to have been their greatly superstitious nature. Casetta reports that the Annamites believe that certain snakes carry in their mouth certain amulet, the size of a small coin, and give it to whom they want, rendering the receiver invulnerable. The comet is considered as something that brings war. They think that the eclipses are due to some dragon trying to swallow up the moon or the sun, and do everything possible by way of making noise to chase the dragon away. The strongest of all animals for the Annamites is the dragon. It lives in the underground. In digging the foundation for the house, or in the various mines, every effort is made not to hurt the dragon that lies below. They have a reverential fear for the tiger.⁶⁶

The religious beliefs and practices of the Vietnamese

It is again G. Casetta, in one of the sections of his long article, who speaks about the ancient beliefs of the Annamites. The author reports that the religion of this people consists in the worship of the spirits and in the cult of the ancestors. The protecting spirits of the empire are the spirits of some great personages, nominated by the emperor himself. The Mandarin has similar right of choosing the protecting spirit for the region over which he has jurisdiction.

The Vietnamese hierarchy of gods

According to Casetta, the Annamites acknowledge a hierarchy among the spirits. The supreme spirit is *Thuong De*. Among the rest, the greatest spirit concerned with the living is *Ngoc Hoang* who is a kind of creator of the world. The spirit who concerns himself with the dead is *Minh Vuong*. He has the charge of the under world. The heavens are divided into three regions with three custodians: *Thang Long* (white Dragon), *Cu Dien* (rose sparrow) and *Bach Ho* (the white wolf). Besides these divine spirits, there is quite a host of others, who together form the council of the gods.

The one class of these spirits who enter more into the daily life of the Annamite is that of the *Ong Nao*, the spirits of the family hearth. The three stones of the family hearth are dedicated to this spirit. Offering to these spirits are always accompanied by alcoholic drinks, which after the religious function is drunk by the members of the family. If the grace required for from one spirit is not granted, the spirit can even be divested of divinity and their statues thrown into the river!

Ancestor worship among the Vietnamese

The second part of the Annamite religion, according to Casetta, refers to the cult of the ancestors. The Annamites believe that every person has three souls: the spiritual, the sensitive and the material. The spiritual soul resides in the brain, and at death, if the person is worthy, passes to the status of the spirits. The sensitive resides in the stomach, and at death goes to the tomb. If the person is not given a worthy burial, this soul wanders about searching for a place of rest. The material soul abides in the lower part of the stomach and after death goes to hell. If the burial is not worthy, this soul escapes and goes back to trouble the living. So the cult of the dead is the veneration of the ancestor who after his death has joined the circle of the divine spirits. In every house there is an altar to the ancestors. These people too have one day of the year dedicated to the dead ancestors - 15th day of the 7th month. According to the local belief, on this day the dead return to their original earthly homes. And so the family celebrates the return of their ancestors to their homes.

⁶⁵ CASETTA G., *Attraverso l'Impero d'Annam*, 3.

⁶⁶ Cf. CASETTA G., *Attraverso l'Impero d'Annam*, 3-4.

A religion without priests

The Annamites, according to Casetta, do not have a special class of priests and religious ministers. The supreme priest for the whole kingdom is the emperor himself. The mandarins are the priests for the regions entrusted to them. In the family it is the first born son who conducts the religious functions. The bonzes are not considered priests, they do not have any religious authority, and in Vietnam they are comparatively few in number.⁶⁷

The Vietnamese ceremony of naming a child

The one important religious ceremony in the life of every person in the region, of which Casetta makes mention in April 1928, is that of imposing a name on the child. It has elements of the superstitious, the curious and of the comical. It is performed when the child is just about a month old. The divinity that presides over this ceremony is the goddess *Bà Mau*. The ritual requires that the parents of the child burn 15 blouses, 15 pants and 15 caps in honour of this goddess. To trick the aged goddess who is believed to have poor eyesight, the ceremony is always conducted towards nightfall. And what actually is burnt, is the necessary number of blouses, pants and caps, but made of paper! And after this sacrifice, the name is imposed on the child. A boy receives three names: one that corresponds to the family name, the second that expresses the wishes of the parents for the child like the name of some kings, or a warrior or some artists, and third, the real name by which the child will be called. At times the child is given the name cat, cow, buffalo, etc with the belief that hearing these names the evil spirits will be duped and not come to torment the child.⁶⁸

Korea

The salesians entered Korea only in 1955. Although most of the articles on Korea appear after this date, the story of the beginning of the Church in Korea, for its uniqueness, and for the waves of persecution, appeared on the pages of GM from 1931

⁶⁷ Cfr. CASETTA G., *Attraverso l'Impero d'Annam*, in GM 7 (1929) 3, 46-47.

⁶⁸ Cfr. CASETTA , *Come gli Annamiti Impongono il Nome ai Bambini*, in GM 6 (1928) 4, 72-73.

onwards.⁶⁹ The presentation of Korea is along the same lines as that of Japan: admiration for its natural beauty, praise for its people and their inborn qualities of head and heart, and a general appreciation of its culture.

Korea: A general description of the land and the people

In April 1956 GM presents a general description of Korea: the land and its people. It notes that the Koreans call their country “the dew of the morning”, while the Chinese call it “Kaosi” which means elegant, or “Tsaosmian” meaning serene. It has a physical feature similar to that of Italy.

This initial report says that ancient Korean legend proposes that these people descended from a sacred cow! An aristocratic legend, proposes that the Koreans descended instead from the sun! The ethnologists say that the Koreans are a mixture of Japanese, Manchurian and Chinese. Describing the general characteristics of the people, the report states,

In general the Korean is of a robust type, of medium stature, of a heavy build. The womenfolk bear a more delicate character, with delicate facial features, slightly bright eyes, rounded forehead, and thick hair. They are intelligent, hospitable, honest and benevolent. They are expansive to relations and friends, but reserved to the strangers.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ The mode of entry of Christianity in Korea is unique in the sense that it was not introduced into the country by some foreign missionaries. Some Korean wise lay men were the first evangelisers of their own people towards the end of the 18th century. For quite a few decades the Christian community remained, and continued its growth without priests. Even the first missionaries could not enter the country openly. Only in 1890 could foreign missionaries really establish themselves openly in Korea. Cfr. *Il Centenario della Chiesa in Corea*, in GM 9 (1931) 10, 181-182; *Corea*, in GM 28 (1950) 10, 8-9; SPIES R., *Una Storia Gloriosa*, in GM 37 (1959) 4, 18-20; *Il Regno Romito*, in GM 39 (1961) 10, 26-29. Something of the kind happened also in regard to the starting of the Salesian work in the country. Much before the arrival of the Salesians, Don Bosco had found a place in Korea. A chronicle of May 1939 notes that a parish Church was dedicated to the Saint in a little village called Eitôho, and youth associations were functioning in this parish inspired by the spirit of Don Bosco. Cfr. *Cronaca Missionaria*, in GM 16 (1939) 5, ii.

⁷⁰ *La Corea*, in GM 34 (1956) 4, 18.

The same report says that the ancient religion of the Koreans seems to have been the worship of various elements of nature like plants, water, stones and fire, which they believed were inhabited by some spirits. However, when the salesian missionaries reached the country, its official religion was Buddhism.⁷¹

Early impressions of the missionaries of the Korean people

In April 1959 GM reports the impressions of Rinaldo Facchinelli one of the first salesian missionaries to arrive from Japan to Korea. Coming from the land of the cherry in blossom, the missionary seems to have been slightly deluded. He writes,

While Japan, a land of much rain yet sufficiently hot, appeared to be a well cultivated garden, Korea gives the impression of a semi-wild desert: bare mountains of rose clay, the plains of large forested grasslands, rivers without embankments, small and difficult mountain paths, little groups of huts made of mud and covered with thatch.⁷²

It was the great poverty and misery of the Koreans that immediately impressed the first salesian missionaries. Facchinelli continues,

As one gets out of the airport, one is struck by the extreme incredible poverty of the land. [...] And even in the great city of Seoul, crowds of boys, ragged, miserable, famished, with pitiful eyes who stretch out their hands to the foreigners. [...] Then there are those wounded in war, and lepers! Yes, also lepers, horribly deformed, were wandering about in the streets and alleys of the capital.

But in spite of all this poverty and misery, the missionary immediately discovered the natural goodness of the people. He wrote,

⁷¹ This is confirmed by another report in April 1959 seemingly coming from the editors of GM. It says that the Koreans are very superstitious. They believe that the atmosphere is full of good and evil spirits. And these spirits live in the trees, rocks, rivers, mountains etc. This explains why they worship these inanimate things. Cf. *Paese del Calmo Mattino*, in GM 37 (1959) 4, 16.

⁷² FACCHINELLI R., *Dal Giappone alla Corea*, in GM 37 (1959) 4, 4.

[...] In spite of it all, the Koreans have a noble and generous heart, habituated to renunciation and sacrifice. In opposition to the Japanese, the Korean is above all humble, simple and naturally religious.

A write up, apparently from the editors, in October 1961 gives more details about the Koreans and their customs and beliefs. It says that the Korean houses are constructed with mud walls and thatched roof. They are usually elevated about half a metre above the ground. The rich have their houses of wood, or of bricks with tile roofing. The traditional ancient houses did not have any windows in it, and there was always just one single entrance. Like in many eastern countries, no one enters the house with foot-wears on!

General characteristics of the Koreans

The same report speaking of the people as such, says that the Koreans are a Mongolian race. It is their simplicity of heart and affability of manners that endears them to the missionaries. They are also intelligent and capable of sacrificing work. They are a people who love cleanliness. The one season of great joy for them is when the work in the paddy field is over and they give themselves to dancing and merry making.⁷³

One of the last reports about Korea in GM, that of April 1966, presents the Korean people as great lovers of music and of dance. Even at home the children learn to sing and to dance. In the school, every class has music lessons. All their meetings are characterised by their traditional songs. Traditional Korean music is slow and simple. However, with the opening to the west, traditional Korean music is slowly being replaced by the western.⁷⁴

Korea – the paradise of the missionaries

But the one characteristic of the Korean people that truly impressed the Salesian missionaries, and that which GM kept repeating in a number of articles is the eagerness of these people for the Catholic faith. Facchinelli wrote in his first report,

⁷³ Cf. *Paese del Chiaro Mattino*, in GM 39 (1961) 10, 19-23.

⁷⁴ Cf. *La Corea Canta*, in GM 44 (1966) 4, 8-11.

Now the Koreans as if in a mass movement are assaulting the Catholic missions asking to be instructed and to receive baptism. [...] The mission center is overflowing with souls in search of the light!⁷⁵

And speaking of the fervent faith of those already baptised the same missionary wrote. "It is an impressionable scene of every day life here: churches packed to capacity, also for the Mass of week days." Speaking of the numbers of baptisms that the missionary administrators, Facchinelli wrote in the same report,

While in Japan we were emotionally moved when on some feast days we could baptize three or four catechumens, in Korea instead there are hundreds and hundreds of them every time. [...] While in Japan there is an average of 17 baptism a year per priest, in Korea it is about 230 baptism per missionary!

In the same issue of GM, yet another Salesian missionary in Japan, Raimondo Spies testifies to the mass movement of the people to the Catholic faith.⁷⁶

The same impression is given by what is said in the write up on Korea in October 1961. The compiler of the article states that the Catholic faith has been diffused among the Koreans during the past 10 years in a surprising way. And the numerical growth has been accompanied by the growth in true fervour.⁷⁷

An article of Archimede Martelli, missionary in Korea, in July 1962 is precisely entitled, "Korea: the paradise of the missionaries". Besides describing the general good nature of the Koreans, and the great movement among all sections of the people towards the Catholic faith, Martelli notes the flowering of religious and priestly vocations. Concluding the report, the missionary writes:

In this climate, there are many who desire to follow the path of priesthood. Habituated to sacrifice and fervent as they are, they find nothing better than to dedicate their life to the good

of others, for the establishment of the Kingdom of Christ among their own country men. Vocations abound among those who finish their graduation. There are those who study in the universities too who choose this particular way. At times even those who return from their military service, which here in Korea last for three years, opt for the priesthood!⁷⁸

Funeral rites – cult of the dead among the Koreans

The Koreans like their neighbours, the Chinese and the Japanese have great veneration for their dead. It is common belief that the prosperity and happiness of the family depend on this cult for the dead. Though GM mentions this aspect of the Korean culture,⁷⁹ it does not give the details of the expression of this cult. Instead it dedicates some space to the funeral rites of the Koreans.

GM mentions the funeral rites of the Koreans for the first time in the general article about Korea in April 1956. The author reports that when a family member is seriously sick, he is transferred from his usual bed-room, to another room in the house, to trick the evil spirit that afflicts him. But if the sick person gives no hope of recovery, the whole family gathers around him waiting for the last moment.

According to the same article, soon after death, the corpse is covered with a sheet of cloth, and the family observes a time of sacred silence after which they burst into expressions of sorrow and grief. On the third day, the relations or sons, after a ritual bath of purification, place the body with the mattress, in a coffin of fir wood or pine wood, trees that symbolise eternal life. At the bottom of the coffin they spread a layer of wheat flour about 3 centimetres thick. On top of the body they spread a covering on which are written the necrological data of the dead person. A few dresses used by the dead when alive, are placed in the coffin. On the fourth day, the relations return to their daily work, but the head of the ceremony, places near the coffin all the objects used by the

⁷⁵ FACCHINELLI R., *Dal Giappone alla Corea*, in GM 37 (1959) 4, 7-8.

⁷⁶ Cfr. SPIES R., *Nuovi Tentativi e Sangue*, in GM 37 (1959) 4, 21.

⁷⁷ Cfr. *Paese del Chiaro Mattino*, 23.

⁷⁸ MARTELLI A., *Corea: Paradiso dei Missionari*, in GM 40 (1962) 7, 32.

⁷⁹ Cfr. *La Corea*, 19; *Paese del Chiaro Mattino*, 22-23.

dead person, also drinks and fruits. For an ordinary person, the burial takes place on the fifth day.

It is common practice that the bonzes are cremated. The ashes of saintly bonzes are preserved in urns and kept in the temples, while the ashes of the ordinary bonzes are mixed with the food that is given to the birds.⁸⁰

The narration of Edoardo McNeil, missionary in Korea, in February 1962 highlights the festive dimension of the funeral in Korea. According to the author, the Koreans consider death as a true passage to life, and so do not manifest so much sorrow in the face of it. The term used to indicate death is "*tora kasyotta*" which means "turn back" to the life from which one has come. That sense of hope is so profound that the funeral procession itself takes on a very festive mood. McNeil reports that the first time that he saw a funeral procession, he even mistook it for a wedding march! It is accompanied by singing and music. At the centre of the procession is the catafalque decorated richly, carried by 8 persons. When they reach the cemetery, the body is taken down and placed in the tomb and covered with sand. Those who accompanied the body, pay their last respects by a deep bow. And everything comes to a conclusion with a banquet at the site of the grave itself! The cemeteries are always outside the village, at a reasonable distance.⁸¹

Conclusion

All along the life of GM the editors seemed to have kept the one focus of the review constantly in mind: create interest in the missions. The reports of the Far East countries served precisely this one purpose. And in some way the vast variety of this region in all spheres of life contributed in a major way to this goal. One would think that the reports of GM created in the readers a great admiration for this region and its people, and at the same time the longing to bring these ancient people to faith in Christ.

In all these countries the Church had to undergo some persecution of some type or other. And GM was not afraid to present this reality to mere school going boys and girls. The missionary presented by GM in these regions is not merely a do-gooder who is the hero of the indigenous people. He is fired by his faith, and has to be ready to sacrifice everything, even his life when his apostolate demands that. This presentation certainly would have warded off the faint-hearted. But it presented a reality that was challenging and therefore truly great.

Today anthropological studies of various ethnic groups serve to supply information on the life styles of these peoples. In this respect GM was a mine of information about the peoples of the East. Coming again from persons who lived and mingled with the people, they always contained much element of truth. This rich information opened up the young boys and girls of Italy to a world so different from their own. It did serve as a cultural bridge.

⁸⁰ Cfr. *La Corea*, 19.

⁸¹ Cfr. McNEIL E., *Funerale in Corea*, in GM 40 (1962) 2, 38-41.

font, served to create a general picture of the region in the minds of the readers of the periodical, the first part of this section will examine the elements of this over-all presentation.

CHAPTER 17

THE AFRICAN MISSIONS

Africa, the black continent, with its teeming millions became the object of great interest of the Church early in the period of the 19th century missionary expansion. The huge stretch of the Sahara desert had prevented all descent of the missionaries from the North. It was only when the sea routes were discovered that the rest of the continent opened up to "discovery" and to evangelization.

The Salesians started their African missions with their apostolate at Elisabethville in Belgian Congo in 1910.¹ Though much of the reports in GM are about this particular mission, there is evidently a tendency to speak of the "African mission" and of the "African people". Especially when it comes to speaking about the beliefs, culture and nature of the people, one notices write-ups on the Congolese people in particular, and on the African people in general. While the majority of the information about Congo in particular comes directly from the missionaries working in the region, the general information about Africa comes from the editorial board. As the presentation of Africa and its people, though from a secondary

The general image of Africa and its people projected by GM

GM makes little mention of the story of Christianity in North Africa. What GM means by the African missions is the Christian penetration of the regions south of the great Sahara desert that is called "black Africa". In fact Zucchetti speaking of the African missions writes in 1951: "The entrance of Christianity into black Africa has been reserved to our times."² Therefore when GM uses "Africa" what is generally meant is the region south of the Sahara, and its people are the diverse original black inhabitants of this zone. GM gives quite a bit of information about the efforts made to evangelise this region. However, all these write ups appear only in the period after the World War II. These reports are always combined especially with the general presentation of the salesian missions south of Sahara.³

Primitive style of life of the Africans

The earliest report of the interior regions of Africa tend to present the primitiveness of the way of living of the people, their apparently savage ways, to highlight the urgency of missionary work in those regions. Thus in May 1924 GM reports that the French government has absolutely forbidden cannibalism in its

² ZUCCHETTI D., *Cristianesimo in Africa*, in GM 29 (1951) 1, 10. (8-10). GM does not totally ignore the early history. In fact the same article deals mainly with the early history of the Church in the continent. However, in the over all picture, very little attention is paid to it. The whole region had become Muslim, and offered little scope for direct evangelisation. Cfr. ZUCCHETTI D., *Le Missioni in Africa*, in GM 32 (1954) 2, 2-5; *La Chiesa in Africa*, in GM 35 (1957) 10, 4.

³ For notices about the initiation of the Christian missions south of Sahara cfr: *Il Congo Belga*, in GM 30 (1952) 11, 7; ZUCCHETTI D., *La Storia del Congo*, in GM 35 (1957) 4, 4-5; *La Chiesa in Africa*, in GM 35 (1957) 10, 4; *La Via Crucis del Missionario in Africa*, in GM 35 (1957) 10, 9. Notices about the beginnings of the missions in other countries have not been grouped together here as they will be referred to when dealing with the individual countries.

¹ In 1923 GM presented an over all picture of the salesian mission in Congo. But then on, there are just scattered reports about the various activities of the missionaries. Obviously the missions in the East occupied much more of the attention of the editors of the periodical. What the reports put in relief is the salesian apostolate in favour of the indigenous people of the region. Though the Salesian mission in Congo started with a formal school in favour of the children of the European immigrants, its development was in favour of the black population. Cfr. GARNERI D., *La Missione del Katanga*, in GM 1 (1923) 11, 164-166. The initial report was further enriched with notices on developments of the mission in the course of time. Cfr. *Missione Salesiane nel Cuore dell'Africa*, in GM 12 (1944) 10, 104; *I Salesiani nel Cuore dell'Africa*, in GM 33 (1955) 2, 12-13.

colonies in Africa, obviously alluding to its existence. The editor mentions that the savage practice simply seems to have arisen out of a need for food in the interior forest regions. But at times also religious ceremonies were connected with human sacrifice. Among certain tribes this practice seems to have persisted for a long time.⁴

General characteristics of the African people

Only after World War II does GM present notices on the general character of the African people. Already in May 1944, GM speaks of the sensitiveness of the Black people to love and affection. A missionary writes,

The Negroes are very sensitive to the way in which they are treated. They feel degraded by the hard and authoritarian ways of the protestant ministers and government functionaries. These do not treat them well, and take care not to enter the hotels frequented by the black people. Seeing that we, instead, treat them well, enter their little huts and take care of them, they take a liking for us and do all that we ask them to do.⁵

They are basically a simple people. And the only path to their heart is that of the missionary: mixing with them, treating them as equals.

It appears that one of the great difficulties that the missionaries met with in their apostolate with the people of Africa was the easy going nature of the people. They have a natural dislike for work, and do the work that is just necessary to obtain the food needed for the day. It is instinct that rules much of their action. There is little tendency to hard work or to sacrifice. The only reason for them to live, is to satisfy their natural instincts. They do not arrive at anything but the material and the pleasurable. But all these do not mean that they are totally incapable of any effort, of any sacrifice. In activities that please them, like hunting, fishing and dancing, they do spend a lot of time and energy. Their easy going nature makes them live one day at a time with little thought for tomorrow! Their love for

⁴ Cfr. *L'Antropofagia nel Centro dell'Africa*, in GM 2 (1924) 5, 75.

⁵ Bozzi E., *La Pace nel Pensiero di Un Negro*, in GM 22 (1944) 5, 47.

individual freedom, and dislike for anything that seems to curtail this unlimited freedom is yet another aspect of their character. This love for freedom makes them also incapable of being constant and persevering at any work. Since even reflection is something that demands effort, they prefer just to remain in their incredulity, and this certainly makes the work of the missionary more difficult and less productive.

The missionaries do not attribute malice to the easy going spirit of the black people. They understand it as part of their character that is very childlike. And this childlike nature is manifested also in their inborn love for pictures, for the colourful, for theatre! They hardly get tired of ceremonies, even when they are long. They can pass hours on end in singing and listening to stories. They easily tend to accept the truth without discussion. They are very sensitive to the way that they are treated. Where they meet with love, they respond with love. And a great saving feature in their character is their sense of bounty and brotherhood, and their capacity to share, even in spite of their great poverty. Their great attachment to their mothers could in some way be seen as yet another dimension of their simple childlike nature.⁶

The lethargic nature of the people takes nothing away from the fact that Africa is the second largest missionary field, the first being Asia. While the Muslim population of North Africa resists all missionary work, and is in turn a threat to all efforts at Christianisation, the Black population of interior Africa, is mostly animist and open to evangelisation. Africa is a continent of great hopes for the Church.⁷

Following the indications of *Fidei Donum* of Pius XII, GM makes a strong appeal in favour of Africa in 1957. The editors present the continent in turmoil, a people who aspire to a civilised life. Various countries tend to throw off whatever smacks of the era of colonisation. There is a legitimate struggle for independence

⁶ Cfr. ZUCCHETTI D., *Questi Sono i Negri*, in GM 29 (1951) 1, 4-6.

⁷ Cfr. *Africa Nera*, in GM 33 (1955) 10, 4-5.

all over. The dangers of communism, Islam and Protestantism threaten the continent.⁸

The common picturing of the African people in their poverty and misery, could easily give the young an impression that this poverty was caused by the continent's lack of natural resources. To ward off such misconception GM notes that the poverty of the people is not due to the lack of natural resource. Africa is a continent that has been endowed with immense natural resources, and especially rich in mineral resources, but with a population that is extremely poor. In spite of the fact that 98% of the diamonds, 55% of the gold, 22 % of the copper and 60% of the palm oil of the world comes from this continent, the indigenous people of the continent live in abject poverty. Therefore the solution to Africa's poverty lies some where else.⁹

Africa – a land of superstitions

One of the first general presentations of Africa carries the heading "In the land of superstitions". Deep rooted ignorance and lack of education of the people make them subject to all types of superstitions. There is a general belief that the whole universe is full of evil spirits whose main concern is to torment poor humanity. The Africans, according to GM, easily tend to attribute the evil they suffer to the evil intention of some one else. In the absence of other means of verifying the innocence of the accused, they have recourse to superstitious methods. So, if one is accused of having poisoned the food of some one else, he is forced to eat the whole supply of food kept in the house of the accuser. And in all disputes, the last word belongs to the sorcerer, whom they believe with so much ease.¹⁰

Obstacles to the evangelisation of Africa

One of the great difficulties that the missionaries met in the evangelisation of Africa, was the family structure in the primitive societies. Polygamy was a common practice among most African

people. The richer a man was, the more wives he could maintain. In fact what was required from a boy to obtain a girl in marriage was the payment of a required amount of money and cattle to the father of the girl. Therefore, the number of wives that a person had also pointed to his financial and social status! Because of the payments involved, the parents finally chose the husbands for their daughters, without even consulting them. And again since it was always a question of money, the husbands had the right to dismiss their wives even for very flimsy reasons.

This over emphasis on the financial aspect had its repercussions on other aspects of family living. As deformed children would be just a burden on the family, it was common custom to get rid of them soon after birth. Since twins were considered to bring ill fortune, they too were put to death at birth, with little qualms of conscience.¹¹

Music and dance in the African culture

In the context of requesting financial assistance for procuring musical instruments for the seminary at Kafubu, Gerardo Van Asperdt speaks of the great love that the black people have for music and for dance. When they are still little children, they participate in dance while being carried by their mothers! The rhythm of the drum enters into them from early infancy! Dancing and singing are the great pastimes of the black people. Certainly in their own ambience, music and dance run the risk of being instruments of evil. But that danger only evidences the greater need to educate especially the young to use it as a means for a greater good.¹²

The African mission of Congo

GM speaks of the general characteristics of the Congolese people, some aspects of their primitive beliefs and culture in the context of presenting the missionary apostolate among them. These

¹¹ Cfr. *La Famiglia in Africa*, in GM 38 (1960) 3, 3; *Me Li Hai Sabvati Tu*, in GM 38 (1960) 3, 9-11.

¹² Cfr. VAN ASPERDT G., *Musica per il Congo*, in GM 40 (1962) 5, 42-45.

⁸ Cfr. *L'Africa Chiama*, in GM 35 (1957) 10, 3.

⁹ Cfr. *L'Africa*, in GM 37 (1959) 3, 5.

¹⁰ Cfr. *Nel Paese della Superstizione*, in GM 4 (1926) 9, 173-174.

reports come from missionaries working in the region. However they are very scanty.

The primitive nature of the Congolese society

A letter of an FMA in 1930 December, speak of the difficulty of the climate of the place, and the destruction brought about by white ants. In the rainy season, two unwelcome guests are the mosquitoes and the snakes. This letter also speaks of the addiction of the Congolese to tobacco and to alcoholic drinks. But even in this they are social minded. The pipe is passed from one person to another. And drinking is a social act. Life is absolutely primitive. Their fickle nature requires much follow up and encouragement from the part of the missionaries. But the vast majority take to the faith with much enthusiasm.¹³

One of the first reports in GM about the customs of the Congolese people picture them as a very primitive group. "In general, the blacks are very poor and their life is very primitive and frugal," so writes Maria Teresa Papa, the provincial Superior of the FMAs in Belgium. Their huts, the furnishings of these huts, and the utensils they use speak of their primitive type of life. Even for their food they depend largely on the products of the forest. And one of their favourite dishes is the locust.

Like everything else, the way of dressing of these people is very simple. The men are scantily dressed, while the women wear a type of a gown that covers them from head to foot. They love to tattoo their faces and wear necklaces. The women folk even wear a nose ring. And all have a passion for wearing shoes.

Even the organisation of the family reflects their primitive nature. The father exercises authority over the sons, while the mother, over the daughters. The boys are practically left to fend for themselves once they reach the age of 12 or 13; the girls are given a better deal. Both the sons and the daughters nourish a great love for the mother. Strangely, the father never takes his meals

¹³ Cf. *Vita di Missione*, in GM 8 (1930) 12, 256-258.

in his own house, but he is served in another house, used in common by the fathers of the families. Generally only the mother and the little children eat in their own families. Even the grown up children eat some where else.

Their primitiveness makes them wonder at the various instruments used by the missionaries. Even a thing like a doll becomes a thing of great attraction to them. The missionary is taken aback by their casual and apparently ungrateful attitude in front of the good done to them.¹⁴

In this primitive society, a personage greatly feared and who wields great authority over the simple people and with whom the missionary is in constant conflict, is the notorious sorcerer. When some parents decide to do away with some child, it is the sorcerer who takes it to the forest and leaves it there as prey to the wild beasts. Even though they may appear to be happy with the gifts that the missionaries offer, their conversion is obviously difficult.¹⁵

In 1947 an FMA, missionary in Congo, writes about the various aspects of the mission. The stress is again on the primitiveness of life of the black people. The region is undeveloped, with no roads and highways. The people live in small villages. Their huts are normally circular in shape with a diameter of about three or four metres. The thatched roofing almost touches the ground rendering the interior very dark. There is practically nothing inside the house by way of furnishing. The chief concern of the people is to get the food for the day.

GM's description of the character of the Congolese

Describing the character of the black children the same FMA writes: "In general these black children are docile, good, affectionate; they sing with particular sweetness the sacred hymns, are intelligent and learn their catechism quickly. [...] They are a happy and smart group. But they have a fickle character."¹⁶

¹⁴ Cf. PAPA M.T., *Usi e Costumi dei Neri*, in GM 13 (1935) 10, 188-189.

¹⁵ Cf. *Kaposa*, in GM 16 (1938) 4, 55.

¹⁶ *I Miei Congolesi*, in GM 24 (1946) 6, 67.

In a report of an FMA about the customs of the Congolese people in January 1951, the sister notes that while the children have a great love for their mothers, it is Congolese custom to turn one's back on the mother in law, and not to look her in the face. This letter too speaks of the apparent ungrateful nature of the people. The FMA writes, "Poor Congolese, they do not know how to distinguish between the right of giving and that of receiving; and so as not to be taken for a ride, they think it better to hold on always to their right of receiving!"¹⁷

One of the difficulties enumerated by the missionaries, for which the Congolese people are slow to accept the faith, even if they have a great desire to, is their apparent aversion for commandments and rules, and their fear for the "always". It is something that makes them retrace their steps. They like the free life, where their choice is not bound to any thing. And this ambience of individual freedom characterises even their family life. After a certain age the parents do not exercise any coercive authority over the children.

Because of their hard, primitive life, where the primary concern is to procure daily food, they do not have much inclination to aesthetics and even to natural beauty. They are a pragmatic people. But, in spite of their primitiveness, they demonstrate a heart that is sensitive and in their simplicity they live their faith with conviction in their day to day life.¹⁸

The superstitious nature of the Congolese

In 1955 February GM publishes quite a long article about the superstitions of the Congolese people written by an FMA. The sister introduces the article in this way, "The life of the black people turns around a texture of superstitions of all types."¹⁹ According to this report, some of their superstitions are harmless while others are harmful. Thus the belief that if a child is born

already with some small teeth, it brings misfortune to the whole village, is the cause of death of hundreds of innocent children. Similarly they believe that if at the time of the sprouting of the teeth, the first ones to sprout are the top molars, the child needs to be killed as it brings misfortune to the village. In their primitive and superstitious nature, death is almost always considered as something caused by some enemy. They believe in the power of spells and magic. But because of it, often innocent people are made to suffer. A motive of fear for the Congolese is the world of evil spirits who inflict various types of misfortunes on them. One way of placating these evil spirits is constructing some little huts and in them make some offering of flour of manioc and some coins. These superstitions are so ingrained in the life of the people that the missionary has an arduous task trying to divest them of it all.

The various ethnic groups of Congo

Only as late as 1957 does GM offer some precise information about the various ethnic groups that inhabit Congo. Besides a good portion of European population, there are three distinct indigenous groups: the Bantus, the pigmies and the Sudanese. The Bantus are the more numerous group and are found every where except in the north-east which is practically entirely occupied by the Sudanese. The Pigmies instead live in small groups in the interior forested regions.²⁰

GM presents a write up about the Pigmies in October 1957. It describes the race in these terms, "They are marked by distinct ethnic characteristics and particularly by their shortness of stature, by their dark coloured skin, their hairy body and their monstrous appearance."²¹ Describing their religious beliefs, the same article reports that the pigmies of Congo call the supreme being "Mungu". To *Mungu* belongs everything, he sees everything and hears everything. Sacrifices are offered to him. Returning from hunting, they throw in the forest a part of the heart of the prey for *Mungu*.

¹⁷ *Usanze Congolese*, in GM 29 (1951) 1, 7.

¹⁸ Cf. *Note di Vita Congolese*, in GM 30 (1952) 11, 10-11.

¹⁹ *Dal Congo Belga - Superstizioni Africane*, in GM 33 (1955) 2, 14.

²⁰ Cf. *Congo Belga*, in GM 35 (1957) 4, 3.

²¹ *I Pigmie*, in GM 35 (1957) 10, 14.

So too the first fruits are burnt in the fire for *Mungu*. These Pigmies have an idea of a life after death. They believe that the good go to live with God and the evil are thrown into the fire under the ground. The sense of right and wrong seems to be very high among them. They attribute great efficacy to amulets, magic etc. Unlike the rest of the population, they have no fear for the dead.

Ethiopia

The Salesians started their presence in Ethiopia only in 1976. Articles on the country begin to appear in GM from 1935. In fact the majority of the write ups appear within 1935 and 1936. And after 1936 GM remains almost silent about the region till after the World War II. This early and frequent appearance of notices about Ethiopia apparently is motivated by the Italian colonisation of the country, and some kind of an imposition from the then Italian government to glorify the "Italian empire". GM does not enter into any political discussion of the situation, instead concentrates on the history of the Church in the region,²² on certain aspects of the lives of the people, and some of their practices. As noted earlier it even offers a mini Ethiopian-Italian dictionary!

The Ethiopians and their customs

Obviously the article "Usances and Customs of the Ethiopians" of September 1936 is written to highlight the

²² GM traces the history of the Church in Ethiopia, right from its first contact with the faith through the two slaves Frumenzius and Edesius, the establishment of a vibrant community, its decisive break from the Church of Rome, the various missionary efforts during the various centuries, and to the actual situation of the Catholic missions in the country. Cfr. *Storia dell'Abissinia*, in GM 13 (1935) 11, 217; 13 (1935) 12, 235; *Il Cristianesimo in Abissinia*, in GM 14 (1936) 1, 16; DI SAN GRADO A., *Un Abissino alla Gloria degli Altari*, in GM 14 (1936) 2, 24-25; *Le Attuali Missioni Cattoliche in Abissinia*, in GM 14 (1936) 3, 38. In the period after the World War II, when GM tends to present various aspects of single missionary regions together in single issue, there is a comprehensive summary of the history of the Church in Ethiopia in September 1956. Cfr. *Il Cristianesimo in Etiopia*, in GM 32 (1956) 9, 6-7; The story is taken up again in January 1967, but with a projection of the actual difficulties that missionary activity encounters in modern Ethiopia both in the social and religious fields. Cfr. PERINETTI F., *La Terra del Negus*, in GM 45 (1967) 1, 9-11.

advantages that the Italian occupation has brought to the Ethiopians, and to put in contrast the primitive ways existent prior to it.

Prior to the Italian occupation, there was little care for the children. Once they were capable of walking about, they were left on their own. Education was limited to very few, and was imparted by some Coptic priest, and all that he taught was to read some religious books and some sacred hymns. This primitiveness marked their family life and their social set up as well. Each village had a council of the fathers of the families, headed by a sort of village head man. Everything was decided by this body. And every one blindly obeyed the decisions made by these elders.

Their food was very simple, the preferred dish being uncooked food. Both men and women dressed very simple. Their occupation was the rearing of cattle and agriculture, but using methods very primitive, and producing just what was necessary to maintain the family. The merchants among them exploited the ignorant villagers. In conclusion the article states: "In general, the Ethiopians were averse to all that which could elevate them. Always diffident by nature, they attached themselves to nothing, not even to their own mother land."²³

Funeral Rites of the Ethiopians

In continuation with the notices about the customs and practices of the people of Ethiopia, GM in November 1936 published an article on the funeral rites of the Abissinians. Among them, when the dying person was really on the verge of breathing his last, the relations came out of the house with loud shouts, and the village joined in this shouting and lamenting. In a short time people gathered before the house of the dead person lamenting and crying. The women folk slowly started a slow dance, singing the praises of the dead person. In the mean time messengers were sent out to the relations near and far to bring the sad news. The dead body was covered and tightly tied in the sheet and placed on the bed on which the person

²³ *Usi e Costumi Etiopici*, in GM 14 (1936) 9, 142-144.

died. The Coptic priests arrived to recite psalms and other prayers. After that, four persons carried the body on the bed on which the body was kept to the church and then to the cemetery. The people followed in procession. When they reached the church, the bed was lowered and the men formed a circle around it. The women in the mean time started a kind of dance again outside the church. After the prayers in the church, the body was carried to the cemetery which was always near the church. Cries, lamentations and dancing became all the more when the body was lowered into the grave. The family kept a mourning period of 15 days when they did not even wash themselves or change their clothes. In this time the fellow-villagers visited the family and brought what it needed by way of food etc. On the first anniversary, they celebrated the rites in the church in the morning, and later in the day, offered a solemn meal to all the relations and friends, thus closing the period of mourning.²⁴

Some aspects of the Ethiopian character

In February 1937 GM published again another article on the customs of the Ethiopians, taking much of the matter from an article published in «Vie d'Italia» of July 1936. This publication notes that the Ethiopian is by instinct a warrior and a hunter. The virtue most admired in any person, especially in a man, is that of courage. For them it is a question of great honour to kill one's enemy in battle or to kill a lion. They marry at an early age. The women do not work in the fields because of the superstition that such a thing would render the land sterile.

In the family, there is great love for children and respect for the aged. They have a great sense of hospitality. Their sense of compassion induces them to assist the sick, to help the poor and the disabled. They are noted for the great veneration they have for the dead.²⁵

²⁴ Cf. *Curiosi Riti Funebri tra i Selvaggi*, in GM 14 (1936) 11, 174-175.

²⁵ Cf. *Usti e Costumi Vigeniti nell'Impero Italiano*, in GM 15 (1937) 2, 22-23.

Rwanda

Although the Salesians arrived in Rwanda only in 1953, articles on the country started appearing from 1949 onwards. There is very little mention about how the Salesian work started in this country. In February 1954 GM publishes the photo of Fr. Frans Lehaen SDB with the king of Rwanda, Carlo Rudahigwa, and notes that after much insistence on the part of the king, the Salesians have opened a technical school at Kabgayi, the capital of Rwanda. In May 1961, among other notices about the country, GM notes that the Salesians have two institutions in Rwanda: the professional school at Kigali and a seminary at Rwesero.²⁶

Considering the fact that the Salesian presence was started in Rwanda only in 1953, one would say that GM dedicated sufficient space to information about the country and its people. True to its missionary nature, much of the information is related to the Church, its initiation and its present status.²⁷

Rwanda – a vast oasis in the African desert

In July 1949 GM publishes a comprehensive report on Rwanda, written by Frans Lehaen, the Provincial Superior of Belgium. The article is written from Elisabethville in May 1949. Lehaen gives a good description of Rwanda, its land, its people, the Church in this country and the missionary prospects in the region. The author takes pains to picture the natural setting of the country, bordered in the north by a series of volcanoes, some of them active, in the east by the river Kagera, in the south by the

²⁶ Cf. *A Kabgayi*, in GM 32 (1954) 2, 9; *Chiesa – Ruanda*, in GM 39 (1961) 6, 29.

²⁷ In its narration of the history of the Church in Rwanda, GM highlights the role of king Mutara III Rubahigwa in the spread of the faith in this country. His father had opposed the spread of the faith. But Mutara, as a young man, was in contact with the missionaries and was a catechumen in secret. For notices about the initiation of the Church in Rwanda and for its present status cf. LEHAEN F., *Nel Paese dei Giganti*, in GM 27 (1949) 7, 8-9, 11; *Ruanda: Paese dei Giganti*, in GM 30 (1952) 11, 12-13; *Chiesa – Ruanda*, 27-29.

river Akanyuru which separates it from Burundi and in the west by the lake Kivu. It is a land that does not have winter. It is an area with an average altitude of 500 – 3000 metres above sea level. There is an almost invariable temperature of about 18°, and the plants are ever green. There are four seasons, based on the intensity of the rainfall: the short period of dry weather in the full month of January, the great season of heavy rains from February to June, the long season of dry weather from the end of June to the end of September, and the short rainy season from October to January. In earlier times Rwanda was a forested region, ideal habitat for various types of wild animals. The national park of Kagera with its rich collection of wild animals, is world famous. Agriculture and pasturing of cattle are the chief occupations of the people.²⁸

Rwandan population and its occupation

This nation is relatively more populated than the others in Africa. There are three groups of indigenous people: Batwa, Bahutu and Batutsi. The Batwas belong to the family of the pigmies. They were the first occupants of the region. They are 1.42 metres to 1.47 metres tall. They are by nature people of the forest, nomads, who live on hunting and fishing. The Bahutu form 80% of the population. They are similar to the black population of Congo. They are mainly farmers. They are a peace-loving people. The Batutsi are true giants, the average height being 1.79 metres! Their chief occupation is pasturing of cattle. They constitute the aristocracy and nobility of Rwanda.²⁹

Deep-rooted division in the Rwandan society

The notices found in GM in May 1961 add little details to the general picture presented by Lehaen. These reports highlight the social upheaval that was menacing the Rwandan society during the period. The Batwas were despised by the other two groups even from the earliest times. The Bahutus who formed the majority of the population, did not have much political power. The Batutsi

²⁸ Cf. LEHAEN F., *Nel Paese dei Giganti*, 8-9, 11.

²⁹ Cf. LEHAEN F., *Nel Paese dei Giganti*, 8-9, 11.

who had so far dominated the other two groups in a feudal way, were being driven out from various regions. The problem that confronted the Church was precisely this social upheaval.³⁰

Madagascar

Salesian presence in Madagascar started only in 1981. Yet reports about beautiful island, its history and its people occupied much space in the 1959 issues of GM. Obviously all the information comes from the editorial board. Some of the reports are shown as written by Zucchetti, while others are of anonymous authorship. The emphasis is on the history of the missions in the island country.³¹

Madagascar – the rose island

From the scattered reports, coming from the editorial board of GM, one could form the following general picture of Madagascar and its people.

It is called the “rose island” because of the great presence of the element of stone in its soil. It has a hot and rainy climate, ideal for the cultivation of rice. The chief occupations of the people are cattle rearing and agriculture. Methods of cultivation used are very primitive. The language is Malagasy, a mixture of Asiatic, African and Oceanic languages.

The Madagascans and their general character

The population of Madagascar is divided into various tribal groups: Hova or Merina, Betsileo, Betsimisaraka, Tanala, Sakalava,

³⁰ Cf. *Terra – Ruanda*, in GM 39 (1961) 6, 20; *Popolo – Ruanda*, in GM 39 (1961) 6, 22-26; *Chiesa – Ruanda*, 27-29.

³¹ GM gives a brief sketch of the history of Madagascar from its discovery by the Portuguese Diego Diaz in 1500 up to its becoming a republic in 1958. The evangelising work of the missionaries was established on a permanent basis only from the year 1861, although there were efforts at christianising the island by earlier groups of missionaries. However, these earlier groups left the island after some period, apparently due to the lack of progress in the work. Cf. *Madagascar*, in GM 33 (1955) 10, 6-7; ZUCCHETTI D., *Storia Madagascar*, in GM 37 (1959) 11, 8-11; *Le Missioni nel Madagascar*, in GM 37 (1959) 11, 16.

Tsimihety, Antaisaka, Antandroy, Bara etc. The Hova is intelligent, enterprising, but an introvert. The other tribals are expansive, simple, happy, always ready to enter into friendship with the foreigners, and great lovers of music and dance.

The Madagascans, on the whole, are primitive but not savage; they have great respect for the aged and great love for children: Their characteristic feature seems to be their love for a peaceful life!

Religious beliefs and practices of the Madagascans

The pagan Madagascans are animists, with a great cult for the ancestors. They have some vague ideas of a creator god. They have a host of other gods who according to local belief, live in the forests and in the rivers. Their religion has neither temples nor priests. The king, the heads of the tribes, and the fathers of the families are the intermediaries between the numerous gods and the people. Marriage is left to the free choice of the partners. All the tribal groups bury the dead, except for the Baras who expose the dead body till it rots away. The Merinas and the Sihanakas bury the dead near to their homes or along the road as they have no fear for the dead. All the other groups bury them away in forest.

The Madagascans do not have sir-names. The Christians have usually two names: one that they receive at Baptism, usually the name of some saint, and the other which they call the Madagascan name. These latter names have always some meaning.³²

Conclusion

It is in coming in contact with a people that one really comes to know them. Therefore, the personal experiences of the missionaries have great value. Barring certain undue generalizations the reports of GM speak much about customs and more about

certain values of the people that the missionaries met. They speak well of the intuition of the missionaries into the nature of the people. The missionaries were sensitive to what they found good and bad in the people they served.

In evaluating the various reports, it is easy to lose sight of the purpose of the periodical: to create enthusiasm for the missions, to sow the seeds of missionary vocation and to sustain them, to create a missionary culture in the various institutions for the young. The temptation is to judge these reports with the present measures. This would certainly be anachronistic! The reports had a purpose, and if they served that purpose in that fixed period of time they served their purpose. There is a constant development of perspectives on different peoples and their cultures. While respecting the progressive changes, the past needs to be valued in its own context.

Compassion is the one characteristic of a missionary. One cannot deny that this characteristic marks everything that is found in GM. One cannot deny occasional "lord it over" mentality. But that is rare! And even in those rare cases, it is a general tone of compassion for the suffering people that marks the reports of GM. The evil practices are not the creations of the present generations. They are often the sufferers! They are in some way condemned to perpetuate a social system which they themselves in some way know are destructive. And therefore, they need the help of people from outside their cultures to enlighten them and to walk with them in the process of liberation: people capable of understanding and suffering with them.

³² Cf: *Madagascar*, 6-7; ZUCCHETTI D., *L'Isola Rossa*, in GM 37 (1959) 11, 4-7; ZUCCHETTI D., *Storia Malgascia*, 8-11; *Il Riso*, in GM 37 (1959) 11, 20; *I Nomi Malgasci*, in GM 37 (1959) 11, 22.

of one who is deeply moved by the value of the saving death of Jesus on the Cross. As projected by GM there is no denying the truth that Jesus is the primary motivation of all and of everything that the missionary lives. In front of a personal and profound appropriation of the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus the honest believer cannot but be a missionary. In that case the believer begins to be a missionary, not when he leaves his homeland and sets out to a distant land, but at the moment of an inner awareness of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

The question that the missionary confronts is not “will a person be saved or not without believing in Christ?” The answer to this question cannot be considered as the pivotal point of missionary activity. It has to be admitted that for the period in which GM was published the official teaching of the Church on this issue augmented missionary enthusiasm in some way. But as presented by GM this was just not the primary motive. Moreover, if others are lost or not, why should one be so bothered as to sacrifice everything precious in the world and go to distant lands ready even to give one’s life just to preach salvation? The colonizers had much to gain: the wealth of the new found regions. But the missionary, what did he really have to gain? Nothing! If so, the answer to the question regarding the inner motivation of the missionary, as wonderfully presented by GM lies in that primary passion for Jesus Christ, and depending on this, the secondary passion for salvation of souls.

The *Da mihi animas* of Don Bosco too cannot be interpreted and properly understood just by starting from a mere exegesis of the words. One would have to start an understanding of the phrase beginning from a delving into the motives for such a passion for souls. Otherwise Don Bosco too would be none other than a greedy colonizer, now greedy for souls, who knows for what purpose! Don Bosco and so too the Salesian missionary, and for that matter any missionary, has found the source of that passion for souls in the passion of the Son of Man.

The second love of the missionary is an all embracing love for mankind. The source of it is again Christ himself and the

CONCLUSION

Mission is a matter of faith. When the Vatican Council II proclaimed that the Church was missionary by its very nature (cf. AG 2), it was pointing to this basic constituent of Christian faith. After their personal experience of the Risen Lord, the two disciples of Emmaus had to rush back to Jerusalem to announce the glad tidings to the others. At the filling with the Holy Spirit, the apostles just could not but proclaim the Good News. It is a matter of an inner necessity. “Necessity is laid on me” (1Cor 11:16).

Today there is so much debate still on “why the missions?” So much is offered by way of an answer to a surely vital question like this, some times convincing, at other times not so convincing. The answer that GM gave for a span of over 45 years is “Mission is fundamentally a matter of faith”. And it understood faith simply as a passion for Jesus and His mission! It was not merely enlisting oneself in one group or other, and much less the fulfilment of a set of rules which seemed to be better than others. It was a question of entering into a deep relationship with Jesus and consequently making one’s own the concerns of this Master, the way that the apostles did it, the way that St. Paul and thousands of valiant missionaries did it after him.

The missionary then is basically a Christian who has in some way tasted the core of what it means to be a believer, has found joy in it, and loves that reality with passion. The missionary does not ask “why the missions?” instead, driven by that inner necessity, the question that he constantly confronts and lives is “how the mission?” He has already found the answers to the “why” in that inner motivating dynamism of his faith, and all his concern now becomes the “how”.

The image of the missionary projected by the pages of GM is that of a person deeply and passionately in love with Jesus and

missionary's passion for Christ. It is a love that seeks to become like the Master in his relationship with humankind. Materially speaking, he gains nothing from his dedication to the people of the missions. These people are not his people, who speak his language, have his mode of thinking and acting. Often there is little that is attractive about these people! Often enough what the people of the missions have to offer to the missionary is their poverty, their misery, their ignorance, their superstitions and their backwardness. Yet, the missionary simply loves these people with a love that is "pastoral": the love of the good Shepherd who lives for the sheep, and gives his life for his sheep! He makes the land of his mission his second fatherland, its people his people, their customs and traditions his own. Often, paradoxically, it is he the non-local who loves the indigenous people even more than their own family members, and who sacrifices everything for their welfare. It is the good of the people entrusted to him that he seeks in everything and above everything. The risks he accepts, the dangers he faces, the sacrifices he makes are all aimed at one goal: the all round welfare of the people he serves. A person without such "pastoral charity" in his heart should not launch out into the missions. And if for some reason he does launch out, he is destined to failure, he will bring immense harm on the people, and he will be the cause of failure of the mission! Mission is not a place of escape from personal and particularly relational problems. Mission needs men who are already tried and have passed the test, and like Don Bosco are capable of loving with a true pastoral heart. A person incapable of loving will never make a missionary!

The missionary's love for humankind is not just the philanthropic love of a "do-gooder". It is "pastoral charity" drawn by the heart of Christ. He is not in the mission field just to do some good, merely for the purpose of educating the young, not even only for the sake of liberating and developing society. He is involved in all these activities. In fact pastoral charity finds expression precisely in all these activities. However, just involvement in these activities does not make of a person a "missionary". It is more a question of a vision, a mentality, a

motivation and a definite direction that belongs intrinsically to the very physique of the missionary. Missionary action motivated simply by the desire to do some good could be compared to the burning of a huge heap of straw! It is all over within a few minutes, and then it dies off leaving just a handful of ashes.

In the Salesian missionary vision, the missionary is one who is deeply marked by a profound love for the Church. He receives the missionary mandate from the Church, he is a man of the Church in all he does. He certainly not only desires but also works to bring all into the Church. He is not apologetic when it comes to calling people to acceptance of discipleship in the Catholic Church. He knows he is there for that, and rejoices when he can bring even a single person to the Church. He values the Church not merely in its hierarchical structure, but more as a community founded and desired by Christ, a community that has found life in the saving passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, and exists now to live and extend this same divine reality to all humankind: a true sacrament of salvation to the world (cf. LG 1). Everything that is related to the Church forms holy ground for the Salesian missionary. He truly lives the passion of Don Bosco for the Church. This does not make him belligerent. However, he does not compromise when it comes to matters which he believes and knows for certain are founded solidly on divine revelation and the magisterial teaching of the Church. He is capable of seeing good in all religions, but he surely longs to realize the prayer of the divine Master, "that they may all be one" (Jn 17:21).

In the Salesian vision, the missionary is a passionate person. He is passionate in his acceptance of the call, passionate in his leaving everything behind to heed the demands of this call, and passionate too in his dedication to all that he deems as part of his saving activity. Most of the young people leaving the shores of Europe for distant mission lands like South America, the Far East and for Africa, knew that they were leaving whatever they could call their own, and that too once and for all! Little did they hope to see again their homelands, their parents, their near and dear ones. That was the radicality of that passion! Liberated from all

other human bonds, they in the missions bound themselves for ever to their country of adoption, and to the people they came to serve. And what dedication? One can only look in admiration at the true missionary spirit found in the great pioneers whom the Congregation has given to the Church and to the world! They displayed a Bosconian passion in their commitment to their mission!

In “mission” the Salesian congregation found a reality that helped the beneficiaries in the distant lands, and along with them benefited also the sent and the sender. Besides the incalculable spiritual good brought about by the missionaries, they were real civilizers of the nations: they established schools, colleges, technical schools; built hospitals and made medical facilities available to the poorest of the poor; built houses, furthered the cause of development in all fields in these distant lands and laid the foundations for growth and progress in different sectors of life. The missionaries of all times and all climes were true servants of humankind.

Mission also helped the missionary. The hard realities of the life of the missionary formed the heroes in the vast majority of them. True, some succumbed and left. But this group formed a most negligible minority. On the contrary, the true missionary made use of these realities to bring out what was best in him, and in the process of it truly got to the highest rings in the ladder of holiness. In a “normal” Christian community, one passes for good and satisfactory just being mediocre and fulfilling the rules which often demand just the minimum! Ease and comfort envelope the life of any one in these “comfortable” communities. Not so the life in the missions. The very demands of the day to day life of the missionary require a high level of Christian discipleship. When one is set ablaze with the zeal for the “salvation of souls” there is little space for ease and comfort. The call of the mission is basically addressed to the more generous souls, and essentially requires greater sense of dedication, and the generous souls are those who find in the missions a true path to that radical following of Christ which marks the saints. The life of the missionary, lived out

enthusiastically and with commitment, is certainly a way of living life in its fullness! And that is sanctity!

Missions benefits the sender too. Here, the sender is not just an indifferent agency that simply fulfills the obligation of sending out new personnel into the missions. The sender is an essential part of the missions, and has the missions very much at heart. In the case of the present study, the sender is the Salesian Congregation. And the missions helped in a great way this young congregation, particularly through the missionary animation of the young of its various institutions. It enthused these youngsters, and they in some way flocked in great numbers to join the ranks of the frontier missionaries. Evidently the missionary fervour of the years between 1920 and 1960 contributed greatly to the prodigious growth of the Congregation. The Congregation experienced growth both at home in the European countries, and in the mission lands. It was not a mere swelling up of numbers! Reading the scanty reports available in the pages of GM about the life and spirit of the various institutions, one would get an impression that the new comers into the Congregation during this period came with a spirit marked with great generosity, heroism, and added not merely to the numerical growth of the Congregation, but also to its growth in holiness of life.

The methodology of missionary animation of GM had little of the spectacular or of the extraordinary in it. In fact, one outstanding characteristic of the review seems to have been its simplicity. Simple narrations of life situations of the missionaries and of the missions, ardent appeals of the pioneers for helpers to join their ranks, facts and stories of missionary heroism, examples of groups of youngsters who did something for the missions, indications of what each one could do even in their own situations in favour of the missions etc: these filled the pages of GM. And certainly the tie up with the association of young missionaries! This simple methodology produced magnificent fruits. Sooner than later, the various salesian institutions were in a holy competition with each other: who will have the most number of associates, the greatest number of subscriptions for the review, who will be able

to send the largest contributions to the center for the support of the missions and the missionary aspirantates, who will be able to send the biggest group of youngsters to the houses of formation of future missionaries? And the result of it all on these very institutions: a new type of youth spirituality, vibrant with missionary enthusiasm! GM became a methodology for creating good spirit in these various institutions, and as noted above a greatly efficacious methodology for the promotion and nurturing of vocations to the priesthood and to religious life.

Even in the initial stages of the periodical, there was a certain fear on the part of some that the naked projection of the actual difficulties of the mission territories would serve as a wet blanket on the enthusiasm of many young people to opt for the missions. But, the actual reaction of the young to these and other projections of the missionary reality was quite contrary to the fears of these sceptics. The young daringly opted purposefully for these hardships, and even in their own situations formed themselves to meet the future with a manly spirit. Even stories of martyrs in the mission field did not dampen their spirits, instead aroused in the young the great eagerness to join their ranks, probably to be martyred along with them!

Not all are heroes, neither are all cowards! Heroism and cowardice, courage and fear, daring and withdrawal form part of every human person. It is simply a question of which aspect is nurtured, and by what means. GM chose to nurture heroism, courage and daring, and consequently it reaped a wonderful harvest.

In an era of colonisation, political, economical and cultural, this periodical of missionary animation chose a different direction: to be a cultural bridge, linking the readers with the peoples of the different corners of the world. And the link was not through fanning the flames of ambition to conquer, but through nourishing what was truly human in every one: understanding, compassion and sympathy. True, the language of GM was the language of its day. Terms like “savage”, “uncivilized”, “barbarian” etc. have been used by the editors to characterize the indigenous people of missions.

If one were to stop merely at the words, these could be occasions of hurt. If, instead, one goes beyond the words to understand the reason for use of such apparently disparaging terminology, it will not be hard to find a sympathetic understanding of the indigenous people. In defence of the periodical, it should be noted that terms like “savage”, “barbarian” are used particularly in reporting about societies that in some way sanction practices that even today would be considered not worthy of human beings like the killing of innocent children, head hunting, caste system, sorcery etc. Even when GM reports these evils, it is not primarily with the motive of showing up one’s superiority of culture, instead, it is to highlight to the young readers the urgency of the situation in the missions, to arouse their generosity and call them to some action to root out these practices. GM well knows that such practices do degrade a whole society. But it is also aware that the same practices are not endorsed by the vast majority of the population; often these are the forceful imposition of a powerful minority, at other times these simply form part of the package of an unquestioned heritage, blindly continued, often again to the advantage of some section in society. The majority often forms the part of the silent sufferer! And therefore, the attitude of GM, and so of the missionary, to the people at large is certainly one of sympathy. The missionary feels the need to do something, and that too in a hurry, to liberate the people from age old slavery to inhuman practices.

Appreciable indeed is the wide collection of cultural practices of different ethnic groups of the indigenous people of the missions found in the pages of GM. Going beyond the periodical, this element points to a quality of the missionary: appreciation for the cultural diversity so characteristic of mission lands. From the pages of GM it has to be strongly affirmed that Christianization has never been presented as a process of Europeanization or Westernisation of peoples: a type of cultural colonization. GM was born in the period after the publication of the great missionary encyclical *Maximum Illud* of Benedict XV where the missionary was strongly urged to refrain from any activity that would smack of colonization. Besides, the Holy Father in the said encyclical had called for an

appreciation of the local cultures, and for action in favour of maintaining all that was genuinely human in these cultures. Therefore, the missionary is one who appreciates the local culture and makes it more and more his own following the incarnational methodology of the Divine Master. Justly does the periodical put up the examples of missionaries who contributed significantly even in the cultural field. Truly, the missionary is one who leaves one fatherland and its mores and modes of living and finds in the mission another fatherland, and accepts and appropriates its mores and modes of life.

Some in the missions today seem to be asking “what is particularly Salesian about the Salesian missions? Aren’t the Salesians doing the same things as the other missionaries do? Aren’t they living the same reality as the others do? What element puts a Salesian mission apart from a non-Salesian one?” Framing the question positively, one would ask “What characteristics should mark a Salesian mission?” Although the Salesian, like the other missionaries, is engaged in the one mission of the Church, he exhibits a method, an approach that could properly be called Salesian. Every congregation and missionary institute brings to the missions their own charisma and spirituality. If not, they forfeit the right to be in the missions. Engagement in a common enterprise does not mean the levelling down of all differences in charisma and methodology. Through its various reports GM proves that the salesian missionary does not ever loose the predilection for youth, and that too the poor and the abandoned, that is characteristic of the salesian charisma. It is through the youth that he approaches the adults. Wherever they went, the salesians established oratories, schools, hostels, technical schools. But more than the institutions, it was a style of activity oriented towards the young that characterised the salesians. The success of the salesian missionaries depended precisely on their salesian methodology. Their missions grew, they were entrusted with one region after another, they enjoyed the favour of the ecclesiastical authorities because of that aspect that was particularly salesian in their work of evangelisation. They took Don Bosco and his system to the four corners of the

world. With the Valdocan Oratory firmly rooted in their hearts, they established Don Bosco houses wherever they went.

The projection of a particular image of the mission and of the missionary in what it proposed as a process of missionary formation of the young, would bring to light the relevance of this image itself. From the many reports in the periodical itself, GM within a short period, became the missionary review of all the students of the salesian institutions. Its reports fascinated its young readers. It really sold the idea of the missions and of the missionary to young in a way to make of them missionaries of the missionaries. In its own time, this image of the missions and the missionary formed the nucleus of a formative process. In many cases this process culminated in a personal appropriation of that image as one’s life dream, and in a dedication of oneself to the salvation of souls in distant lands. From the various reports found in GM itself, and from the occasional assertions of the Major Superiors of the Congregation, one easily deduces that it was the idea of the missions that attracted and motivated many youngsters in their choice of the salesian life. It would not be true to ascribe only to GM and the missionary association the prodigious growth of the Congregation. There were very other factors that played their due role. But, certainly, the image of the missions and of the missionary projected by this simple periodical fascinated many young people and played its role in the choices they made. In its own time, it was relevant!

One would think that it was the projection of the image of the missions and of the missionary in folkloristic and easy to read style that contributed to the great success of GM. The projection of the image of the missionary as a real hero who did great things for a people so much in need, obviously appealed to the young readers. GM’s missionary was a true hero, but whose heroism consisted in spending one’s life in service of saving the ignorant, the poor and the abandoned. GM presented to the young a combination of great heroism with great human and spiritual strength.

No one is born just to live for oneself. The orientation to the other is written into the structure of the human person. It is only in relationships that the person realizes oneself. More challenging these relationships, greater the realization that can be achieved! Mission is a spirituality not only oriented to mission lands. It is a spirituality that can be lived meaningfully any where and any time, and that can be a very efficacious means of personal growth for the young. The story of GM is the story of a youth missionary spirituality. In an era when the tendency is to lock oneself up in the narrow confines of interests centered most often on the self, the challenge of the vast unconfined mission lands could supply a more meaningful alternative to live life with greater meaning and greater satisfaction.

APPENDIX 1

TRANSCRIPT OF THE LETTER OF PROVISORY COMMITTEE OF GIOVENTÙ MISSIONARIA TO PAUL ALBERA

Torino, 16 Luglio 1921

Rev.mo Sig. D. ALBERA,

L'eco del suo caldo appello sulle Vocazioni Salesiane è giunto anche a noi del Primo Oratorio Festivo di D. Bosco e ci ha invogliati, spronati a rispondere noi pure, nel miglior modo possibile, ai suoi santi desideri e voleri, e gareggiare noi pure, coi suoi figli Salesiani, nella santa impresa di promuovere e coltivare le Vocazione Salesiane e specialmente le Missionarie.

E perché la nostra umile cooperazione sia quanto più possibile larga e duratura ed efficace abbiamo creduto bene di costituirci in Associazione Missionaria permanente affine di promuovere e aiutare le Vocazione Missionarie.

A tale effetto ci siamo costituiti in Comitato provvisorio, con l'adesione entusiastica di un forte gruppo di giovani dell'Oratorio, e redatto un schema di Statuto che ci permettiamo di sottoporre alla sua autorevolissima approvazione.

Noi osiamo sperare dalla sua bontà non solo l'approvazione, ma altresì la sua paterna benedizione ed il suo benevolo appoggio.

Con questa speranza siamo lieti di professarci

Obbl.mi in C.J.

IL COMITATO PROVISSORIO

Sd. Gaspare Balma, Luigi Pisani, Pietro Pivano.

GIOVENTÙ MISSIONARIA PER LE VOCAZIONI MISSIONARIE

Costituzione. – Mossi dal pietoso lamento del Divin Redentore: La messe è certo molta ma gli operai sono pochi, e dall'accorato appello del suo Vicario Benedetto XV nella sua lettera apostolica sulle missioni, nonché dalle paterne insistenti esortazioni e preghiere di Don Bosco e dei suoi Successori e dei missionari in genere, gli Allievi ed Ex-Allievi del I° Oratorio Festivo di Don Bosco hanno costituito l'Associazione "Gioventù Missionaria".

Scopo. – Lo Scopo è di promuovere le vocazioni missionarie, di aiutare a formarle e a sostenerle nell'apostolato.

Soci. – Tutta la gioventù dell'uno e dell'altro sesso degli Oratori, dei Circoli, delle Unioni, dei Collegi, delle Scuole ecc. può appartenere alla Associazione. Può appartenere altresì ogni altra persona a cui sta a cuore la gloria di Dio e la salvezza delle anime. – I soci si dividono in attivi, propagandisti e benemeriti. Attivi sono quelli che corrispondono regolarmente al programma. Propagandisti – collettori sono quelli che si fanno apostoli dell'Opera, si incaricano di raccogliere le offerte; da essi principalmente dipende il felice successo e lo sviluppo dell'Associazione. Benemeriti sono quelli che appoggiano particolarmente l'Opera e vi concorrono con generose offerte.

Mezzi. – I° Pregarla, conforme all'insegnamento di Gesù che disse: Pregate il Padrone della messe che mandi operai a lavorare nella sua vigna. I soci quindi mettono l'intenzione che le loro preghiere quotidiane siano anche indirizzate per le vocazioni missionarie. Inoltre offrono a tale scope Messe, Comunioni, Rosari ecc.; 2° Propaganda, col diffondere l'Opera, col fare conoscere la sublimità, la necessità delle Vocazioni Missionarie, col promuovere, coltivare, indirizzare ad Istituti Missionari quei giovani che aspirano a sì nobile e santo ideale; 3° Offerte, per cui i soci si impegnano di versare almeno due soldi al mese o più secondo il loro zelo e la loro possibilità. Chi non può versare nemmeno i due soldi vi supplisca con più abbondanti preghiere.

Vantaggi. – I° Quello eccelso di cooperare con Gesù Cristo alla salvezza delle anime; 2° Quello di partecipare alle preghiere che gli Aspiranti Missionari fanno ogni giorno per i loro benefattori; 3° Quello di partecipare a tutte le opere di zelo che vanno compiendo i Missionari.

Funzionamento. — "Gioventù Missionaria" sceglie a suo Patrono Maria Ausiliatrice, a suo modello Domenico Savio, a Superiore il Rettor Maggiore dei Salesiani. È diretta ed amministrata da un Presidente, da un Segretario, da un Cassiere, assistiti da un Assistente Ecclesiastico, nominati tutti dal Superiore. Al Superiore saranno raccomandate in modo particolare le Vocazioni Missionarie, al cui mantenimento saranno devoluti interamente i proventi dell'Opera.

Organo e mezzi di propaganda. Organo è il Bollettino Salesiano. Mezzi di propaganda sono i foglietti "Gioventù Missionaria" che vengono spediti ai propagandisti e a chiunque altri ne faccia richiesta. L'Associazione fa inoltre molto assegnamento sulla propaganda dei soci e sulla cooperazione attivi degli Allievi ed Ex-Allievi Salesiani, delle Allieve ed Ex-Allieve delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice, dei Cooperatori e delle Cooperatrici Salesiane e di ogni altra persona a cui sta a cuore la propagazione della fede e della civiltà.

Per informazioni rivolgersi a "Gioventù Missionaria" – Via Cottolengo 32, Torino

Comitato provvisorio

Pivano Pietro: Presidente
Pisani Luigi: Cassiere
Balma Gaspare: Segretario

APPENDIX 2

TRANSCRIPT OF THE REPLY OF PAUL ALBERA TO THE LETTER OF THE PROVISORY COMMITTEE

Ai Carissimi
PIVANO PIETRO, PISANI LUIGI, BALMA GASPARE,
costituenti

Il Comitato Provisorio dell'Associazione "Gioventù
Missionaria" per le Vocazioni, nel I° Oratorio festivo
Del Venerabile Don Bosco.

Con grande gioia dell'animo mio ho letto la vostra bella lettera del 16 corrente, e presa visione dello schema di Statuto dell'Associazione "Gioventù Missionaria" per le vocazioni, la quale voi avete in animo di far sorgere tra i vostri compagni del I° festivo di Don Bosco, e di propagare in tutta quanta la gioventù cattolica.

Tra le cose che potevate ideare per fare del bene, questa di cooperare efficacemente a formare dei buoni Missionari è certo una delle più sante e necessarie, stando a quello che pensava San Vincenzo de'Paoli, il quale lasciò scritto "Pensiamo pure fin che vorremo, ma troveremo di non poter contribuire a cosa più grande che a formare un buon prete." E il nostro Ven. Padre Don Bosco, facendo suo questo pensiero, si diede a promuovere e coltivare le vocazioni con tale zelo, da meritarsi di venire chiamato Apostolo delle vocazioni sacerdotali-religiose.

È quindi cosa convenientissima che il primo Oratorio festivo da Lui fondato, dal quale Egli trasse eccellenti vocazioni, si faccia in certo modo continuatore dell'Apostolate paterno in modo più regolare ed efficace mediante l'Associazione testè costituita, che io perciò benedico di tutto cuore, augurando a me ed a voi che i

suoi aderenti divengano così numerosi da poter mettere insieme ogni anno la somma necessaria per far studiare non uno solo ma parecchi giovani che si sentano chiamati a farsi missionari. Ogni legione di mille soci, i quali si obbligassero di mettere in serbo a tal fine almeno una lira all'anno per ciascuno, potrebbe far studiare un futuro missionario. Ora io ho fiducia che, lanciata quest'ottima iniziativa, si farà di tutto per tradurla in atto con tenace e perseverante lavoro, e si riuscirà, coll'aiuto del Signore, a raccogliere migliaia di soci, sia tra gli allievi ed ex-allievi del Oratorio e i loro parenti, si negli altri oratorii festivi maschili e femminili, dove potrebbero costituirsi sezioni apposite.

Ma questo scopo di raccogliere i mezzi per far studiare i futuri Missionari non è, se ben vago, che uno scopo secondario della "Gioventù Missionaria" mentre il principale sarebbe quello di suscitare e coltivare in gran numero le vocazioni stesse tra i giovani degli Oratorii festivi, sia col mezzo potente della preghiera, sia con apposite conferenze, sia ancora procurando di risvegliare l'aspirazione all'apostolato in quei giovani in cui uno studi amoroso e costante faccia riconoscere le doti a ciò necessarie. Proposito questo ancor più eccellente e meritorio.

All'opera dunque! La nostra benignissima Ausiliatrice coll'angelico Servo di Dio, Domenico Savio, vi ottengano dal Signore la forza e gli aiuti necessari per l'attuazione del vostro magnifico disegno, e in particolare i lumi per ben redigere lo Statuto e il Regolamento definitivo dell'Associazione, poiché da ciò dipende in sommo grado il successo dell'impresa. Io pregherò con fervore a tal fine; e certo Don Bosco non mancherà di appoggiare le mie povere preghiere col suo valido patrocinio.

Salutandovi intanto di cuore insieme con tutti i vostri cari,
mi confermo coi migliori augurii

Vostro aff.mo nel Signore

APPENDIX 3

TRANSCRIPT OF PRO MEMORIA SU GIOVENTÙ MISSIONARIA E SUL PERIODICO MISSIONARIO SALESIANO OF SAMUELE VOSTI

Mi permette di sottoporre alla considerazione dei Superiori del Capitolo quanto segue:

1° GIOVENTÙ MISSIONARIA.

Quanto prima si dovrebbero ristampare i foglietti "Gioventù Missionaria". Occorrerebbe quindi sapere se e quali modificazioni si desiderano introdotte nello Statuto-Programma.

È noto che "Gioventù Missionaria" è sorta per suscitare e maturare Vocazioni Missionarie; per aiutare a formarle a sostenerle con preghiere e offerte.

È noto parimenti come quest'opera abbia suscitato e attirato molte simpatie, specialmente tra i giovani e chierici e anche tra il popolo. Il Sig. D. Albera stesso e lo stesso S. Padre la benedissero e commendarono ampiamente. "Il S. Padre", scriveva il Cardinal Segretario di Stato, "non può non augurare il più fiorente sviluppo ad una istituzione così bella e così conforme all'insegnamento evangelico. E di tutto cuore imparte la Benedizione Apostolica ai promotori e a scritti a 'Gioventù Missionaria' invocando ad essa le grazie più elette..."

È vero che vi fu anche qualche voce isolata che la disse inutile, un bis in idem della S. Infanzia e della Propagazione della Fede.

Se fosse stata inutile o fosse stata un bis in idem della S. Infanzia non avrebbe certo ottenuto lo commendatizio così lusinghiere dal Sig. D. Albera e dal S. Padre stesso.

Dal resto basta esaminare lo scopo della Santa Infanzia e della Propagazione della Fede per convincersene del contrario. Lo scopo della S. Infanzia è essenzialmente per raccogliere offerte per i bambini cinesi; quello della Propagazione della fede è di raccogliere danaro per sussidiare le Missioni Cattoliche. Giov. Miss. Invece è per suscitare e maturare Vocazioni Missionarie.

2° PERIODICO MISSIONARIO

Ora da molti si prega per un organo di propaganda e per il resoconto dell'opera, un periodichino, mensile o quindicinale. Ma perché il periodico corrisponda anche ad un altro bisogno molto sentito, dovrebbe essere un periodico che narrasse gli episodi più interessanti e significativi delle Missioni nostre e anche altrui.

Con questo mezzo, col propagandare cioè le nostre Missioni, certo noi potremmo fare un grande bene tra la gioventù. Potremmo suscitare un grande movimento missionario; suscitare vocazioni, simpatie, entusiasmo per le nostre Missioni.

Gli altri Ordini e Congregazioni che hanno Missioni hanno quasi tutti il loro periodico per la gioventù. Lo hanno quei di Milano, di Parma, i Gesuiti, i Francescani, i Domenicani, ecc.. noi in questo siamo rimasti indietro. Col solo Bollettino Salesiano non si può soddisfare. Così molti dei nostri giovani sono costretti a prendere gli abbonamenti al periodico missionario di altri Istituti non Salesiani. In certi nostri Collegi hanno 20, 30, 50 abbonamenti di Italia Missionari o di altri periodici consimili.

Tutti questi sarebbero abbonati nostri, cui se ne aggiungerebbero molti altri. A questi si potrebbero accoppiare i 10,000 abbonati al Per la Gioventù che in tal caso soprattutto potrebbe cessare senz'altro le sue pubblicazioni.

Mi permetto di fare ancora presente ai Superiori che qualora ritenessero che anche noi potessimo gareggiare cogli altri Istituti per far conoscere e valorizzare sempre più le nostre Missioni e suscitare per esse simpatie e vocazioni mediante un periodichino missionario vi sarebbero già parecchi confratelli che accetterebbero volentieri il desiderato incarico della redazione. Ad esempio D.

Garneri lo redigerebbe molto volentieri. D.Spriano, D. Marescalchi, parecchi Missionari e chierici vi collaborerebbero molto volentieri

Il periodico dovrebbe essere di formato comodo, ad esempio, come "Rivista dei Giovani" o come il "Per la Gioventù"; avere 16 pagine mensili, più la copertina per annunci, ecc..

Per le speze si potrebbero mettere abbonamenti come per il "Per la Gioventù". Si potrebbe anche aprire una sottoscrizione permanente per il Periodico e per le Missioni.

Torino, 14 Dicembre, 1922.

Sd. Don Vosti.

APPENDIX 4

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PROJECT OF GM "IL NOSTRO PROGRAMMA"¹

Don Bosco saluterà certamente col suo benevolo sorriso paterno il nascere di questa nostra rivista – Gioventù Missionaria – e benedirà dal cielo a tutti quelli che collaboreranno a questa opera buona.

Egli infatti non solo si adoperava con ogni santa industria perché i giovani potessero trascorrere le ore di ricreazione nella sana e vivace letizia del giuoco; ma voleva che anche durante le ore dello studio, nei momenti liberi dalle cure della scuola, potessero gustare lo svago e il conforto delle amene letture.

Per questo sacrificando le ore del riposo, oltre ai libri che dovevano essere nutrimento di sapere e di divozione, componeva anche quelli che li avrebbero ricreati col vario racconto di fatti edificanti, di casi curiosi e di amene avventure. Addestrava intanto a quest'arte quelli tra i suoi figli che mostravano migliori disposizione e così, dietro al suo esempio, si svolgeva quella serie di pubblicazioni che si poteva dire la letteratura dei colleghi salesiani ed erano pascolo desiderato e gradito della bramosa curiosità dei giovani alunni.

Così nacquero le Vite di *Domenico Savio*, *Magone Michele* e *Francesco Besucco*, così la *Casa della fortuna* e *l'Orfanello delle Alpi*, così la *Storia d'Italia* e le *Vite dei primi Papi*, così i volumi delle *Letture Cattoliche* e così tutti gli altri che furono letti con tanto gusto e tanto bene operarono, e si mantengono sempre vivi ed attraenti per la semplicità e l'affetto che spirano da ogni pagina e per la edificazione che se ne ricava.

¹ FASCIE B., *Il Nostro Programma*, in GM 1 (1923) 1, 1-2.

Benedirà dunque certamente a questa pubblicazione periodica che vuol illustrare ai giovani l'opera delle Missioni che da lui iniziata e caldeggiata mise radice accanto alle altre che già fiorivano e con esse crebbe come pianta maestosa distendendo i suoi rami su tutta la faccia della terra. Che messe copiosa di fatti e notizie, di cose nuove e interessanti, di avventure edificanti e generose, di aneddoti commoventi ed ameni, di costumi nuovi e bizzarri, di atti umili ed eroici, di opere ferventi di fede, di carità e di apostolato.

Né meno contenti ne devono essere i giovani lettori. Essi nelle loro letture vanno a caccia di tutto ciò che può stuzzicare la loro curiosità; e, pur di soddisfare quello loro bramosia, divorano volumi di avventure fantastiche che molte volte non han nulla a che fare né colla realtà e nemmeno colla verosomiglianza, e finiscono per trovarsi, dopo la lettura, stanchi e storditi, colla mente eccitata, popolata di strani fantasmi, lontani e diversi da tutto ciò che li circonda e li tocca, e invece di appagamento e soddisfazione provano una sete sempre crescente, che pare malattia, di nuove letture dello stesso genere che li ecciteranno sempre più senza riposarsi mai.

Quanto non dovranno dunque trovarsi contenti e soddisfatti nel vedersi davanti a novità vive e vere, nell'apprendere notizie e cognizioni inaspettate ed interessanti, nel conoscere costumi curiosi di popoli reali e viventi, nell'assistere al drammatico svolgimento di avventure forti e generose, nel partecipare con santa invidia alle eroiche e sante imprese dei missionari.

E tutto questo non in mondo vano e fantastico, ma sulla faccia di questa terra, patria del genere umano, nei suoi mari sterminati, nei suoi laghi nei suoi fiumi, nei monti, nelle valli, nelle città, nelle campagne popolate dalla bella e sempre nuova famiglia di erbe, piante ed animali che vegetano e vivono di una vita piena e reale dalla quale la commozione e gli ammaestramenti nascono da sé ad appagamento della fantasia, a soddisfazione della mente a conforto del cuore, ad educazione della volontà.

E non questo solo. Da una tale lettura nascerà dentro dell'animo un forte allettamento e uno sprone vigoroso a bene

operare, e un'affettuosa emulazione li spingerà ad associarsi col desiderio e coll'opera all'apostolato dei missionari così pieno di attrattive. Donde il desiderio e, direi, il bisogno di far vivere in mezzo a loro questo mondo missionario così corrispondente alle aspirazioni generose e ai movimenti espansivi del loro cuore. E vorranno prima di tutto parlarne tra di loro e le loro conversazioni coi compagni acquerteranno un tono nuovo e naturale di spontanea edificazione, improntato ad una vivacità soda e composta, fervida ed educata che diffonderà intorno come un'aureola di santa letizia. E dopo questo la tendenza ad unirsi in associazioni per cooperare colla parola, colla preghiera, colle loro piccole industrie, collo scrivere, colle elemosine all'opera e all'apostolato missionario, godendo della soddisfazione santa ed operosa di sentirsi parte attiva di un'opera così grandiosa di carità.

Ed educandosi a questa scuola di apostolato nuove iniziative si apriranno facilmente al loro semplice intuito illuminato e accalorato dalle grazie di Dio. Vedranno che una larga opera missionaria si può svolgere anche senza uscire dalla propria famiglia, e dal proprio paese, col buon esempio, colla parola, colla buona condotta tra i loro compagni freddi, poco educati al sentimento religioso od anche sviati, come Don Bosco fanciullo faceva tra i fanciulli della sua borgata. E avranno il conforto di vedere sbocciare intorno a sé, coltivata dalle loro giovani anime, una ricca e varia fioritura di bene, irrorata e fecondata dalle benedizioni celesti. Saranno così essi le giovani scolte di questo esercito della carità che si avanza per diffondere il Regno di Dio e la sua pace su tutta la faccia della terra.

A questo mira con umile coraggio – Gioventù Missionaria – e per questo rivolge il suo fiducioso appello al cuore generoso di tutti i giovani.

D. B. Fascie.

APPENDIX 5

LIST OF SOME OF THE MISSIONARY PERIODICALS IN CIRCULATION IN ITALY DURING THE LIFE SPAN OF GM ACCORDING TO THEIR YEAR OF INITIATION

- 1822 - «Annales de l'Association de la Propaganda de la Foi» was published from Lyons and from Paris.
- 1831 - «Annali delle Francescane Missionarie di Maria» was published from Rome. In 1961 the title was changed to «Rose Serafiche», and in 1973 the title was further changed to «Le Missioni Francescane».
- 1853 - «Annali dell'Opera della Santa Infanzia» was the official review of the Pontifical Society of Holy Infancy. In 1924 the title was simplified to «Santa Infanzia».
- 1870 - «Annali Francescani» was a missionary periodical published from Lombardi. In 1965 the title was changed to «Cammino Scintilla».
- 1872 - «Le Missioni Cattoliche» was started as a weekly illustrated missionary periodical by the PIME fathers. It continued under the same title till 1969, when it was changed to «Mondo e Missione».
- 1881 - «Il Missionario» was a missionary bulletin published by the Salvatorians from Rome, mainly for the co-operators of the Society.
- 1883 - «La Nigritia» was an illustrated review published by the Figli del Sacro Cuore, from Verona. Its objective was to make propaganda mainly for the African missions.
- 1893 - «Annali della Congregazione della Missione» was published from Firenze. In 1951 the title was changed to «Annali della Missione».
- 1895 - «Eco dell'Africa» was the illustrated periodical of the African missions of Sodalizio di San Pietro Claver, published from Rome.
- 1897 - «Il Missionario Cattolico» was the bulletin of the Pontifical Seminary of Saints Peter and Paul, Rome.
- 1899 - «Bollettino Francescano» was the missionary bulletin of the Franciscans, published from Turin.
- 1899 - «La Consolata» was the missionary bulletin of the Missionaries of La Consolata, published from Turin. In 1929 the title was changed to «Missioni della Consolata».
- 1902 - «Carmelo e le sue Missioni all'estero» was the missionary periodical of the Order of Carmelites Discalced, published from Rome.
- 1902 - «Fanciullo Negro» was started by the Sodalizio di S. Pietro Claver, precisely for the young. It was published from Rome. In 1957 it was named «Gioventù Africana».
- 1903 - «Fede e civiltà» was the illustrated review of the Institute of St. Francis Xavier of Parma for Foreign Missions. It was published from Parma. In the period between 1927 and 1947 the title was changed to «Missioni Illustrate».
- 1903 - «Missione di Mangalore» seems to have been the first missionary periodical of the Jesuits, published from Venezia. From 1915 onwards, it was published with the new title of «Le Missioni della Compagnia di Gesù», and 1970 the title was further changed to «Popoli e Missioni della Compagnia di Gesù».
- 1914 - «Siglo de las Misiones» was published by the Jesuits from Bilbao, Burgos. This too was to cater to the missionary interests of the young. In 1967 the periodical appeared under the title of «Misiones». In 1976 the latter was united to «Pueblos del Tercer Mundo».
- 1914 - «Propaganda Missionaria», was a publication of the PIME from Milan and from Rome. From 1959 onwards it appeared with the title of «Missionari del PIME».

- 1917 - «Bollettino dell'Unione Missionaria del Clero» was the official organ of the Unione Missionaria del Clero, published originally from Milan. It was more scientific in nature and meant to serve the clergy. From 1919 to 1922 the title was changed to «Rivista di Studi Missionari». Again from 1923 to 1938 it appeared with a new title: «Rivista dell'Unione Missionaria del Clero». In the period between 1939 and 1949 the periodical was known under the title of «Rivista dell'Unione Missionaria», and in the period between 1950 and 1968 it was renamed «Clero e Missioni». From 1969 onwards the review has been published under the name of «Mondo e Missione».
- 1919 - «Italia Missionaria» was the official organ of the Institute of Foreign missions of Milan.
- 1919 - «Per il bene» was the bulletin of the Stigmatists, published from Rome. Besides reporting about their missions, it spoke of their works in general. In 1934 it took on a more missionary character and was renamed «Il Missionario».
- 1920 - «Bollettino della Congregazione della S. Croce e Passione di N.S.G.C.» was the bulletin of the Passionists, published from Rome.
- 1920 - «Missioni Francescane» was the periodical of the OFM, published from Venezia.
- 1921 - «Bollettino di S. Domenico» served as the missionary bulletin of the Dominicans and was published from Bologna.
- 1921 - «Eco dei Barnabiti» was a bulletin of the apostolic life of the Barnabites, published from Rome.
- 1921 - «Svegliarino Missionario», published from Brescia, was the missionary periodical of the Combonian Missionaries. In 1933 the title was changed to «Le missioni dei Comboni».
- 1921 - «Voce di Maria» was an illustrated review of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, published from Naples. In 1955 it was renamed «Fino al Popolo», and from 1959 it was known under the title of «Missioni OMI».

- 1921 - «Voci d'oltre Mare» was the missionary periodical of the Institute of Foreign Missions of Parma, published from Parma.
- 1922 - «Azione Missionaria» was a missionary bulletin of the Diocese of Vicenza, to serve as an organ of propaganda for the missions of the diocese.
- 1922 - «Missioni dei Padri Bianchi in Africa», published from Aosta, was the missionary review of the White Fathers. In 1946 the title was changed simply to only «Africa».
- 1922 - «Regina degli Apostoli» was the missionary bulletin of the Pallotine Missionaries, published from Rome.
- 1923 - «Bollettino ufficiale dell'Azione Cattolica Italiana», published from Rome, was the official organ of information and animation of the Catholic Action.
- 1923 - «Le Missioni Francescane dei Frati Minori» was yet another missionary periodical of the OFM, published from Rome.
- 1923 - «Missioni estere Vincenziane» was published from Turin, by the Vincentians to make propaganda for their missions. From 1968 onwards the review was known as «Missione Vincenziana».
- 1924 - «Campana Missionaria» was the missionary periodical of the diocese of Aversa.
- 1924 - «Lacrime e Sorrisi di Bimbi» published from Rovereto was the missionary review of Rovereto.
- 1924 - «Le Missioni della Madonna dei Servi di Maria», official organ of missionary propaganda of the Servants of Mary, was published from Vicenza.
- 1924 - «Santa Infanzia», published from Rome, was the organ of the General Council of Holy Infancy for the whole of Italy. In 1936 the title was changed to «Crociata Missionaria».
- 1926 - «Squilla Missionaria» was the illustrated periodical of the Franciscan Missionary Union of the province of Venice, published by the OFM of Vicenza.
- 1927 - «Crociata Missionaria Francescana» was published by the Franciscans from Rome.

- 1927 - «Echi delle Missioni» was an illustrated missionary review for boys, published from Rome.
- 1927 - «Gentes» was the official organ of the Lega Missionaria Studenti started by the Jesuits, published from Rome. In 1933 the title was changed to «Lega Missionaria Studenti», and in 1947 it was renamed «Gentes L.M.S.».
- 1927 - «Il Piccolo Missionario» was the illustrated monthly for the young, published from Verona. It centred more on the African Missions.
- 1927 - «Voci della Nigrizia» was the missionary bulletin of the Institute of African Missions, Forlì.
- 1928 - «Missioni dei Servi di Maria» was published from Rome by the Servants of Mary.
- 1928 - «Missioni Domenicane», published by the Dominicans from Firenze.
- 1929 - «Il Pensiero Missionario» was another missionary periodical of the Missionary Union of the Clergy in Italy, published from Rome. It started as a trimonthly.
- 1930 - «Crociata Missionaria» was the common periodical of the Pontifical Missionary societies, published from Rome. In 1976 the title was changed «Popoli e Missioni».
- 1932 - «La Voce del Nilo» was another of the OFM missionary periodical published by the Franciscan Missions of Northern Egypt.
- 1932 - «Missionarie Francescane d'Egitto» was published from Rome, as the voice of the Franciscan missionaries of the whole of Egypt.
- 1933 - «Fanciulla Missionaria» was a simple supplement to «Vita Canossiana», the official bulletin of the Canossians.
- 1933 - «Il Missionario Francescano» was the monthly illustrated review of the Friars Monor Conventuals, published from Assisi.
- 1934 - «Notizie della Missione di Pengpu» was the voice of the Jesuit missions of Pengpu in China.

- 1939 - «Bollettino dell'Istituto Missioni Consolata» was published from Torino as another bulletin of the Missions of the Missionaries of La Consolata.
- 1942 - «Bollettino di didattica missionaria» was published from Parma by the Institute of the Foreign Missions of Parma.
- 1946 - «Missioni Camilliane» was the review published from Milan by the Camillians, dedicated to the ministry among the sick in the pagan lands. In 1963 the title was changed to «Amare».
- 1953 - «Missionarie di Maria» was a monthly periodical of the Missionarie Saveriane, published from Parma.

APPENDIX 6

TRANSCRIPT OF THE CLOSING EDITORIAL OF GIUSEPPE BASSI

COMMIATO

Cari lettori,

ho il doloroso incarico di annunciarvi che con questo numero la nostra rivista «Gioventù Missionaria» chiude i battenti. Il 1968 non la vedrà più uscire.

Molti di voi, già a conoscenza della cosa, ci hanno scritto per esprimerci il loro rammarico e la loro protesta, con parole spesso commoventi. Prendiamo atto di questi gesti di solidarietà che sollevano un po' la nostra pena. Ma le ragioni che hanno indotto i nostri Superiori a prendere questa decisione sono di forza maggiore.

Termina così il dialogo che la nostra rivista teneva con i suoi giovani lettori da ben 45 anni, durante i quali essa è stata il punto d'incontro tra molti illustri missionari e molti giovani generosi, suscitatrice di entusiasmi, di fattiva cooperazione e di numerose vocazioni missionarie.

Non terminerà però il vostro affetto per le missioni, che troverà sicuramente altri modi per alimentarsi.

No, la vera Gioventù Missionaria non muore, perché più vivo di prima sarà il vostro interessamento, la vostra azione, la vostra preghiera per le missini.

Avanti, Gioventù Missionaria, nel più sacro tra i doveri del cristiano, quello di spandere il Regno di Dio tra gli uomini che popolano la terra! E la vostra testimonianza viva sarà ancor più efficace di quanto non lo fossero questi pochi fogli di carta.

A.R.T.!

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TSMV 1	TSMV 2	TSMV 3	TSMV 4
TSMV 5	TSMV 6	TSMV 7	TSMV 8
TSMV 9	TSMV 10	TSMV 11	TSMV 12
TSMV 13	TSMV 14	TSMV 15	TSMV 16
TSMV 17	TSMV 18	TSMV 19	TSMV 20
TSMV 21	TSMV 22	TSMV 23	TSMV 24
TSMV 25	TSMV 26	TSMV 27	TSMV 28
TSMV 29	TSMV 30	TSMV 31	TSMV 32