

1924-2024 . 100 years supporting the Salesian Missions. Salesian Missions Institute

The Salesian Missions Institute was erected by decree through an initiative of the Rector Major, Blessed Philip Rinaldi on 13 January 1924 to support missionary activities. The Institute continues its work today on behalf of many missions around the world.

Salesian missions were increasing in the 1920s, nurtured by letters from missionaries constantly presented in the Salesian Bulletin, by the excitement produced in those years by new geographical and cultural discoveries, and by the many people who had emigrated from their homeland in search of a better life, and sent news to those who had remained at home. A series of events ended up focusing on the missions.

Fr Rinaldi had founded the *Cardinal Cagliero Institute* in Ivrea in 1922, for the training of future missionaries. Just a year after it began it already had one hundred and sixty candidates. This institute was recognised by the *Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide* on 30 April 1924 with a decree in which the Cardinal Cagliero Institute was canonically erected as a seminary for aspirants to the Salesian Missions. It was declared to be “dependent on it, and would partake of all the rights and privileges enjoyed by similar Institutes” and agreed to and passed on its statutes.

This growing interest in 1923 led the Rector Major Fr Philip Rinaldi to found a magazine called “*Gioventù missionaria*” with the aim of animating and cultivating work for the missions among the new generations. In the first issue we read that

"Gioventù Missionaria therefore relies on your active propaganda [to make known the activity of the missionaries]. And it expects even better from you all: it hopes to find missionaries of the... missionaries in you. It will launch frequent, continuous appeals to your good hearts so that you will be zealous apostles of an idea: *the Missions*."

On 9 November 1923, the King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel III, signed a decree regarding a temporary dispensation from military conscription for young men preparing to go to the missions, or for those who were already missionaries. This change encouraged and boosted the preparation of missionaries, so much so that the Salesian Congregation established 31 religious institutes that prepared young men for the missions: 15 in Italy and the rest abroad.

In June 1924, the Rector Major, Fr Filippo Rinaldi, wrote to the Salesians about the missions:

"And, admirably, young people from many of our colleges, boarding houses, hospices, but mainly festive oratories have already become fervent apostles, stirring up and keeping alive a noble competition among their companions of privations and spontaneous mortification for the benefit of our Missions; lotteries, theatrical performances and other entertainments for the same end; letters to parents, siblings, acquaintances and friends to obtain some offerings, or to induce them to enrol among the Cooperators or to subscribe to the beloved *Gioventù Missionaria* magazine. And it not infrequently happens that, by dint of begging for the Missions, some young people end up giving themselves as well, and becoming Salesian missionaries."

In 1925 a new World Missionary Exposition was planned to be held at the Vatican, in which the Salesians also participated, and the solemn inauguration, presided over by the Holy Father Pius XI, was planned for December 1924. An extra push led Fr Philip Rinaldi to entrust the task of the missions (until then reserved to himself) to the Prefect General, Fr Peter

Ricaldone, who was to follow up the preparations. He said in this regard: "Article 62 of our Regulations says: The care of the Missions is entrusted to a member of the Superior Chapter, delegated by the Rector Major. Availing myself of this faculty, I delegate this to the V. Rev. Fr Peter Ricaldone, Prefect General. He is already connected with our missionaries through other attributes, and therefore seems to me the most suitable for reasons of simplicity. Since he is the one who takes the place of the Rector Major, this delegation does not diminish the contact I wish to maintain with my dear missionaries, so distant and at times exposed to such grave dangers and surprises."

When Don Bosco ended his earthly life, the Salesian missionaries were present in five countries of Latin America, about 150 in number, among the 773 Salesians in the whole Congregation. Their numbers grew so much that by 1925 some 3,000 Salesians had left for the missions. Such a large number of missionaries, with a large number also of missionary works, not to mention the beneficiaries of the missions, required a huge organisation, as much in the preparation of these generous Salesians as in material resources.

Preparations were also being made to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first Missionary Expedition (1875-1925). About this, the *Salesian Bulletin* in June 1924 wrote:

"Approaching the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Salesian Missions (1875-1925), we recommend the celebration of Mission Days to everyone on behalf of the Salesian Missions, in order to spread their knowledge and needs, and gain greater sympathy for them, so that they may attain the support which they need daily.

But the **Mission Days** cannot suddenly gather the help which is needed. Our Missionaries, for example, ask with daily insistence – not only for linen and items for the exercise of the sacred ministry – but also, and above all, for *material clothes, footwear* to dress the little pupils of the numerous

Orphanages and others, and medicines and a thousand other things necessary to fraternally assist and initiate the new Christians in civil life.”

With this in mind it was necessary to found a legal entity, the Salesian Missions Institute, to take care of missionary needs. Its deed of incorporation was registered as early as 18 October 1922 at the notary register in Moncalieri (today a municipality in the metropolitan area of Turin), by Fr Rinaldi, Rector Major, and some of his collaborators. It was an act that gave birth to an entity that reflected the growing interest in the Salesian missions. In 1924 it was civilly recognised as a non-profit organisation by Royal Decree No. 22 of 13.01.1924.

Over a century, the Salesian Missions Institute has acted as an intermediary between benefactors and beneficiaries of the missions. Incalculable good has been done by so many people – often hidden – who have wanted to be involved in this noble activity and who will certainly be copiously rewarded by God. Don Bosco maintained that the generosity of benefactors is always rewarded by God, and not only in eternal life.

The task of the Salesian Missions Institute, which began one hundred years ago, has not stopped, because the needs have not stopped. It continues today because the education of children, especially the poorest, is an ongoing mission. There is always a need for benefactors because God wants everyone to participate in his saving work. It is up to each one to decide if they wish to cooperate with God. And if anyone wants to, they can do so by contacting this institute at the contact details given below.

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