

Some Remarks on the Tasks and Perspectives of Salesian Historiography in Middle and Western Europe

I would like to begin my lecture with a quotation from the German historian Hartmut Lehmann:

«In too many studies the argument remains locked in one region, within one church or denomination and within one national tradition. By contrast, intercultural comparison would open our eyes to the global dimension of the history of Christianity and thus to the global dimension of our task as church historians.»¹

It is my impression that Lehmann's words – although spoken with regard to the history of Christianity in general – can help us comprehend better what the tasks and the perspectives of Salesian historiography in Middle and Western Europe might be. Before I explain this, I would like to give some information about our conference to those people, who are participants just for this evening.

My lecture takes place within a conference of Salesian History with the participation of Salesians of Don Bosco, Salesian Sisters, Don Bosco Volunteers, Salesian Cooperators as well as one member of the congregation of the Oblates of Saint Francis de Sales. The participants come from the following countries: Ireland, Great Britain, Belgium, France, Germany, Austria and Slovenia. Two special participants come from Italy and Vietnam: Father Francesco Motto, the director of the Salesian Historical Institute in Rome, and Father Dominik Tran Manh Nam, who is studying here at Benediktbeuern and who would like to share his experience with us.

There is an important reason, why the participants come from these countries. The Salesian Historical Association (*Associazione Cultori di Storia Salesiana*) already has regional European sections in Spain and in Poland as well as of a rather dense communication network in Italy. Thus it makes sense, to bring together scholars and friends of history from the other European countries, where the Salesian Family works, i.e. from Middle and Western Europe.

One main objective of our conference is, that scholars of Salesian history have time to exchange ideas about their projects, their methods, and their problems. Possibly this will lead to a more intensive cooperation. Another aim of the conference is, to inform the public about our work: that is, what I am doing right now.

In my lecture I want to give a special survey of Salesian history in the countries already mentioned. Doing so it is not intended, to tell you *the Salesian history* in our Middle

1 H. Lehmann, «The History of Twentieth-Century as a Challenge for Historians», in: *Church History* 71 (2002) 585–599, 598.

and Western European region. Perhaps you will miss some *typically Salesian topics*: pedagogy or forms of institutions like oratories, schools etc. At the moment I am more interested in the conditions, under which Salesian history took place in the past and is taking place today in this region. And I am convinced that these conditions suggest parallels in the way we should study and write Salesian history. In fact: they do not only suggest abstract parallels, but they suggest concrete forms of cooperation, too.

Now some words concerning the epoch and the region which will be treated. Don Bosco lived from 1815 until 1888. The congregations and groups founded by him or his successors (Salesians, Salesian Sisters, Cooperators, Volunteers, Past Pupils etc.) still exist and are very alive. Thus we have to view two centuries which normally form objects of modern and contemporary history: the so-called *long 19th century* (1789–1917) and the so-called *short 20th century* (1917–1989).

Salesian work in the individual countries of our region started at different times. Let us look at them according to the year of beginning:

France 1875	Germany (= Sierck/France) 1904
Austria (= Trento/Italy) 1887	Hungary 1913
Great Britain 1887	Germany 1916
Switzerland 1889	Ireland 1919
Belgium 1891	Czechoslovakia 1924
Austria (= Oświęcim/Poland) 1898	Netherlands 1928
Austria (= Ljubljana/Slovenia) 1901	Sweden 1930
Austria 1903	Luxembourg 1969

We can see quite well, that in most of our countries the Salesians of Don Bosco were present before the end of the First World War (the Salesian Sisters normally came a little bit later). It becomes evident, too, that the period of the Rector Major Michele Rua (1888–1910) was a period of great Salesian expansion.

With regard to the tasks and the perspectives of Salesian historiography in Middle and Western Europe, I have formulated five «theses», which I want to explain and illustrate by some examples. Obviously most of the examples derive from the limited horizon of a Salesian, who has occupied himself with a few aspects of the early Salesian history in Germany.

«Thesis» 1: *Salesian historiography should not be restricted to the history of Don Bosco and the Salesians.*

It seems to be significant, that Fr Morand Wirth, who 30 years ago published a book about Salesian history with the title *Don Bosco and the Salesians*², for the new and amplified edition

2 M. Wirth, *Don Bosco e i Salesiani. Centocinquant'anni di storia*, Torino-Leumann (LDC) 1970; English version: Id., *Don Bosco and the Salesians*, New Rochelle/N.J. (Don Bosco Publications) 1982.

of this book has chosen the new title *From Don Bosco to our Days*³. This new title implies a wider perspective. And it corresponds in some way with the changes actually taking place in church history: that scholars do not only look at the Catholic church or the other great Christian churches, but they also regard marginal Christian phenomena situated outside the official religion. A history of Christianity can help us to have a better look at the peculiarities of one's individual church.

I am of the opinion that Salesian history should be interested in Don Bosco, in the Salesians, in the Salesian Sisters and in the whole Salesian Family. But that cannot be enough. Today it is also necessary to pursue a history of the Salesian charism, i.e. a sort of reception history. Where were the ideas of Don Bosco spread out? Who were the people writing and reading about Don Bosco and his pastoral or pedagogic work? In what way did they transform the material they received? What were the channels of communication? Did the reception of Don Bosco lead to any action?

If we look at Salesian history in Germany, we see that these questions really have their justification. Don Bosco was known in Germany about 30 years before the foundation of the Salesian house of Würzburg in 1916. The first German Don Bosco biographies were translations of the famous French books of *Charles d'Espiney* and *Albert du Boys*; and they appeared in Western Germany – Münster and Mainz. Obviously there existed a sort of French or Belgian connection.

The books circulated in an *ultramontane milieu*. One of the readers was the young Bavarian priest *Johann Baptist Mehler* who visited Don Bosco in the summer of 1885. He spoke about Don Bosco in the general assembly of the catholic associations some months later and was the author of several publications about Don Bosco. A friend of Mehler, the priest *Johann Nepomuk Werner*, opened a house for apprentices in München.

In the following period the number of Salesian Cooperators in Germany, Switzerland and Austria increased. The German *Salesian Bulletin* appeared in 1895. Two years later a house for German speaking late vocations was opened in Foglizzo near Torino (1899 in Cavaglià, 1900 in Penango), where the first generation of German Salesians was formed.

Now I don't want to tell you the whole prehistory of the German Salesians. I just wanted to show you that there had been a Salesian history in Germany long before the arrival of the Salesians and the Salesian Sisters, a history that seems to be rather unknown.⁴

3 Id., *Da don Bosco ai nostri giorni. Tra storia e nuove sfide (1815–2000)* [Studi di spiritualità 11], Roma (LAS) 2000.

4 Although we possess some literature about this period. Cf. N. Wolff, *Viele Wege führen nach Deutschland. Überlegungen zur salesianischen Geschichte der Jahre 1883–1922* [Benediktbeurer Hochschulschriften 15], München (Don Bosco) 2000.

«Thesis» 2: *Salesian historiography should look over the national fence.*

In many cases Salesian historiography concerns just one country, one province, one house or one person. This has to do with the special interest of the author, sometimes also with his capacity to master (or not to master) foreign languages. And this is useful, as long as the research is made according to the historical critical methodology. But in some cases it is indispensable to cross the national borders.

One example is the study of Fr Stanisław Zimniak about the early Salesian history in Austria-Hungary. Zimniak had to do with Salesians of numerous nationalities – Italian, Polish, Slovenian, German, Hungarian etc. –, all living and working together in the Danube monarchy and in one Salesian province, which had to be divided after the First World war – also because of the national differences. The sources for this study could be found in archives of several states. They had to be read in different languages as well as sometimes in the German *gothic handwriting*.⁵

Looking at the compatriots of Fr Zimniak, we can see that a certain number of the confreres, who formed the elite of the Polish Salesian province in process of development, had spent their youth in Prussia – in the political provinces of Upper Silesia and Poznań and occasionally in the industrial zone at the Rhine (*Ruhrgebiet*). Besides two of the five pupils of the oratory of Poznań, killed in 1942 because of their belief and declared blessed in 1999, were born in Germany as children of Polish migrant workers.⁶

I do not say this, because I want to make the Polish confreres and pupils Germans, but because I want to point out that they were born in Germany (with German birth certificates), went to German schools, perhaps did their military service in Germany and may be also have had to ask for official German permission to leave the country and to study in Italy or somewhere else. This suggests that archive material can be found in Germany or is written in the German language.

We can also make the observation, that some of the famous Salesians of our region had undertaken *international careers*. Biographies of the following people obviously cannot be written without an international cooperation.

Fr *Francesco Scaloni* (1861–1926) entered the congregation in his Italian native country, became director of Liège where he opened the first Salesian house in Belgium, was provincial in Belgium and in Great Britain and died in Congo.

5 S. Zimniak, *Salesiani nella Mitteleuropa. Preistoria e storia della provincia Austro-Ungarica della Società di S. Francesco di Sales (1868 ca.–1919)* [ISS. Studi 10], Roma (LAS) 1997. – For the Salesian history in a special part of former Austria-Hungary, i.e. in Slovenia, cf. now B. Kolar, *Salezijanci – sto let na Slovenskem 1901–2001*, Ljubljana (Salve) 2001.

6 Franciszek Kęsy (* 1920 in Berlin-Wilmersdorf) and Edward Klinik (* 1919 in Bochum). Cf. J. Krawiec, *Świadkowie Chrystusa*, Kraków (Poligrafia Salezjańska) 2000, 233 and 249.

Fr *Eugène Méderlet* (1867–1934) was born in Lorraine/France. He became German after the war of 1870/71, studied in a Franciscan school in France where he entered the Franciscan novitiate as a lay brother. Afterwards he became a Salesian in Italy, studied theology in Belgium, was the director of the first German speaking Salesian house in Muri/Switzerland,⁷ went as a missionary to India and finally was appointed archbishop of Madras.

Fr *August Hlond* (1881–1948) was born in Upper Silesia as the son of a Polish family, entered the congregation in Italy, became director in the Polish speaking part of Austria, then in Wien and was first provincial of the German-(Austrian-)Hungarian province. Later on he became apostolic administrator and bishop in Katowice and finally archbishop of Gniezno, primate of Poland and a cardinal. Hlond, who seemed to be an Austro-Hungarian cosmopolitan in his period as director and provincial in Wien, ended as a Polish nationalist.

Also the destiny of the French Salesians in the first years of the 20th century has some international implications. We know about the problems of our confreres especially by the study of Fr Yves Le Carrérès who investigated the history of a Salesian house in Brittany.⁸ The congregation at that time was abolished by the French state. The Salesians had to leave the congregation and to continue working as diocesan priests or lay people (that is what happened to the Southern province). Or they had to leave the country and founded houses in some frontier regions like Belgium, Italy, the Channel Islands (that is what happened to the Northern province).

In 1904 the German government of Alsace-Lorraine gave permission to establish a Salesian house in Sierck. This happened on condition, that no confrere, who formerly had belonged to a French Salesian house, would be sent there. The negotiations, which preceded the opening of the house, were first made via Switzerland, where Fr Méderlet worked as director of Muri. After its opening in autumn 1904 Sierck belonged to the Belgian province. According to the main purpose of the new foundation, it was meant for pastoral work among the Italian migrant workers in the industrial zone of Lorraine. There was always one Italian Salesian at Sierck (since 1905 at Diedenhofen [Thionville]), for certain periods assisted by German or Austrian confreres. At the end of the First World War the first Salesian house of the German empire went over to France and had to be closed.

These few examples may be enough to demonstrate, that Salesian history in our region very often crossed the national borders – and that Salesian historiography should not hesitate do the same.

7 Cf. F. Schmid, «Die 'Don Bosco-Anstalt zum hl. Joseph' in Muri (1897–1904)», in: *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 33 (1998) 269–334.

8 Y. le Carrérès, *Les salésiens de Don Bosco à Dinan 1891–1903. Une œuvre naissante brisée par le Sénat* [ISS. Studi 6], Roma (LAS) 1990. Cf. also F. Desramaut, «Les crises des inspecteurs de France (1904–1906)», in: *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 30 (1997) 7–56.

«Thesis» 3: *Salesian historiography should pay more attention to general church history and «profane» history.*

Although the general church history and the «profane» history of our countries in Middle and Western Europe normally are well-known, in many cases Salesian history seems not to be well integrated into these wider frames. Let me mention just some of the historical and social phenomena which have played (and play) some roles in our region and which should be investigated more intensively in their connection with Salesian history.

Middle and Western Europe (together with Northern Europe, where the Salesian family is scarcely present) is one of the most important regions of *Protestant Reformation*. Countries like Great Britain, the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland and Hungary are denominationally mixed. Also in France and in other countries we can see the effects of the reformation. In some zones the Salesian family works under Diaspora conditions. Here we have to deal with topics which are of no interest to the classical Catholic countries. The question of ecumenical cooperation is relevant and perhaps we have to deal with denominational conflicts (for example in the press).

In our region we also find the phenomena of *secularization* and even *dechristianization*: that means the Christian religion no longer plays the public role it did in former times. Eastern Germany and the Czech Republic are known as the most dechristianized countries of Middle Europe. The situation seems to be similar in some parts of the Netherlands, France and other countries.⁹ Here again we find some consequences for the Salesian historiography. E.g. we have to ask what role the Salesian family played in societies which got rid of their Christian character.

At the end of the 19th century we can observe one phenomenon that seems to be rather German, since the word for it is normally not translated into other languages. I speak of the *Kulturkampf*, the clash between the modern national state and the catholic church. The spread of Don Bosco to in Germany first took place at a time, when the great troubles between state and church still existed. Monasteries which had to leave Prussia and establish themselves beyond the Dutch frontier (Steyl and Simpelveld) were interested in Don Bosco and his ideas. At the same time the catholic associations which were engaged in the social field looked upon him as a model. We find contributions about Don Bosco in non Salesian books and reviews of that period.

Still it was very difficult for the Salesians to enter Germany. The *Kulturkampf* legislation was partly in force until the First World War, and it allowed foreign congregations to establish themselves in the German empire under severe conditions. Only when the civil authorities were convinced that the Salesian work would be useful to the state, was permission given to open new houses (1904 in Sierck, 1916 in Würzburg).

9 Cf. H. Lehmann (ed.), *Säkularisierung, Dechristianisierung, Rechristianisierung im neuzeitlichen Europa. Bilanz und Perspektiven der Forschung* [Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte 130], Göttingen (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht) 1997.

Also in Italy and in France there were phenomena comparable to the German Kulturkampf. If we look at the 1850s in Italy when Don Bosco started to found his congregation, we see that some of the problems he had to deal with were similar to those in Germany in the 1870s and later on. What happened to the French church and to the French Salesians at the beginning of the 20th century also can be seen from a Kulturkampf perspective.

The fact that people from Italy and Poland left their native countries to live and work elsewhere has already been mentioned. In the late 19th century *migration* became a mass phenomenon. The Salesians of Don Bosco were engaged in the pastoral ministry to emigrants in several countries in South America and Europe. At the moment we possess only a few studies on this migration issue.¹⁰ Here an international cooperation would be very useful, because the sources in many cases are scattered about.

Several Middle and Western European countries had to deal with *colonialism*. This is important because since the 1870s the Salesians of Don Bosco are a missionary congregation. Numerous confreres from our region (e.g. from Belgium, France and Germany) went to South America, Africa and Asia to announce the gospel of Jesus Christ and to work with young people.

It can be said that Salesian missionaries have done great things. Some of them took care of the people who suffered from leprosy (in Agua de Dios and Contratación / Colombia). Others were engaged in schools or in professional training centres where they helped young people to find their place in society. Others defended the human rights of indigenous people and even died as martyrs.

However, in the field of Salesian missions there are some questions. What were the motives of young confreres and sisters in becoming missionaries? What were the missionary objectives? Was it perhaps important to transport European culture into third world countries? What role did inculturation play? What was the relationship between Salesian missionaries and the local church, other religious congregations, the colonial authorities, other denominations or other religions? What was the image of Salesian mission in the missionaries' native countries? In what way did these countries support the mission?

Our Middle and Western European region formed the theatre of two *World Wars*, and these wars without any doubt were of a great significance for the development of the Salesian history.¹¹ The First World War particularly was very important for Germany. I don't want to tell you too many details, because during our conference we will have an a presentation on this topic.

The First World War intensified national feelings in many European states. Young Salesians who formerly had belonged to international communities in Italy, Austria-Hungary or

10 Cf. L. Trincia, *Per la fede, per la patria. I salesiani e l'emigrazione italiana in Svizzera fino alla prima guerra mondiale* [ISS. Studi 19], Roma (LAS) 2002.

11 Concerning the Second World War cf. J. Wielgoß, «'Man steht so allein in dieser Umgebung'. Briefe junger Salesianer aus dem Zweiten Weltkrieg», in *Ordenskorrespondenz* 35 (1994) 173–191.

Belgium now had to fight for their own country (and thus against confreres from hostile states). After the war it was impossible for many confreres to stay together in one province. E.g. with the collapse of the Danube monarchy, the Salesian province had to be divided into a Polish-Yugoslavian and a German-(Austrian-)Hungarian province.

During the First World War the Salesian Bulletin (at least the German one) was «nationalized» in a certain way. Up to 1915 it was a central means of communication in the hands of the Salesians' superiors in Turin. From then on it was published under the responsibility of the provincial (in our case the provincial of Oświęcim, later on Wien).

Salesian houses had to be closed during the war (e.g. Diedenhofen/Lorraine). Others could be opened (e.g. Würzburg/Bavaria). After the war there was a real wave of Salesian foundations in Germany. This was due to the fact that there existed nearly 200 German confreres before the congregation could enter Germany.

«Thesis» 4: *Salesian historiography should consider the role of the Salesian Family in politically difficult times.*

The 20th century was for Europe not only the period of the great wars, but also of *totalitarianisms*: national socialism and communism. Germany and – since the late 1930s – Austria had to live with the first one. Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia were concerned with the second one.

There is no doubt, that the Salesian family was a *victim of national socialism*. Houses had to be closed and they were used for military and other purposes (e.g. Benediktbeuern); some were destroyed during the war. The German Salesian Bulletin was forbidden in 1939. Salesians had to leave Germany and went into exile. Others had to become soldiers in the Second World War and were wounded or fell.

Confreres of different nations were jailed in prisons and concentration camps, and some died there because of hunger and torture. We know some famous names like Fr Józef Kowalski from Poland who died at Oświęcim in 1942 and has been declared blessed in 1999;¹² Fr Theodor Hartz, the former director of Benediktbeuern, who died at Dachau in the same year 1942; Fr Karl Schmidt, a former student of Benediktbeuern, who survived the concentration camps of Sachsenhausen and Dachau and died in 1968.¹³

Another aspect: We know about the heroic attitude of confreres during the nazi times, about Italian Salesians, who hid Jews in their house, always in danger of being discovered by the German secret police. Fr Francesco Motto has written a book on this topic.¹⁴

12 Cf. J. Krawiec, *Świadkowie Chrystusa* (ann. 6), 109–191.

13 Cf. J. Wielgoß, «P. Karl Schmidt SDB (1904–1968). Sechs Jahre priesterlicher Existenz in nationalsozialistischer Schutzhaft», in: *Archiv für mittelhessische Kirchengeschichte* 49 (1996) 227–238.

14 F. Motto, «*Non abbiamo fatto che il nostro dovere*». *Salesiani di Roma e del Lazio durante l'occupazione tedesca (1943–1944)* [ISS. Studi 12] Roma (LAS) 2000.

The Salesian family was also a *victim of communism*. In some countries, especially in Czechoslovakia, all the Salesian activities were prohibited, and the houses were expropriated. There were Salesians in communist prisons or re-education camps. Some confreres were tortured, even tortured psychically. There were members of the Salesian family, who stayed in their native countries under very difficult conditions, «went underground» and lived their vocation in secret. We know about underground novitiates, underground youth ministry and similar things.

In several countries it was possible to stay or to become a Salesian or a Don Bosco Sister, but the possibilities of working with young people were restricted. Some Salesians went abroad; there existed exile organisations like schools for Czech or Slovak or even Ukrainian boys. Confreres developed particular activities in the field of the mass media (e.g. Radio Free Europe).

It is quite clear that there are a lot of historically interesting questions about the Salesian Family and the totalitarianisms, about the sacrifices that had to be borne, about the persecutions, about the difficult conditions of work in Nazi Germany and in communist states. I am of the opinion that we must also ask, if the Salesian family was only a victim. Was there perhaps a sort of compromise, of cooperation with the aim of guaranteeing a minimum of Salesian activity? Did the totalitarian ideologies influence the Salesian language?¹⁵ Can we find traces of anti-semitism or of nationalism in Salesian publications?

You know that at the moment there is a public debate about the Catholic church and anti-semitism. By taking part in this debate with the aim of defending the church or the Salesian family, it is necessary to be sincere and to accept also the dark sides of our own history –if they exist.

«Thesis» 5: *Salesian historiography should make use of new methodological approaches.*

In several cases a *critical re-reading* of Salesian historiography is necessary. Many of our «province histories» and chronicles offer precious material that cannot be found anywhere else. These books certainly must not be neglected. But too often «the argument remains locked»¹⁶ within the Salesian tradition, the Salesian archives and the other Salesian sources. Sometimes also the sources have been used in an uncritical way.

In modern historiography *comparative approaches* play an important role. The method of comparison can be used on various levels. So it seems it would be interesting to have a look at Salesian life in different countries and to examine this life according to specific criteria (e.g. pedagogic institutions, structure, recruitment and formation of the Salesians, relations with pub-

15 Fr Johannes Wielgoß in a lecture has lined out that German Salesian authors in the 1930s wrote about John Bosco as «Führer» of youth.

16 H. Lehmann, «The History ...» (ann. 1), 598.

lic authorities etc.). It would also be fruitful to compare the Salesians or the Salesian Sisters with other religious congregations using similar criteria. This could help us understand better what is «specifically Salesian» and help us avoid some prejudices or misunderstandings.

Another approach that has been discussed in the last decades is the method of *oral history*. Paul Wynants says with regard to Salesian pedagogical institutions:

«For the recent past, *oral history* constitutes a resource which one cannot ignore. Without doubt the memories of the persons being questioned – especially if they are aged – lack precision. They misrepresent reality. Their contribution is generally weak when it is matter of establishing a chronology, the unfolding of precise facts. It is more substantial when the objective pursued is to come to understand motives, morale, an atmosphere.»¹⁷

In some (communist) countries it was not possible for the Salesian family to exist officially, so that Salesian life took place in the underground (e.g. Czechoslovakia). Here written documents are hardly to be found, because their production was dangerous. If we want to occupy ourselves with their history, we need some sort of source materials. And here we can, we must fall back upon eye witnesses. But at the same time we have to be critical and pay attention to the limits and problems of oral history. I would propose that we – in this time – use the chance to collect (and sometimes to produce) the oral «raw material» which can enable us (and future generations) to study Salesian history under conditions of persecution.

The question of *archives* which can be useful to Salesian historiography has been treated already by several authors – at great length by Wynants.¹⁸ There is conformity among the scholars that we cannot only consult Salesian archives, but also have to go to public archives of different levels (state, province, county, municipality) as well as to ecclesiastical archives (Vatican, diocese, parish).

I would like to mention some more archives that have been neglected up to now (as I suppose). We must not forget the military archives (if we want to treat the World Wars) and archives of secret services (if we are dealing with persecution in totalitarian states). There are also school and university archives which can tell us something about the life and studies of Salesians and Salesian Sisters before entering the congregation. We find some interesting material in private or family archives, e.g. letters from missionaries.¹⁹ And finally the archives of organizations and associations that were in contact with the Salesian family should be consulted (e.g. Caritas and pedagogical associations).

17 P. Wynants, «Writing the History of a Religious Teaching Institute: Guidelines for Research, Sources and Methods (19th and 20th Centuries)», in: *Journal of Salesian Studies* 8 (1997) 91–142, 141; the original French article: Id., «Pour écrire l'histoire d'un établissement d'enseignement congréganiste: orientations de recherche, sources et méthodes (XIX^e–XX^e siècles)», in: F. Motto (ed.), *Insediamenti e iniziative salesiane dopo don Bosco. Saggi di storiografia* [ISS. Studi 9], Roma (LAS) 1996, 17–62.

18 Ibid., passim.

19 Fr Francis Desramaut has told me that he is preparing a publication about the French Salesian Fr Francisque Dupont murdered 1945 in Vietnam – using letters etc. from such private archives.

The *press* is also an important source for Salesian historiography. But here again there is the danger to become uncritical. Not everything that can be read in local or diocesan newspapers and reviews happened as it was presented. We have to ask what were the «policies» of the newspaper, the authors and their motivation and also what were the communication channels between the Salesian family and the press.

When we talk about the press, we should take a look at the *Salesian press*. I do not say that the Salesian Bulletin can tell us «what really happened». It can give us some dates that cannot be found elsewhere, but these have to be put in connection with other sources.²⁰ Besides we learn much about theological and pedagogical conceptions. What did the Salesians want to impart to their cooperators? What image of John Bosco was presented to them? What image of mission? How about the veneration of Our Lady? What traces of certain political conditions can be found? What traces of social and cultural changes? What traces of ecclesiastical events like the Second Vatican council? What about ecumenism? Can we find differences between the Italian, the French, the English, the German and the other versions of the Bulletin?

To end my lecture I would like to mention some *modern sources* that did not play any great role in the conventional historiography. There are photographs, films, sound documents and in the very recent time even computer files which should not be neglected. Here again it depends on the methodology, on the right questions that are to be applied to the sources.

Conclusion

Talking about the tasks and perspectives of Salesian historiography in Middle and Western Europe I have limited myself to some catchwords – without aspiring to any sort of completeness. One implication for me is that we cannot study and write Salesian history in our region without certain forms of international cooperation. This is due to the international connections as well as to the sources. It is also necessary not to neglect the contexts in which Salesian history took place. The method of comparison – intercultural, international, national, inter-congregational etc. – will render good services to this purpose.

I hope that the scholars who are gathered here this evening will be ready and able to work together in this field: committed, critical and always interested in Don Bosco and his charism.

20 E.g. we find information about celebrations or voyages which are important in another context. Cf. N. Wolff, «Entre la France et l'Allemagne, l'Italie et la Belgique, la Suisse et l'Inde. Notes sur la vie d'Eugène Méderlet (1867–1934)», in: *Ricerche Storiche Salesiane* 37 (2000) 345–369, especially 354–358.