



† Fr Marc Cuvelier, SDB

June 5, 1938 ~ Dec. 4, 2011
Gullegem, Belgium - Seoul, Korea

Message sent by Bishop Luc Van Looy, Bishop of Gent, Belgium, companion of Marc in Belgium and in Korea, which was read at the Funeral Mass of Fr Marc.

The news of Father Marc's death was expected since he had been in the hospital for a week. The family followed very closely the news I received from Father Blanco day after day. We are so grateful for the confreres that assisted him in his last months, weeks and days. Now is the time to remember a great friend, faithful brother and spiritual father of many people.

Father Marc was born in Gullegem, northern Belgium, in 1938 in a family of working people. He had to go to work after primary school, in a factory where they made washing machines. (This is why in Korea the Salesian Sisters have had a number of machines from the factory 'Primus' of which Father Marc took good care to keep them running year after year). But the Lord wanted him, and he joined the "Late Vocations Program" at Don Bosco Kortrijk.

I got to know him when he came to the Novitiate, one year behind me. He was a good and strong football player and a good and expert technician. He spent his free moments fixing bicycles, motorcycles and cars. He was always ready to do all kinds of repair works.

May be, he liked working more than studying. After the Course of Philosophy he was sent to Korea and did his Practical Training in the Don Bosco Center, in Seoul.

Together we studied the Theology Courses in Leuven. We took notes most of the time in Korean so to keep practicing, and all seminars and papers we had to do, we did it about Korea and about Evangelization. Studying was for him reading texts and thinking about them, in his armchair, and integrating the content of the text in his life. Highly intelligent as he was, he understood in depth what we were learning and at the examinations he did very well.

After our Priestly Ordination we were together responsible for the Pastoral care at the public church of Don Bosco Oud-Heverlee, for one year, and then we moved on to do the Master in Missiology. Fr Marc's mother died not very long after his Priestly Ordination, it seemed to us that she had been waiting for her son to be a priest, to receive his blessing.

Back in Korea in 1972, Father Marc went again to the Don Bosco Center where he loved being with the working boys, teaching them Mechanics, and working with Br Marino Bois. There was his life, in the midst of the boys, caring for them, listening to them, accompanying them to gain their place in society, without forgetting that our true home is in Heaven.

At one time Fr Marc's father fell ill. Unexpectedly, at that same time, Marc had to go to Central House of the Salesians in Rome and went to see his saddened family. His father said: "Marc, do not wait for going back to Korea, when you hear about my death, just say one Hail Mary for me". This was the profound faith of his parents and of his family, and is

still now.

Being still a priest among the working youth, Fr Marc became more and more involved in the direction of the House and of the Province. He became vice-Provincial and later Provincial for even two terms. When he was vice-Provincial we worked together very closely with Brother Oh Tadeo as Economist. Every week we used to meet in the recently opened House of Youth Retreats, at Shin Weol Dong, to share about the running of the Province.

Father Marc was concerned about the formation of the young brothers and of the ongoing formation of the priests. He would ask himself "did they understand rightly what Don Bosco wanted and do they interpret it rightly into the culture of Korea?" This was his constant concern. Little by little people in the Salesian Family discovered the great wisdom of this good salesian priest. So he has become a very welcome guide for persons and for Communities, giving frequent Retreats, especially to the Salesian Sisters.

A few years after being Provincial, he opened the new Formation House in Dae Jeon.

Under his guidance the Yanji mission in China came to be and he sent missionaries to African countries. But still all that time his heart was in Don Bosco Center with the boys and with so many people whom he knew and who had need of help. In 1996, being at the General Chapter in Rome, his health started giving him problems.

In Leuven the doctors found it even necessary to put him on the list of patients for heart transplant. To this end he remained some months in Belgium waiting to be called. When finally the call came, they diagnosed his situation too good for a transplant, and after a smaller surgery he recovered well, and decided to return immediately to Korea, as he knew a good Korean doctor would follow him there. Back in Korea, Fr Marc served for still another twelve years of humble and responsible work. Then his heart began to weaken again and Fr Marc had to stay quietly in his room, but he was not idle, he kept giving joy and courage to the other salesians and guidance to many people who would come to see him.

Dear boys, Sisters, Cooperators, confreres and friends, we have lost a great friend and a good father. But, we did not lose him, in one way we gained him more now, as we can call on him at all times. Each one of us will remember one or another word or attitude of Father Marc. Please, custody it well, as he approached you with great love, the love he himself had received from God in order to convey it to others. Here we have really a person who has spoken us of God, not always in brilliant words, but always with true and transparent heart.

We have all learned very much of this authentic Salesian. It is now the time to share these lessons with each other, and bring to life in ourselves the great love that Father Marc has shown for the young and the poor.

+ Luc Van Looy, Bishop of Gent.

Here are four pages written by his close companion of missionary life in Korea, Bro. Marino Bois, who together with Fr Marc started the Don Bosco Technical School in Seoul in 1966. At present, Bro. Marino Bois works in the Salesian Technical School of Yanji, China.

I have been asked to write some comment on the years that I spent with Fr Marc Cuvelier. Yes, I will do it very willingly. Let me mention some deep experiences lived together, in a period very important in my life, at the beginning of the Don Bosco Technical School. My hometown is Chatillon, Val d'Aosta. I made my Novitiate at the Salesian House of Pinerolo as a Salesian Coadiutor, and the Course of Magistero (Instructor Course) at the Technical School of Rebaudengo in Turin, and I made one year of practice in Italy.

I had been called to Korea because the Salesians of the Korean Province planned to start a Technical School. I had arrived to Korea on July 29th 1963. At that time I was 20 years old. In Korea I was mostly alone. I did not belong to the group of the Seminarians, the students for the Priesthood, who were about a dozen, in their period of the Practical Training.

He land for the Technical School had been purchased in the District of Yeong Deung Po, at the south of Seoul, at a distance of about 20 minutes by foot from the Formation House of Dae Rim Dong. At that time they were leveling the two meters deep rice paddies with the trash of the city, in order to rise it up so that in the rainy season it would not become a lake.

At one side, there was a small house, where three Salesians and twelve Aspirants were living. At the Formation House of Dae Rim Dong, in a corner of the playground, there were two sheds, just the walls made of wooden boards and the roof of tin. One shed had farming tools. The other was my working place. There were some rudimentary machines and basic tools needed for the maintenance work of the house: reparations of electrical appliances, of the boilers, of the water system, etc. I had been told to teach the main notions of manual work and the practical life of a Salesian Lay Brother to three coadiutor Aspirants, in the afternoon.

Marc arrived to Korea on November 15th 1965. I had been in Korea a little over two years. The main obligation of Marc was to go to the Language School together with the other young seminarians arrived mostly from the USA. The Language School had been started one year before, at the Convent of the Franciscan Missionaries, in downtown Seoul. The trip from our home to the School was in the city-bus plus some walking and it took about one hour.

As soon as the young Salesians came back from the Language School, Mark would come to see me at the machine shed. He was most happy to help me with the work that I was doing to repair some malfunction in the house. Actually, I was waiting for that moment, and some days, I kept looking through the window to see if the young salesians were returning from the Language School. Mark repeated that he was very glad to be able to put to good use the experience that he had made working at the factory.

We lived in great poverty. Food was simple and scarce. Some rainy days I felt very lonely. I had need of a friend, a person with much patience, due to my limited knowledge of English. It would be good if this friend had some mechanical experience so that we could work together, but again he had to have much patience, due to the elemental tools that we had. Well, Marc had all these requirements, and we could communicate easily in French.

At the free time Marc could stay with the group of the seminarians, where he also belonged. They spoke mostly in English, with jokes and games and even some musical rehearsal. Marc had good talent for music and had brought his banjo, which he played very well: he had a good voice and good sense of rhythm and always gave life and joy when he was in the group. Yet, Marc, in many of those moments of free time, would prefer to come to stay with me.

Some time we would sit near to the stove, especially in those cold days of winter. We tried to prepare coffee, we called it “espresso” but it was made with the powder from the jar of instant coffee, but anyway, it tasted very good. There we had long talks about our life, our work, our future, social events, politics, economy, religion, sciences and so on, which for me have been very helpful in the formation of my cultural and salesian mentality.

Marc, after his experience of life as a factory worker in Belgium, had learned marvelously the classic and academic disciplines during the period of his Aspirantate. During the year of his Novitiate, he learned the Salesian Spirit and the salesian passion for poor boys. In the years of the Course of Philosophy, Marc succeeded in putting together the science and the experience, all in a very logic and clear synthesis, so that he could talk of deep arguments of philosophy, history, problems of the young people, of the workers, the social Doctrine of the Church and the changes we were having those days, right after the Second Vatican Council.

Marc talked with simplicity and profundity. These talks filled many empty spaces in my still incipient intellectual and religious life. Marc also gave time for me to mention my ideas, and listened with attention, without making me feel uncomfortable when I did not know.

Another good thing Marc did to me was that he pushed me to go to the Language School. Since the very day of my arrival to Korea, I had been trying hard to learn Korean with the help of the boys and of a dictionary, also because there was not any Language School at the time when I arrived. But now, after the advice from Marc, I decided to ask the Superiors to be allowed to go to the Language School, and they allowed me to go.

This was quite a discovery, because till that time I had been speaking Korean in words rather than in sentences. Now, in only three months of study, in a small group, with another seven missionaries arrived to Korea from different countries, and with the expert guidance of a patient teacher, a kind Korean lady, I began to talk in sentences with certain easiness.

After three months of study of the Korean language, which were during the autumn of 1966, one day Marc told me: "Enough of school. Now during winter we prepare some benches and some vices, and find some files and hand saws and start teaching the street boys how to make a straight cut and a straight surface in a piece of iron. We will teach them also some geometry. They are losing the most precious years of their life on the streets, because their families cannot pay the small amount of money needed to send them to Middle School, after the six years of compulsory and free education in Primary School".

Actually I had had this same idea many times, but I gave it up because I saw that, under the present circumstances, it was impossible to put it into practice, since we did not have any thing or any place to start. Now, together with Marc, everything was different and possible. We started making some wood benches to sit and tables to write. We welded together some iron angles and made two heavy work benches, to fix four vises on each of them, not too high. We started gathering pencils and notebooks for a group of twelve or fifteen boys.

All the Salesians wanted to start working for poor boys but they did not know how to begin. So everybody in the Community were very cooperative to help us put into practice our plan. The young Korean seminarians volunteered to teach some reading and writing, after they came home from their studies at the Diocesan Seminary, in the afternoon. We emptied the shed which contained farming tools and put there the primitive benches and desks.

The heavy work-bench with its eight vices remained in the shed that was my working place. We went to the nearby Parishes, presented our plan to the Pastors and asked them to send to us the boys of 13 - 18 years old who could not go to any school, even if they were not Christian. In March we started with 18 boys, teaching first safety, not to hurt their fingers.

A few days after the beginning of our teaching we found that we could use one spacious room at the House of the Aspirants, with better desks and a real blackboard hanging on the wall. Besides, the aspirants would teach the boys some of the subjects taught in the Middle School, in the morning, which was impossible to be done by the young Salesians who went to the Diocesan Seminary. The problem was that this classroom was a 20-minutes walk away from the working shop. But anyway, this was better. We started class at 9:00 in the morning.

This change was also good in another respect, because we found that at lunch time we could give to the boys a piece of bread received from a nearby bakery which used flower of wheat or barley or millet or rye to make bread and cookies, that were sold for a cheap price, in the whole the nation. This factory employed hundreds of poor girls and the owner was a kind catholic lady who had been giving to our aspirants the pieces of bread that came out too dark or too light, or fell off the conveying belts. As soon as we told her that now we had also a group of poor boys, she gave orders to bring bread also for them.

After half an hour playing some games, we would take the 20 minutes' walk and came to the working shop for the practical lessons. The two heavy work-benches with their vises had been moved to the shed that was the initial class room. For the rainy days we had gathered and repaired some umbrellas, so that the boys could go, two of them under one umbrella, from their academic studies to their practical instructions.

We had been doing this work for three months when one day Marc, with a sad look told me: "I'm afraid that after summer you will have to do alone because I must go to Belgium to study Theology. I don't want to be ordained priest when I am too old. I will continue helping you when I come back." I knew about this but I tried not to think of it. Marc left for Belgium on August 22nd 1967. We continued the work and the number of boys increased, since we kept receiving a new group of some twenty boys every year.

On October 17th 1972 Marc, now Fr Marc, kept his promise and came back together with his companion, Fr Luc Van Looy. They brought new joy and new hope, and also music. Fr. Luc composed the hymn of the Don Bosco Technical School, which still today is sung with pride and emotion. Fr Marc with his joyful humanism gave life to all the programs of study, work, recreation, and now, with his priestly character, the spreading of the Word of God.

Soon Fr Marc was named Rector of the Community and he continued leading the Technical School with joy and peace. In May of 1984, the Provincial of Korea, Fr Luc Van Looy, who was in Rome for the 22nd General Chapter was elected Councilor for the Salesian Missions, and Fr Marc who was serving also as Vice-Provincial became automatically the Provincial.

In May of 1996, while Fr Marc was in Rome for the 24th General Chapter, his heart showed signs of illness: it had taken our pains and weaknesses and mistakes for twelve long years. From Rome Fr Mark was taken to Belgium where he was carefully treated and operated, and by December of that same year, 1996, Fr Marc could come back to Korea. Again he was appointed Rector of the Don Bosco the Technical School in Seoul, for 6 years, (1997- 2002).

In June of 2002 a new Provincial was appointed, the first Korean Salesian to be Provincial. In January of 2003 Fr Marc was assigned Rector of the Community of the Novitiate in Daejeon and he was also called to serve as one of the seven Members of the Provincial Council. This was a difficult period. Korea had become a major economy in the world and the whole nation was growing and improving. Also in our Province new ideas came up, asking for new structures and new buildings. There were difficult decisions to be made at the monthly meetings of the Provincial Council. Fr Marc was there, sometimes alone, reminding us of our duty to religious poverty and to our salesian mission to poor youngsters.

Fr. Marc's brothers and sisters and nephews and nieces wrote this page of eulogy in the brochure distributed at the Funeral Mass, held one month after the death of Fr Marc, at his home town.

Dear, dear, uncle Marc,

We are so happy and grateful we had the chance to know you. You had so much love in you, for your family and friends in Belgium, for your family and friends in Korea.

Many people will remember you as a wise man, not only with your mind, but also with your heart and your hands.

We know, we believe and we trust that you are not so far away. You made the crossing to a place we can only dream of here.

Every time you came home to Belgium after some years, it was one big joyful occasion for all of us. You'd tell us heart-warmingly and full of passion about your dreams, you filled our homes with singing and music, and you loved listening to our stories and dreams.

Your smile was always there, your words were always sprinkled with a touch of humor. You enjoyed teasing your nephews and nieces . . . and you didn't mind when we fooled you back.

But you could be really serious as well, when something came up that touched you deeply. You gave us new insights.

Now it hurts, but we are letting you go little by little, because you can really come home now . . . with your Father and Don Bosco, your shining example.

You reached the same age as Don Bosco, if that isn't a coincidence . . . Just like Don Bosco you stayed young at heart, as you surrounded yourself to youngsters.

Together with them you set off to climb the mountain of God.
That journey wasn't always easy. There were many obstacles and sometimes you had to go down again to encourage those who stayed behind.

Even your health problems didn't stop you.
Your mission has been accomplished now . . .
You reached the top.

You won't have to carry your ill body anymore.

You can continue your mission up there . . . , held in the palm of God's hand . . . , surrounded by your parents, your brothers and all the friends who went before us.

Keep watching over us and if there is a smile on our faces, we will know you are there.

Dear uncle Marc, we will miss you but you will always be in our hearts.

"I will return to the foot of the mountain, gather my youngsters, and find the way for them to like me.

I will coach them in facing ordeals courageously.

They will like tagging along with me and we will climb the mountain of God together".

We thank all the friends of Fr. Marc most sincerely for every gesture of friendship and comfort, in words and thoughts, for your prayers and compassion.

We remember our dear Fr. Marc with deep affection.

We try to follow his examples as a good Salesian.

We also, with fraternal love, pray for his eternal rest in the Peace and Love of God.

Gullegem, December 2011.

Fr Marc's relatives and friends.

The family of Fr Marc were: the parents and seven children.

The seven children were: one older sister of Fr Marc and five younger brothers.

Dear Confreres, after these three precious quotations, let me resume the Obituary Letter.

In 1982 Fr Marc was also appointed Vice-Delegate of the Korean Delegation. The Delegate, Fr Luc Van Looy, in 1984, attended to the 22nd General Chapter in Rome and happened that he was elected General Coucilor for the Salesian Missions and did not return to Korea. Automatically Fr. Marc became the Delegate, that is the Superior of the works and activities done by Salesian Congregation in Korea, and humbly he carried out this heavy responsibility, not only for one term of six years but for two terms: from May of 1984 to December of 1996.

Fr. Marc was very careful for the formation of young Brothers and the Courses of On-going Formation for Priests. His constant concern was the adaptation of the Salesian Spirit to the mentality and culture of Korea, while keeping faithful to the Charism of Don Bosco. All the people in the Salesian Family discovered the wisdom and the good spirit of Fr. Marc, which was much like St Francis de Sales, and they asked him to be their spiritual guide.

Shortly after Fr Marc took responsibility of this Delegation, continued sending Korean Confreres to Italy, to Germany, to the USA and to Manila for their studies of Philosophy and Theology, and even after their Priestly Ordination some salesians were sent to pursue their studies in order to receive the Master and Doctorate degrees to serve better this Province.

In 1988 Marc found the ideal place for the new House of Formation at the central city of Daejon, half way between Seoul and Kwangju where we have the biggest Communities. In 1989 the Province bought the land of Naeri, by the sea in the west coast, for the Summer Camps. Recently this House was erected canonically as Novitiate and House of Retreats. In 1990 our Province started the building of the Technical School at Yanji, in China, where we have a Community of ten confreres caring the Technical High School for 550 students. Fr. Marc also sent missionaries to South Africa, Nigeria and Sudan.

The year 1994 Fr Marc named a confrere as provincial secretary, work that till then had been done by the Provincial himself. The reason was the increasing of office work to keep all the records of the confreres and send the reports of the communities to the General Secretariat. And here is a revealing arithmetical curiosity, regarding the growing of vocations in 10 years: in 1984 the salesians in this Province were 28, in 1994 they were 82.

In May of 1996 Fr Marc was in Rome attending to the 24th General Chapter. During those days of demanding work and heavy responsibility, the heart of our good Fr. Marc felt ill and had to receive medical treatment in Belgium. Happily, in December of that same year, 1996, Fr Marc could return to Korea. He attended to the Ceremony of the Nomination of the new Provincial, because the Delegation of Korea had been raised to the status of Vice-Province, and the new Vice-Provincial was Fr Václav Klement.

In 1997 Fr Marc was appointed Rector of the Community of Don Bosco Technical

School, which he knew so well from its beginning, and did this work perfectly for the usual six years. Without any free time, in January of 2003, he was appointed Rector of the Novitiate, where he served for another 6 years. . . . Well, not quite; something unexpected happened. . . .

In October of 2008, we had the joy of having the visit of Fr Marc's sister and brother-in-law. During this visit, Fr Marc accompanied them to see all the salesian Communities in Korea. Those were busy days. One day Fr Marc fell unconscious: he had been giving too much work to his already weak heart. He was rushed to the hospital in Daejon, and a few days later to the St. Mary's Hospital, in Seoul. The day, when Fr Marc's sister and brother-in-law had to return to Belgium, Marc was fighting for his life in the Intensive Care Unit of the Hospital. The two guests were taken directly from the hospital to the airport, all silent in the car, because the sister of Marc was shedding tears.

The last years, 2009, 2010 and 2011, Fr Marc had to stay quiet trying to keep his heart alive, but he was not idle: many people came to see him, for he was always patient and peaceful, and truthful and transparent. The room of Fr Marc, right in his Don Bosco Technical School, was near to the Chapel of the Community, so that he could go, day or night, to pray, or even only to breath, by the Blessed Sacrament. Fr Marc every day said the Office and the Rosary.

The last week of November of 2011 pleural complications forced the Confreres to take him to the Catholic Hospital of St. Mary. Since the first moment Fr Marc was kept in the special ICU for heart patients, with the oxygen mask and the larynx lining tube. The friends from the Belgian Embassy came and also the Belgian Sister Marie-Hélène Brasseur, Medical Doctor, Superior of a Community of nurses who have a humble Family Hospital in a poor slum of Seoul, came to see him but he was not able to speak. His health kept declining steadily.

The afternoon of that Sunday, the 4th of December, was warm and clear and calm, with that heavenly and nostalgic aura of a Sunday of Advent in the Novena of the Immaculate. That afternoon Fr Marc died peacefully. We had three days and two nights of Masses and prayers in the Ardent Chapel at the Provincial House. The solemn Funeral Mass was offered and attended by many priests and religious and Sisters and members of the Salesian Family and, a very impressive and emotive scene to watch, by a crowded group of silent workers, young and old, the grateful mechanic apprentices of Fr Marc.

We ask a prayer for the eternal rest of our dear Fr. Marc.

I ask also a prayer for our Province.

Fr Stephan Nam Sang Hun, SDB. Provincial of Korea



Data for the Necrology:

First Profession: at Groot-Bijgaarden, on August 25th 1962

Perpetual Profession: at Out-Heverlee, on April 6th 1968

Priestly Ordination: at Out-Heverlee, on September 12th 1970

He served as Provincial for 12 years. (1984~1996)

Fr Marc Cuvelier

June 5th 1938(Gullegem, Belgium) ~ December 4th 2011(Seoul, Korea)

Province of Holy Korean Martyrs