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DON SILVIO

A Biography of Fr. Silvio Lomazzi, SDB

Salesian Missionary in China

Apostle and Victim of drug-abusers

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Fr. Silvio Lomazzi, S.D.B. (1907-1982)

INTRODUCTION

Fr. Silvio Lomazzi, SDB, was murdered in the early hours of December 29th 1982 at the Salesian Provincial Office in Pokfulam Rd., Hong Kong.

The news of his tragic death spread like wild fire throughout the world and shocked many.

The heroic conclusion of his life threw new light on the many virtues which he always managed to hide behind a rather rough appearance. They must not remain hidden. Hence the present biography.

HIS YOUTH

Fr. Silvio was born in Milan, Italy, on April 24th 1907: his family was deeply religious. While father was endowed with a kind and endearing character, mother was rather stern, although she too loved her children deeply. She never showed young Silvio and his sister Luigia marked affection but fulfilled her motherly duties with readiness and determination. If anybody dared to trespass in conversation in their presence, she would intervene with severity. From his father Silvio learnt outstanding uprightness of mind and heart and from his mother great strength of character.

As a boy he was cheerful, simple and extremely lively; he often got told off by mother on account of his boyish pranks. If he was walking along the tram-tracks, he would take great pleasure in sticking the point of his umbrella into them, which most often resulted in returning home with a broken umbrella to face the music. Climbing stairs the usual "banal" way was no fun for young Silvio; he would take great delight in climbing up (often with his younger sister riding on his back) holding on to the outside of the hand-rails and riding down fast along the same: a distance of four floors: all done merrily without any thought to the risks involved. His satchel in winter would make an ideal toboggan to slide down the slopes of the "Castello Sforzesco"!

He would never dare to contradict his mother, but his boyish liveliness always managed to win her over.

As a young man he was even more daring: from the embankment of the railway he would jump onto passing trains and on being shouted at by angry railwaymen, he would happily dash off and . . . disappear!

One of his great feats which he always thoroughly enjoyed was having free rides holding on to tram-car doors and getting off before the next stop: it looked so simple (although risky!) and especially . . . less expensive!

Once, however, he almost paid for his daring with his own life, when he fell onto the tracks and saw death just a few inches away: yet he luckily escaped it as the wheels that were to crush him just grazed past his legs.

Since the age of five Silvio attended the oratory of the "Incoronata" parish: there he readily found ample scope for his lively temper.

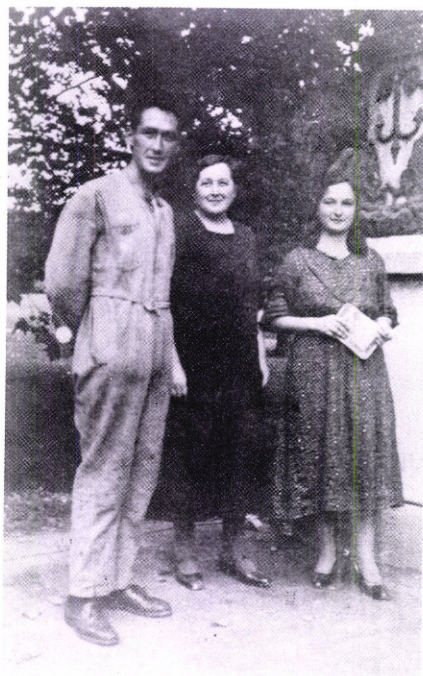
Even at school he enjoyed making merry, so much so that his class-mistress had come to the conclusion that wherever things got noisy, Silvio must be there!



Silvio's father: Mr. Luigi Lomazzi



Silvio's mother: Mrs. Maria Rosa Giudici



Young Silvio with mother and sister

One day after classes the students were having great fun at the bottom of the stairs and naturally the lady teacher thought that as usual Silvio would be one of the trouble-makers and bellowed, "Lomazzi!" "I am right here, madam!" came the ready answer: for once Silvio had been standing quietly near her.

At the oratory the youngster took great interest in organizing stage performances, band concerts, games as well as the teaching of catechism, to the great pleasure of all concerned; and his pupils always came up on top.

He enjoyed the valuable friendship of the priest in charge (a capable person) with whom he used to take great delight in mountaineering. He enjoyed climbing rock-faces and knew full well that he always needed no fewer than three supports.

Once, however, he missed one and being about to crash started shaking pretty badly. Luckily for him, the leader realized the risk and shouted from below, "Take heart, Silvio!" The words were good enough for him to pick up courage, find the third support and slowly climb down safely.

After attending primary and middle school, Silvio enrolled in a technical evening school. In this connection, I have been informed by his sister of the following incident; "The final exam was to take place on a Sunday; my brother was not too sure of himself, yet he went to the oratory as usual. My father and I on leaving church after attending holy mass, went over to the oratory, where we heard the lively notes of a trumpet. Father stopped for a while in his steps and then led me to the hall where we found our youngster blowing away with great zest. Father gave him a warning look; my brother got the message, put down the instrument, left the hall followed by us and directed his steps towards the technical school "Santa Marta"; he eventually went through his exams with flying colours.

On graduation Silvio decided to start working. Electronics was his choice: before long he produced his first . . . master-piece: a simple crystal radio-set made out of a . . . cigar-box! He soon joined the Brown-Boveri factory and later the "Compagnia Generale di Elettricit  ". His tutor was a very exacting German technician who trained him so well that in no time Silvio became a specialist in producing high and low tension tram-car motors; the long hours of work often made the skin of his hands crack and bleed. He was interested also in other pursuits like the dubbing of films and giving a helping hand in the wine-shop of his father: the latter's dream was that young Silvio should learn and eventually inherit the business: however, the



Silvio the painter



With friends on an excursion



Silvio the actor

youngster did not show much enthusiasm for it. Yet he picked up a good deal about wines: how they are brewed, treated and tasted. He used to say that in those days he was doing three different jobs at a time while dreaming of a fourth one: to be a train-driver.

Yet God had something different in store for him.

We know some delightful details about Silvio the worker; he did not go back to work every day just aiming at his wages but also at acquiring more experience. Although he was offered a pay increase, he soon quit his job which he felt had become boring and uninteresting.

As a factory worker, Silvio did not enjoy much of a happy time: with his fellow-workers he was not too popular because he was exemplary at his duties and a convinced and practising catholic, while most of them were socialists with their heads stuffed with anti-clerical ideas. Naturally they would not mince words with him and often addressed him as “a bigot”, “a running dog of priests” and even less complimentary epithets. Yet Silvio never cowered or lost his peace, until one day a serious challenge changed the situation altogether. A fellow-worker took to teasing him more insistently than usual and Silvio suddenly lost control of himself, picked up a hammer and was about to throw it at the teaser when luckily a fellow-worker got hold of him, pinned him down to the floor and thus avoided a tragedy! The result: his colleagues realized once and for all that Silvio was not the chicken-hearted coward they imagined and decided to respect him and leave him in peace.

An interesting break in his workaday life was the young man's military service with a mountain heavy-artillery battalion. As he was quite proficient at drawing, he was entrusted with the responsibility of assessing the accuracy of artillery gun-fire. His battery worked independently of the rest of his comrades-in-arms, which enabled him and his mates to be exempt from the tedious daily chores of the barracks.

In later years Fr. Silvio used to tell amusing stories about his life in the army. One day, for example, up in the mountains he and his fellow-soldiers, all as hungry as young men can be, were left without their daily rations. The small loaves of hard bread left for emergencies, simply refused to slide down their throats. Luckily there appeared on the scene a welcome herd of goats which generously provided them with fresh milk. The affair, however, did not work out so smoothly as the old bread and the fresh milk did not agree too much in their stomachs. Result: a very hard-to-forget inner trouble for all!



Out mountaineering



Silvio the soldier

SILVIO'S VOCATION

Back from the barracks to the factory, young Silvio was already maturing a higher ideal in life. How did it all come about? The ways of the Lord are manifold and they affect man in such a variety of surprising fashions.

On one occasion Silvio had to work on a film about a missionary in India, which set him thinking hard. He did not mention it in the family but his folks soon realized that something was brewing. Before long the young man spoke to his spiritual director. The latter, a Mons. Mercalli, would never suspect that happy-go-lucky Silvio might entertain such plans and with a smile of unbelief asked him in great astonishment, "You?" Yet realizing that the youngster was dead serious, Monsignor encouraged him to pursue his worthy ideal in earnest.

Silvio had the missions in mind and so, naturally, he thought of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (P.I.M.E.), the wellknown missionary society with headquarters in his Milan. But he was politely turned away on account of his age of 25, which was deemed unsuitable for the exacting studies for holy priesthood. It was then that Monsignor suggested the "Institute Card. Cagliero" at Ivrea. "There they enrol also people of your age!" added the good priest. Thus it happened that young Silvio bumped into the Salesians of Don Bosco.

His decision made, he spoke of it to his mother. She opened her arms in a gesture of great faith, "If this is God's will, go ahead!" she said.

In an interview with a journalist of the "Corriere della Sera" in 1976 Fr. Silvio declared, "The day I decided to leave to pursue my vocation I was back home with mother. Having gone through some chores, I went to the door and said, "Mother, I am going to the missions!" and rushed down the stairs.

"But what about your father? Have you forgotten your father?"

Of course I had not but I did not have the heart to tell him.

Having made my rounds to deliver father's flasks, back home I was told that he was already in the know. He did not give me time to speak a word and, producing a railway time-table, "You have one hour before the next train leaves for Ivrea!" he said; "I was planning to leave my wine business to you. But you are no longer a boy. If you have made your decision, go ahead and do not look back!"

Thus in a way so heroic yet so simple the worthy parents offered up to God their only son."

On concluding his report of the interview, the above-mentioned journalist added another interesting detail mentioned by Fr. Silvio: "Of course there was the problem of my girl-friend. Naturally we were looking forward. She was a good girl. But she tried to understand!"

I had some doubt about this little story and enquired of Fr. Silvio's sister who kindly supplied me with additional information:

"My brother never promised any young woman anything. Of this I am quite sure. As you may imagine, he was a smart young man and the girls of the oratory and of the parish did not hide their admiration and affection particularly as Silvio was very successful on the stage. I knew he was quite popular, but to him they were all just good friends. Naturally he had his preferences. I know that one of them, a very good girl, hoped to be the chosen one, but my brother never made any choice. Perhaps even unwittingly he felt little attraction to the married life. I came to this conclusion when I noticed that as father was planning to develop his business also in view of the future family, my brother did not show much interest. I know also that the girl spoke to Mons. Mercalli, who discouraged her from pursuing the matter, "because Silvio will never be interested in you or in other girls: he is after another kind of love!"

"Perhaps recalling these incidents Fr. Silvio may have cracked a few jokes with the journalist. Another thing: I recall I never imagined my brother would get married. Perhaps it was some kind of intuition, but for sure I never imagined it!"

A SALESIAN ASPIRANT.

The Salesian missionary juniorate "Cardinal Cagliero" at Ivrea was set up in 1922 to commemorate the diamond jubilee anniversary of priesthood of the Cardinal, who had headed the first group of Salesian missionaries to South America back in 1875. It was the first of several missionary juniorates established in those days as a result of the great "Missionary Crusade" set in motion by saintly rector major the Servant of God Fr. Philip Rinaldi. In its first year of life it existed as an autonomous section of the novitiate house. In 1922 it had the whole premises for itself when the novitiate moved to the house at Foglizzo.

Ivrea was for many years the well-known breeding ground of a great number of youthful Salesian missionaries: among them Fr. Silvio.

He arrived on March 9th 1933. A bit hesitant because he had been told that the house was meant for . . . mentally retarded people! His fear grew stronger when on reaching the gate he met a bunch of "house-boys" who were setting out on an outing, walking in Indian file, all silent and looking somewhat odd.

(As an explanation may I add here that in those days there lived in some Salesian houses people called in Italian "Famigli" who generally were in charge of domestic chores. Indeed some of them were half-witted fellows with nobody to turn to, unable to do better jobs and employed by the Salesians in order to provide them with a decent way of life. Those working at Ivrea were mostly peasants who, supervised by a capable laybrother, looked after the farm adjoining the juniorate premises.)

On entering the house young Silvio was shown round the place and, as it might be expected, his Cicero often mentioned Don Bosco. The new-comer, who had kept silent all the way, eventually asked with eagerness, "May I see this Don Bosco?"

"Oh, he died long ago!" Silvio swallowed the gaffe with a smile.

Then there came the turn of Card. Cagliero, the titular of the house.

"May I visit Card. Cagliero?"

"Oh, no; he is long dead!"

But then, thought the puzzled youngster, where have I ended up? A home for the mentally retarded and with people long gone!

Then there came supper time: prayer and silence. Later, the reading over, the "Tu autem Domine miserere nobis" (to him it sounded like tamtam domine!) and the general loud reply "Deo Gratias! Bon appetit!"

Silvio's conclusion came natural to his mind, "This is indeed an asylum for the mentally retarded!"

In the class-room Silvio, a tall mature ex-artillery-man, sat by the side of a young boy who looked hardly able to blab a few words. The juniorate in those days welcomed pupils of different ages with a common denominator, as it were, i.e. the desire to go to the missions to work. Silvio soon understood the idea of his superiors: to put together the young (naturally a bit lively) with the mature ones, who would exercise a beneficial influence on them.

A minor anecdote of those days: Silvio was chatting with some friends of his in the playground; another student standing at the window of the attic up above dropped a small object which was not meant to hit anybody but just to cause a little fright.

Unluckily the small missile hit one of his companions down below right on the head. The latter looked up without showing any anger, rather smiling up calmly although a little tear welled up in his eyes; it was Silvio, who behind a rough appearance hid a generous heart.

Among his fellow-aspirants Silvio was soon noted not only because of his age but above all for his spirit of piety and steadiness of purpose which he showed in the discharge of his duties.

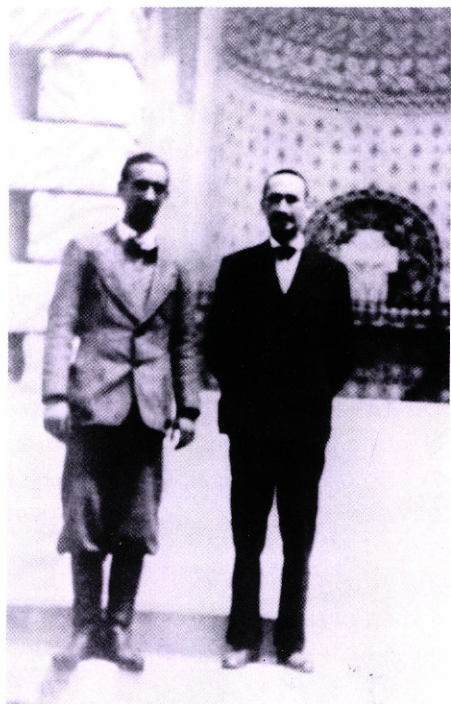
He had learnt a good deal at the school of the unforgettable Mons. Olgiati, the promoter in Milan of the Catholic Action Movement. His deep and solid formation in this field showed up with clarity in his daily life.

Silvio added his marvellous voice to the wellknown choir of the Juniorate and in theatrical performances he almost always was assigned the leading role.

As regards the theatre, Silvio was not only an actor but was also in charge of the setting: the latter being often rather poor, he often had to have recourse to his artistic talents to remedy the situation.

On day this activity of his cost him quite dearly. It was a Sunday afternoon during the celebration of Vespers and Silvio was busy on the stage to get it ready for the evening performance. He badly needed an article which he knew was locked in a nearby room. As time was running out fast, the prefect of studies who was in charge of the performance, suggested climbing into the room by a small window. He readily complied and was about to jump when the rector of the house appeared on the scene! That evening the little talk which the rector addressed to the community after night-prayers was indeed a fiery one. Having caught a student acting very much like a burglar, father let himself be carried away by holy zeal! The following morning Silvio was called along and told to pack up and go. It was lucky for him that the prefect of studies intervened in time and explained the matter to the superior. Of course the burglary was forgotten right away.

Among other things a beautiful sermonette by Silvio one evening in May before the statue of our Lady Help of Christians made a remarkable impression and is still remembered today.



At the Salesian Missionary Juniorate, Ivrea



Ready to leave for the missions (Ivrea 1935)

However, at Ivrea Silvio found two things hard to put up with: the first was the boarding school type of discipline. The latter was indeed needed as most pupils were young boys; to Silvio, however, a mature ex-soldier, so many detailed regulations looked very much like narrow-minded fuss. Yet in his wisdom he managed to understand and accept them. The second, a much heavier one, was his studies. Starting anew at 26 he found his memory a bit "rusty"! He struggled very hard but without much success. We have records of the grades he obtained: Religious knowledge: very good; in other subjects: mediocre; in Latin and Greek, alas, just enough to keep afloat!

The rector of the Juniorate and his Council put down the following comments on Silvio's graduation day: Health: good; Intelligence: mediocre; character: mature man, a bit touchy but very co-operative. Loves the Congregation dearly. Aptitudes: accomplished in electrical engineering and expert at drawing and painting.

Let us point out that the word mediocre was applied only to his studies; his various talents were far from mediocre.

In his time at Ivrea Silvio always set an outstanding example of fervour to all and was an inspiration to everybody to persevere in the missionary vocation. One of the most impressive occasions of the whole school year at Ivrea was indeed the proclamation of the various destinations throughout the Salesian world assigned to the year's graduates.

The graduating class of the year 1935 boasted 44 young men among whom was Silvio Lomazzi. His name solemnly called out and his destination "China" proclaimed, he was hardly able to control his emotions. The latter were indeed mixed: the joy of having at last received the big news was somewhat tempered by fear: he was fully aware of the difficulties involved in the learning of the Chinese language; but he soon plucked up courage, "After all, basically I have made the choice myself, haven't I?" he thought. The clothing ceremony of the neo-missionaries took place at the Juniorate itself. To make Silvio's joy complete his parents were also present: for three long years they had missed him badly. As she was helping with the buttoning up of his new cassock, the good mother commented wisely, "Silvio, wear this cassock with the dignity due to it and never give it up."

After a short leave back home with the family, Silvio cheerfully bade farewell to his people and left for the Far East on the motor vessel "Conte Verde".

Among his companions on the journey was Fr. Andrew Majcen, a wellknown Salesian from Yugoslavia, who worked with zeal in China and later in Vietnam for many years. Here are some of his reminiscences: "I knew Bro. Lomazzi while travelling by train from Turin to Trieste to board our boat. Later on on board the ship he came along to greet me, but communication was rather awkward because of my poor knowledge of the Italian language. Towards the conclusion of the journey Bro. Lomazzi again approached me, this time to apologize for failing to keep me company (as he kindly put it); he mentioned of course the language barrier. Then I admired his good and sincere heart. In later years my opinion of him grew more and more appreciative indeed." The Conte Verde reached Hong Kong on October 2nd 1935. The new arrivals were met at the pier by the unforgettable provincial Fr. C. Braga: jubilant over the youthful additions to his personnel, he hugged them all in the enthusiastic welcome so typical of him!

THE NOVITIATE AND PHILOSOPHY YEARS

When setting foot in the house of formation at Shaukeiwan (a suburb of Hong Kong), Silvio was wearing a handsome beard, so that to his amusement the Chinese aspirants rushed along to . . . kiss his hand!

That same evening he was asked to draw up the program of a modest entertainment in honour of the newly-arrived. It was the first in a long series of tableaux, paintings and stage settings which made Bro. Silvio popular but cost him a great many sacrifices for many years to come.

In the novitiate his master was Fr. E. Almazan, who had previously joined the staff of the house after leaving Thailand. A learned man and capable teacher.

From the provincial records it appears that at first Bro. Silvio looked somewhat light-headed to his master; later on however, the latter realized his steadiness of purpose, at times there appeared in the novice signs of discouragement, although they were short-lived and soon overcome. This was indeed a typical mark of his personality: great enthusiasm in doing good and intense inner suffering when he met with failure or misunderstanding. Not much else is known of Bro. Silvio as a novice apart from his religious profession which took place on December 8th 1936.

On completing his novitiate, brother moved over to the section of the house occupied by the students of philosophy. A marked improvement in his studies can be noticed from the records when compared with those

at Ivrea.

The grades he obtained on graduating in June 1939 show one single six for the English language; then ten for religious knowledge, eight for philosophy and eight and a half for Latin.

In 1937 there arrived at the house of formation two extraordinary visitors, the Rev. Frs. P. Berruti and A. Candela, both members of the superior council, from Turin. While Fr. Berruti one morning was all absorbed in his preparation for holy mass in the sacresty, Bro. Silvio noticed to his great dismay that a big mosquito had landed on Father's neck and was having a great feast on his blood; after it had had its fair share, it peacefully departed without Fr. Berruti showing the least sign of discomfort. Bro. Silvio was deeply moved at the sight and during the day kept mentioning the incident with great admiration to his fellow clerics.

Life in the house of formation often tends to be monotonous and rather boring. When at Shaukeiwan it was question of keeping up the spirits, the wizard was unquestionably Bro. Silvio. He was ever ready; a light make-up and then alone or accompanied by some other cheerful fellow he would improvise amusing skits which set everybody roaring with laughter. A famous one was the wellknown poem "La Vispa Teresa", which he used to declaim in ever new fashions with outstanding sense of humour.

On graduation from his studies of philosophy, Brother moved at once to the St. Louis Industrial School in the same city of Hong Kong for his practical training. He not even dreamt of a holiday after the strenuous efforts of his exams.

BRO. SILVIO'S PRACTICAL TRAINING YEARS

In the curriculum of formation for junior Salesians the so-called period of practical training is deemed quite important. The studies of philosophy concluded and before starting those of theology, the young brothers are sent to different Salesian communities to put into practice the norms learnt in the houses of formation as teachers and supervisors of the pupils. It is no easy stage in the formation period, during which under the guidance of their senior confreres they learn in practice the ways of the Salesian educative system.

Also in the case of Bro. Silvio it was in no way plain sailing. Here there follow some reminiscences of his regarding that time:

"On completing my studies of philosophy, I started my practical training. The first year I spent in St. Louis Industrial School (as it was then

called). It was an interesting experience. As I arrived from Shaukeiwan, on entering the boarders' dormitory, I came across Bro. V. who had had a clash with the superior and was about to leave as he was deemed unsuitable for the Salesian life.

I was arriving and he was leaving: this displeased me.

The superior, Fr. G. Guarona, was rigid with others and very rigid with himself. Quite exacting as regarded the supervision of the pupils, he set an example by always being present with them whenever other confreres failed to attend, particularly in places which he felt required closer supervision.

In those days St. Louis was a rather difficult school to work in: there Brother needed very badly the principles of the preventive system in the education of youth he had learnt at the house of formation.

Many of the students had been sent by the Police, some were Eurasians (a particularly lively breed!); it was a mixture of thieves, bullies and cheats! Indeed it was to be a very hard year for me.

The first Sunday I was there I was put in charge of a group of boys with Bro. Schmidt, a greenhorn like myself. We set out on an outing but the pupils took advantage of our lack of experience and refused to comply with our orders.

We decided to bring them back to the School but they refused to follow us. They said in Chinese "M faan!" (which means "we are not going back").

I thought they were telling us they had no rice: I was unable to make head or tail of whatever they were saying Eventually the two crestfallen brothers had to make their way back to the school without their charges! Utter failure!

On this and other occasions the unruly pupils were punished rather drastically by the school authorities but mostly without much apparent result.

On noticing a group of students who evidently were keeping less decent conversations, I would bravely approach them; but they would quickly break up, soon to reassemble elsewhere to . . . carry on their fun! A very disheartening reaction indeed.

It was a sad day for me when the art teacher Fr. Dalmasso had to leave the school for the USA: he was a valuable confrere adept at drawing and



With fellow-students of Philosophy at Hong Kong, 1937



On the Staff of the Salesian Theologate, Shanghai, 1948

painting, a graduate of the Milan Academy of Arts.

Fr. Rector called me along and told me to take over all Father's lessons. I was thoroughly frightened: among the students there were some who were quite adept at drawing. I approach Fr. Dalmasso for advice but he is already taken up by his imminent trip and has little time for me, "But it is so simple; you know drawing; teach them how to draw. We Salesians learn swimming by diving into the water . . . it's all so simple . . . do you understand?"

I was left helpless but luckily not hopeless and I came by a trick to impress upon my students that I knew my art. During the night I went down to the class-room and carefully drew a flowerpot on the board, then rubbed it off but taking care to leave a very light trace which from afar was hardly discernible. Next day I bravely faced my boys, all ready to give me a rough time!

"Well now, we are going to draw something together. What shall we draw? A flower-pot? Well, a flower-pot. Then, what shape? Round? Alright, round!"

Then I proceeded to . . . draw the round pot as required. (Of course I had taken great care to give the students no time to make . . . any suggestions which would make my trick founder!)

"Then there must be something in the vase! Some branches, some leaves, some flowers . . ." And I went on bravely drawing while my boys sat goggle-eyed with admiration.

"Now then; it's your turn; come on, get your things ready and start drawing!"

The trick had worked; my reputation as an artist was.. . safe, "The fellow knows what he is talking about!"

Great help in that crucial year I drew from the sodalities. I had complained with Fr. Guarona.

"What to do?" he replied, "Do what Don Bosco did. Try to be Don Bosco your own way! Meanwhile organize the sodalities: you will see great results!"

It was indeed a wonderful piece of advice but my poor language stood in the way. I spoke little Chinese and understood less. The boys of the printing shop were all young delinquents, unwilling to work and keen on . . . pilfering about!

There was one Chung fellow who was particularly bad, a real scoundrel, a violent chap, but very intelligent. I decided to start organizing the sodalities with his help; I picked the most difficult boys and managed to enlist Chung's co-operation. It was the beginning of the sodality of St. Aloysius, which boasted the worst but the most brilliant students in its ranks. Naturally addressing them was the problem. Once I managed to put together a short talk with the help of Fr. Acquistapace who happened to pay a visit to St. Louis; on another occasion I got help from Fr. Arduino.

Something was achieved and the boys appreciated it. When on one occasion the feastday of St. Anthony was about to be celebrated, it fell on me to decorate the chapel and the playground. I assemble my sodalists:

"It is a great honour for all of us to decorate the chapel and the playground for this important occasion . . come on . . . get moving. This is our chance!"

It was a double great success. Not only the preparation before the feastday but also the removing and reassembling of all odds and ends after it (which generally is not such a pleasant task for boys!). Everything went smoothly and quickly. Fr. Rector was quite pleased and commented, "At the conclusion of the school year, I propose you take your sodalists for a trip as a reward."

As I hesitated, he added, "Try: you will be happy and the boys happier than yourself!" I did as I was told and the idea worked marvellously. The outing turned out to be a great success indeed. The boys knew I liked roasted beans and provided a bagful of them for me and insisted that I eat them all! Wonderful kids: the sodalities are indeed a great means in the education of youngsters.

One of my heaviest tasks was indeed my drawing lessons, which involved all the apprentices of the school. I took it very seriously and worked hard even at night. One one occasion I was caught . . . red-handed by the rector. "Oh, look at this young missionary who stays up working late at night. Be careful: you will pay for it eventually as I paid for it myself in my time . . ."

I was eventually given the student section of the school to teach them drawing (they followed a different syllabus from that of the apprentices).

In the senior class there held sway a fellow who was the worst of them all. How to face the situation?

“Let us do machine drawing!” I started my pep talk to the class. “Machine drawing is the bridge of communication between the engineer and the worker: the latter will indeed be successful if he is able to draw and to interpret machine drawings. If you succeed in managing it, you will be ready to contribute positively to the progress of the new China!”

The leading boy of the class got the message and the others followed suit! Come the exams. I prepare the test that takes me less than an hour but I fail to foresee that the boys will not manage it in the four hours allowed to do it. Time up, I decide to collect the papers: no way! They intend to stay on and complete the job, well into the afternoon (of course missing their lunch!); they indeed enjoyed it. In time, however, all these hardships brought my vocation almost to breaking point. Once I even asked myself, “What am I doing here? I am lost and nobody seems to care!” Fr. Catechist had little time for the brothers in practical training and the rector, busy with a lot of things, would just say, “Learn how to swim, my dear!”

I thought I had failed to learn. In one of those dark hours, one afternoon, I went to the chapel, sat down before the Lord and said, “But, Lord, what am I here for? I do not know what to do. Things are not working at all!”

No answer from the Lord ensued, but I suddenly felt within myself a mysterious calm, a great tranquillity of mind, a soothing feeling of relief. I got up, returned to my duties as though nothing unpleasant had ever happened. On looking back, I feel it was a great triumph of God’s grace.

Towards the end of that school year (1939-40) war broke out between Italy and Great Britain. Bro. Silvio like his fellow-Italians, automatically became an unfriendly alien, was confined to the premises of St. Louis and eventually deported to nearby Macau.

Here in Salesian School he spent the second year of this practical training which turned out to be much happier than that in Hong Kong had been. He had finally found the right place: the boys were more open, more co-operative and closer to their teachers. Bro. Silvio’s open and ready-to-help attitude to all together with his outstanding abilities soon won over all his charges.

Quite interesting to mention, the “unavoidable” nickname he eventually got: “Lo Tsing Nin” (the youthful old man)! It described his personality quite aptly: old of age and young at heart.

One day brother suffered a painful sprain on his foot, which made his moving about quite awkward. It might have been a God-sent chance for him to retire and rest; but this was not what he decided to do: before long you would see him in the classroom and in the playground walking unsteadily about on a pair of crutches as cheerful as ever!

THE STUDIES OF THEOLOGY

In those days the practical training period lasted three years. In Bro. Silvio's case, however, in view of his age and maturity, it lasted only two years, after which he was sent to Shanghai for his theology.

Salesian work in Shanghai in those days was manifold: "The Red House" to the south of the city in the suburb of Nantao (built by Comm. Lo Pa Hong in 1925) housed several separate communities: The aspirants, who at one time numbered well over one hundred; the novices, who were all Chinese and the students of philosophy and theology. There was also the "St. Joseph's Trade School", which trained mostly orphan boys. In another suburb of the city (Yangtsepoo) there stood the "Don Bosco Trade School" which catered for boarding and day students, a flourishing boys' club and the Don Bosco Parish Church.

Times were difficult because of the war and the Japanese occupation. There was not much to keep going and saintly Fr. Braga, the Provincial, had to make frequent rounds to beg for money and for rice. It was no easy task to feed over three hundred young men and boys without any steady income. Yet life went on thanks to God's help and the protection of Our Lady Help of Christians.

Was it an inspiration? Or was it luck? It's hard to tell but the thing did come about. Many friends and benefactors came to know about the plight of the Salesians through theatrical performances staged by the clerics and the aspirants on various occasions. The affair gradually developed to outstanding proportions and eventually "Operettas" of remarkable artistic value made the Salesians wellknown throughout the city. Some beautiful musical productions are still remembered today: "Il Cieco di Gerico"; "Marco il Pescatore"; by V. Cimatti as well as "Tarcisius"; "Matteo Ricci" and "Il Miracolo dell'amore" by Mo. Pellegatti.

The performances not only brought fame to the Salesians in the region but also badly needed financial help in those hard times.

The beautiful productions were indeed due to the efforts of many but



At the House of Formation, Hong Kong, 1955

also to the tireless manifold work of Bro. Silvio who never spared himself as a brilliant actor, an outstanding painter as well as an experienced producer.

But by far his heaviest job was the planning and the painting of the various sets needed on the big stage: Brother was a veritable magician with his brushes. Many times spectators simply went wild with admiration when the curtain went up to reveal his masterpieces.

On the occasion of the celebrations for the centenary of the Jesuit missions in Shanghai, the Salesians availed themselves of the occasion to express their gratitude to the Fathers, who had extended them a brotherly welcome as well as substantial aid on their arrival in the city following their expulsion from Hong Kong in 1940. Thus they went out of their way to prepare a series of plastic tableaux for the stage: a remarkable blend of colour, music and lively commentary. The numerous repeat performances drew very favourable comments from the public. They were thoroughly appreciated and did a lot of good to many. But behind the scenes was capable, ever — enthusiastic Bro. Silvio, never minding time or energy to make the productions resounding successes.

In times of serious financial difficulties, he had to struggle even with his own superiors to obtain the needed stuff for his work; many hours of the night were spent on the stage, because those of the day were given to his books. As the icing on the cake, add the food that in those days was poor and scarce, and the bitterly cold Shanghai winters (the seminary could not afford central heating!).

But an extra ordeal was in store for Bro. Silvio: it was decided that the whole student body of the Salesian Seminary should travel to the city of Shuchowfu, many miles to the north of Shanghai beyond the Yangtse River to perform some of the operettas already produced in Shanghai. The plan entailed a great deal of extra work. Bro. Silvio and his helpers had to prepare new and lighter sets to be packed for shipping to Shuchowfu, travel to the latter city by train, which indeed was no pleasure trip and then unpack, set the stage, which again was a back-breaking job. But good old Silvio took everything in his stride always with a smile on his lips and a ready joke to break the monotony of his demanding task.

Another less responsible man would have availed himself of his extra responsibilities as an excuse to lessen the burden of his studies. Such an idea never crossed his mind: he was cut for the heroic and to the end he lived up to his heroic ideals: Always the best in all things.

THE PRIEST

The study of theology was indeed a heavy burden on Bro. Silvio's shoulders because of his age and the many extra activities he had to attend to; yet he managed to graduate successfully and eventually to his great satisfaction and joy he was ordained a priest on January 29th 1945 by the Bishop of Shanghai, the saintly Mons. A. Haouisée. Newly ordained Fr. Silvio and his companions regretted only that they were unable to share with their families the great joy of the occasion because of the war, but they readily offered up their sacrifice in truly missionary spirit. Fr. Silvio in later years often mentioned his first holy mass and the great fervour and satisfaction associated with it.

FR. SILVIO'S PRIESTLY APOSTOLATE

Fr. Silvio's zeal and generosity soon found ample scope right there in the section of the "Red House" adjacent to the seminary. There were housed several hundred Italians, former members of the crew of the liner "Conte Verde" blocked in the harbour and of the battalion "San Marco." They

were practically leading the life of a concentration camp with the obvious consequences of all kinds including the moral ones.

Newly-ordained Fr. Silvio readily accepted the responsibilities for the spiritual care of the men, who indeed badly needed it.

His remarkable spirit of dedication to their welfare soon won their admiration and gratitude: he was inexhaustible in his tricks to cheer them up, in his ways to console them when sick and in his eagerness to teach them catechism. Before long he became quite popular also for his abilities as an actor and his skilful skits used to set his charges roaring with laughter on many occasions.

Treated as prisoners of war, the men had to work for the Japanese in the nearby naval dockyard facing the daily danger of death from American air-raids. Fr. Silvio was ever in the fore-front to keep up their morale, particularly on one sad occasion when about a dozen of them were killed by American bombs. He always brought along a word of encouragement and cheer. His priestly zeal was inexhaustible in consoling them in their sick **beds and exhorting** them to bear their sufferings patiently and in some cases to face death with serenity and resignation to God's holy will. Meanwhile he did not neglect his duties in the seminary. His lectures were appreciated because it was so evident that he put all his soul into them; he made up for his lack of academic qualifications with hard work and very accurate preparation. In later years he worked also in the St. Joseph's School and in the Don Bosco Trade School.

When the new regime took over control of the country in 1949, things became quite difficult also for Fr. Silvio who had to witness helplessly the process by which the authorities were progressively taking over the schools. Father went through the painful ordeal patiently and bravely until eventually he was confined to his quarters with the other members of his community, unable to communicate with and to work for his students. At last in July 1952 after a long wait he was granted an exit visa and left the country for Hong Kong. A few days later he was already on board a ship bound for Venice. He was pleasantly surprised when he was welcomed at the pier by his father, his sister with her husband and the two children. With them he spent a few happy and restful months which he badly needed after his seventeen years in China which had been all but plain sailing.

FATHER'S YEARS IN HONG KONG

Back from leave in May 1953, Fr. Silvio spent the next five years as

economer in the house of formation at Shaukeiwan and later in the Tang King Po School. In those days he impressed both students and staff with his intense commitment to duty and spirit of responsibility in all matters he was in charge of.

In 1957 the premises of the house of formation in Shaukeiwan were taken over by the aspirants and thus a new place had to be provided for the students of philosophy. Eventually a small bungalow was purchased at Cheung Chau, an island a few miles to the West of Hong Kong. In the small place there were crowded the students and their teachers who initially had to lead a truly spartan way of life. In time a nearby bungalow was acquired which then had another storey added on top. With the passing of years the students increased in number and the house saw the arrival of young Salesians from the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Japan and Korea. Thus new accommodation had to be provided in the form of three beautiful and functional blocks which were inaugurated and blessed on May 6th 1963 by H.L. Mons. Caprio, then the Holy See's Representative in Taipei and later Cardinal. They were glorious years for the new house of formation as regarded the number of students and the wonderful spirit of the community.

Fr. Silvio worked there as prefect of religious activities for two years, as economer for three and for another six as teacher and spiritual director. While the building of the new premises was in progress, he supervised it very closely and had to bear with not a few headaches in dealing with the workers, but the final result measured up to everybody's expectations.

In those days although the building was complete, still it had to be further taken care of to make it more functional and presentable. Fr. Silvio took the project to heart and worked hard with the help of the students to build new pathways, to plant trees and to provide badly needed extra facilities. Difficulties and heavy toil seemed to strengthen his resolve and tenacity; his enthusiasm for manual work which always characterised him was truly "infectious" among the many brothers who lived in the house in those days. He was in the habit of setting an example before asking people for help. He would not say, "Please do this!" but rather, "Let us do this!"

A confrere recalls the famous well down in the valley below the house near the laundry shed; "Fr. Silvio was a hard worker but on one special occasion he impressed me the most when digging away like a Trojan to deepen the well on our farm, which provided precious water for the fields. He tackled the job with great tenacity and zest; the result: a wonderful deep well with plenty of water throughout the whole year."

In Cheung Chau Fr. Silvio also taught electronics and biology. He had to do it using the English language with which he never was really familiar. Of these subjects he knew just a little more than his pupils, but as usual he made up for his lack of remote preparation with hard work and great interest in his subjects.

His lectures always turned out to be informative and pleasant. For biology he had to do dissections and so he set out with some volunteers hunting for frogs, mice, snakes, beetles and other creatures on which he carried out the experiments required.

APOSTLE OF DRUG-ABUSERS

In 1966 Fr. Silvio was invited by the then bishop of Hong Kong, H.L. Mons. L. Bianchi, P.I.M.E. to help with the assistance to drug-abusers. Father readily agreed and set out to accomplish his task with his usual interest and ardour. It was then that he started to visit the centre set up in the island of Shek Koo Chau by S.A.R.D.A. (the Society for the aid and rehabilitation of drug abusers) where the poor addicts are housed and helped to get rid of their habit. Although not a prison, the centre is not accessible to the general public, as great care is taken to prevent drug-traffickers from visiting it and tempting the inmates into purchasing the drug.

The new arrivals are made to go through a special routine aimed at freeing them from their slavery. When the poor ex-addicts leave the centre, they are physically cured but not yet entirely well, as their will-power is still weak and liable easily to give in to temptation again. It was with the aim of helping them out of trouble once and for all that Fr. Silvio every Sunday, rain or shine, would travel to the centre with the enthusiasm of a young man, approach the poor fellows and try to make friends with them. Before long he came to realise that while other ways might interest them momentarily, only the Christian message would influence them deeply: he would read Holy Bible to them, in the hope that the word of God might gain entry into their hearts. The results? He himself commented years ago in one of his reports: "It is a continuous repetition of invariable ups and downs; hopes arising and then vanishing into utter delusion."

Yet Fr. Silvio never gave up the unrewarding task because "love believes all things and hopes all things!"

He also started getting acquainted with the families of some drug-abusers whom he tried to follow after they had left the centre. Here too how much misery. Yet he was able to give them at least a little comfort and

encouragement.

In this apostolate father also managed to reclute some generous youngsters who extended a helping hand to him; through them he was also able to win over souls to Christ and to the Church.

PROVINCIAL ECONOMER

His peculiar work with drug-abusers did not prevent Fr. Silvio from carrying out his normal duties in the seminary in Cheung Chau. Also when in 1968 he was summoned to the provincial office to take up the post of provincial economer, he went on caring for the addicts.

That of the provincial economer is a job which entails heavy responsibilities and hardships while bringing little satisfaction. For his part Fr. Silvio took his new duties as seriously as he had always done before: he insisted with all his confreres on the need to economise and reduce all expenditure which he thought was not absolutely necessary. Naturally there were confreres whose opinions in this regard differed from his; father would always make his ideas known clearly but then he would humbly stand by the decisions of his superiors. As his health started declining, he repeatedly asked to be relieved of his heavy responsibilities. This he eventually obtained although only in part: thus from 1977 although another confrere took over as provincial economer, the daily burden of the office was still left to Fr. Silvio to shoulder.

GLEANINGS FROM FATHER'S WORDS AND DEEDS.

Before we proceed to write about the glorious conclusion of Fr. Silvio's life, we shall describe briefly some interesting aspects of his personality and apostolate.

Fr. Silvio had the outward appearance of a strong man but his stout physique hid several physical weaknesses which with the passing of time grew more telling.

His legs gradually became swollen which required the wearing of elastic stockings. Thus walking to him was painful especially when, owing to his weak eye-sight, he was forced to give up driving. He had always been a clever driver as well as a daring motor-cyclist, quite adept at squeezing through heavy traffic. In this regard once he had a very narrow escape from death when on his powerful motorcycle (a 900 c.c.) he was negotiating a bend near the provincial house. The vehicle suddenly slipped and sent the driver sliding fearfully quite a few meters along the wet surface of the

road. He got up calmly as if nothing had happened, in spite of some painful bruises and several broken ribs. Incredible indeed! He refused the plaster and while taking some precautions, although suffering a great deal, he let nature look after itself and slowly heal his injuries!

Later on a serious cataract began progressively to threaten his eye-sight. With patience father put up with a painful operation which thank God successfully removed his trouble and enabled him to enjoy his eye-sight once again although with the help of contact lenses.

Fr. Silvio went back to Italy on leave a few times: both his journeys and his stays in his native country provided him with wonderful occasions to give full scope to his priestly zeal. Some of his letters written to Fr. Provincial reveal the rich personality of a Salesian missionary with fire in his heart. Here there follow some extracts from said letters.

“The journey to Singapore by sea was quite pleasant . . on board the ship I made friends with a good number of people particularly with members of the crew. In the kitchen I always get a joyful welcome! When I appear, it is great fun for all . . . in spite of the remarkable heat of the place. They are all my friends there, including a communist activist. He comes to attend my explanations of the Gospel and I notice great interest on his serious countenance. The Gospel readings I comment upon are appropriate to them. I speak with zest and verve: they say I am a speaker who does not tire his hearers! Once in my enthusiasm I trespassed a bit and spoke for 35 minutes without apparently their realizing the passing of time!”

“Yesterday I organized two requiem masses for the late Holy Father: one which the captain and the officers were invited to attend. We decided to have it sung. The 21 nuns on board were responsible for the singing and an American priest delivered the sermon. In the evening another holy mass in the mess-hall for the crew: I spoke with great fervour about the pope. It was terribly hot. The very fact that you keep standing there perspiring all over but ever smiling and devout is great witness which impresses the congregation they often come to me with interminable complaints, which I already know by heart; but I let them speak out their minds as they please. I must listen and listen without ever losing control of myself. In the end I add a good word which perhaps does not convince but at least leaves the fellows with a peaceful heart for a while. I try to be there as often as I can . . . they do need a good word very badly” “Here in Milan in the morning I go to the parish church and spend four or five hours there. It looks as if I am the only priest available for confessions!

This dialogue with souls does a lot of good to my soul too. So many problems, so many sorrows. I do not know why but it seems I take all the problems to heart; at time reflecting on the counsels I give I marvel at the way I manage to give them!

Indeed here I am growing ever more convinced of the presence of the Holy Spirit. At times I really wonder at what I am saying. They go away happy, resigned, weeping, satisfied: the whole range of human feelings!"

"I have made the acquaintance of several artists: painters, sculptors . . . I enjoy the absorbing conversations with some of these people. It is a chance to say a good word."

"Since a few days ago I have been living here at Gerini (a Salesian technical school in Rome) with my good friend Fr. Ferrari. His cordial hospitality is indeed moving. In spite of the harsh weather I have dived into my studies with great energy. . . I have been to St. Peter's to recite the Angelus with the Holy Father. It has been a great experience. I felt my heart as being suddenly overcome by emotions. . . I wept and let the tears well up in my eyes unashamedly! I tried to speak: it was not possible, my excitement blocked the words in my throat. I felt like a tiny speck of sand in the ocean and at the same time I was so proud to be a member of the great Family of the Pope, a catholic priest, a living part of that immense crowd standing around me I have always loved the Pope but now my love has grown stronger. I am old, father. I easily get moved and set weeping. . . ."

"I have attended the first week of lectures by a French professor from Paris. It's terrific! Classes, experiments and intense study, at times as late as midnight. This course in electronics has been wonderful but it has deeply discouraged me: it is a science as vast as the sea and what I manage to learn is so little and, I am afraid, soon out of date."

"I am trying to see as much of Rome as I can but I am fascinated by the basilicas: the statues, the paintings. More than the artistic value I appreciate the deep religious significance of these works of art!"

"Sunday for me in Rome is a day of triumph! From 6 a.m. to 1 p.m. confessions sine fine and two holy masses with sermons Yesterday I was invited to speak to the boys of the local oratory. My heart nearly broke. They listened to me so attentively from start to finish. It really surprised me and filled me with enthusiasm. Bear in mind that they are the most difficult kids you can ever come across. They behave like the masters of the whole world these Roman boys! Yet I accepted the invitation . . . of

course with no small apprehension. Before facing my ordeal, I set my eyes on the statue of the Blessed Virgin in the sacresty and then went . . . I talked to them about purity. I spoke away like the wind, I was affected by such enthusiasm which I was unable to account for . . . Perhaps I was recalling our great Salesian old-timers . . like saintly Fr. Braga! . . . ”

“On the feastday of St. Michael we congratulated Mons. Arduino. In the evening a solemn agape in his honour; the whole community with 15 bishops attended. There were songs galore. Fr. Glustich sang too and I . . . of course gave my . . . ever-new rendition of “La Vispa Teresa”. We brought the house down! Mons. Arduino was beside himself for joy.”

Fr. Silvio’s sister Luigia wrote him a remarkable letter after his last visit home. “Your latest visit home is not going to be forgotten. Our rosaries in the evenings with our friends, followed by simple comments and exhortations to pray the Blessed Mother with fervour . . . you were always so ready to help in all needs both material and spiritual with the modest comment, “It’s all so simple!”

I shall not conclude these simple gleanings from Fr. Silvio’s remarkable personality without a few revealing points.

Father’s life of prayer was quite intense although he always loathed showing any peculiar signs of fervour: he hated things artificial and sophisticated. His spirit of poverty impressed his confreres and sometimes irritated a few! “He possessed an almost fanatical zeal for saving,” writes one of the past students Fr. J. B. Personeni now working in Thailand, “his principle was that whatever tends to make our life as religious more comfortable is superfluous; his own way of life was indeed austere. I recall going to town for purchases with him: it was always the bus or the tram. Not once did we travel by taxi. Forgetful of his own fatigue (he was already around 60), he would ask me if I felt tired.”

Fr. Silvio suffered whenever he noticed that some confreres were not as thrifty as he would have liked them to be. It was a point of pride for him to carry out all the maintenance and repair work in the house whenever he could, to save expenses for the community. The thick candles used in the chapel at the provincial house were all his products. To make them he utilised the wax left-overs in the nearby parish church of St. Anthony.

Fr. Silvio’s practice of obedience was never legal, narrow-minded or mean. Obedience to him meant whole-hearted co-operation. He did not know what it was to reject an invitation to help. Very often he was asked

to give a hand to the painting of stage sets in various schools: in spite of his age and pressing duties he would readily comply, often sacrificing his time for rest and recreation. Once he even travelled to the Philippines to assist the confreres there in the preparations for the festivities in honour of St. Dominic Savio. On another occasion while on leave in Italy father received an urgent phone call from Turin: they needed at short notice a set for an important stage production at Valdocco. The painter in charge had disappeared! Fr. Silvio made no objections nor complaints: Without delay he rushed to Turin and in two days the set was ready: an outstanding job! When the confreres went around looking for him to congratulate and thank him . . . he was already on board his train bound for Milan! Father was quite allergic to praise. His successes especially on the stage always attracted very flattering comments: whenever he felt people would turn up to congratulate him, he simply disappeared; if this was not possible, he would turn the conversation into a clever joke which caused hearty laughter and beautifully solved the issue. As we notice in the letters quoted above, father was also quite keen on hearing confessions and spiritual counselling.

“Fr. Lomazzi used to be my spiritual director, “writes one of his former penitents, “I used to be quite satisfied with his counsels which were encouraging and helpful. I felt so much at ease with him. I used to open my heart to him and found in him a kind father all the time.”

One of Fr. Silvio's desires was to approach as many people as he could in order to know them and to assist them in their needs. Travelling around on public transport he never shied away from people; as a result, many made friends with him and came to visit him at the provincial house and got a good word from him.

Fr. Silvio's devotion to Our Lady was outstanding and wellknown. He came to know Fr. Stephen Gobbi, the founder of “Movimento Sacerdotale Mariano” (Marian Priestly Movement) and set about organizing “cenacles” for fellow-priests who gathered together to pray the rosary and concelebrate holy mass on the occasion of Marian feastdays. His last letter of invitation addressed to them sounds very much like his spiritual testament.

Father often insisted on Our Lady's urgent appeal to prayer and penance, the only ways to avert Almighty God's punishment on sinful mankind. To a close friend of his he confided a few days before his death, “The Blessed Mother would like us to fast on Fridays. . . . I do not intend to do it at table in order not to embarrass my confreres, but I will certainly make up for it with some other mortification which is equivalent to fasting

on bread and water.”

When it was question of accounting, Father took great pride in keeping his books with scrupulous exactness. He was at one time economer at Tang King Po School. One evening he comes to the superior with a big problem: there is a puzzling difference of 35 cents which he is unable to account for. Fr. Rector with a smile suggests putting the tiny sum down as charity but Fr. Silvio will not hear of it and at once sets out for St. Louis School to consult Fr. M. Suppo who is an accomplished accountant. Next morning he happily rushes to the superior again, “Father, I have been working hard on the accounts up to 2 a.m. this morning and I have managed to solve the problem! Thank God; I propose we have a special drink at table today!”

I recall his frequent ordeals as a provincial economer, as his monthly or yearly accounts caused him serious headaches. He had no peace until he had managed to settle everything to his complete satisfaction.

Rev. Fr. Thomas Panakezham, the regional superior for Asia, who knew well and admired Fr. Silvio’s work, has sent this beautiful comment of his:

“Conversing with me a month or so before his death, Fr. Lomazzi revealed two aspects of his spiritual life: his love for the Eucharist and consequently his love for his neighbour manifested in his dedicated work for drug-addicts.

a/ His love for the Eucharistic Lord. Meditating on the love God has made manifest for men in his presence in the Eucharist, he was attracted by an inexpressible force to make frequent visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. This love so affected him that at times he used to think of the loneliness of Jesus during the hours of night, when all were asleep and decided to keep watch at least for one hour from midnight to 1 a.m. every day. In the beginning he found this practice a bit difficult but then he soon got used to it, so that he felt there was no sacrifice at all. This was the best part of his 24 hour day, he said very happily. It was the time of the tete-a-tete with the Master of the house, when he could keep company with him, when the world around was sound asleep, to make reparation for the sins of mankind. This had been his practice for long.

b/ His love for his neighbour: the drug-addicts. Asked about his experiences in working for them, he replied that only his love for the Eucharist and obedience to the hierarchy gave him the courage to carry on a work in which there was no human consolation. The inconveniences of the journey to the island centre at his age told on him. He would have

happily undergone these and other difficulties had there been any tangible return, say at least one addict reinstated in society but he did not have this consolation, as far as he affirmed. Their inconstancy, apathy and lack of co-operation really pained him; but then, thinking of the Eucharistic Lord, he plodded on. The divine irony! He succumbed to the traitorous hands of one from whom he expected a little return. Only genuine love for Jesus can withstand the ingratitude of man. Here is the greatness of our dear Fr. Lomazzi!"

So far the comments of Rev. Fr. T. Panakezham, SDB.

As a conclusion I add here a few lines I received from Fr. Julian Carpella, SDB. "I was lucky enough to spend the last four months of 1982 with the late Fr. Silvio Lomazzi before his heroic death on December 29th.

I had lived with father in our seminary at Shanghai in the 1940's as a student of theology first and then as a young priest. I had also worked with him in our house of formation at Cheung Chau in the 60's. I always thought he was a man who took things seriously and loathed compromise, half measures and the easy life. Yet when in late August 1982 I joined the community of St. Anthony's where he was working, I realized to my great edification the enormous strides he had been making in the past twenty years in virtue, piety and apostolic zeal.

At the beginning of September he added an extra burden to his already heavy workload as economer of the community, assistant to the provincial economer and chaplain of drug-abusers.

He readily accepted an invitation from the Canossian sisters to celebrate holy mass for them every morning at 6.30 at their college in Aberdeen, a few miles from our house.

He took up the challenge with youthful zest and travelled by bus daily (although the sisters provided him with the taxi fare!), rain or shine, facing the ordeal of long waits in line especially on the return trip (he was 75!).

Yet holy mass alone seemed . . . a bit too little to him. He must give a short homily every day. So he decided to do it in earnest: to say "solid" things and to say them "well"! It was his style.

Therefore he used to sit down long hours getting his sermonette ready in English and then like a little boy he would come along to the office to have it "checked for mistakes"!

On those occasions (we can say “daily”) he revealed his impressive personality. He would often comment on the reactions he had detected on the sisters’ faces, which brought him great satisfaction. He related his moving experiences with such simplicity and modesty that were truly edifying.

How many times during those blessed months I thanked the Lord for such wonderful examples of virtue and zeal.

Now good old Fr. Silvio has gone to his reward, the reward promised by the Lord to the good and faithful servant. I pray every day that Fr. Silvio may obtain from God many vocations of generous and ardent young men for the Church and our Society.”

FR. SILVIO’S HEROIC DEATH

From the mortuary letter written by Fr. Provincial, the V. Rev. Joseph Zen, I quote the particulars connected with Fr. Silvio’s heroic death.

“Fr. Lomazzi had been dedicating much time and energy to his apostolate among drug-abusers and his zeal had never abated even when his experience taught him how hopeless his endeavours were. One exception, however, used to cheer him up: a young man, a Mr. Yiu Chi Keung, who looked as though he was already rid of the slavery to the drug and who rendered valuable assistance to father in his work. A good catholic, guided by father, he used to study Holy Bible with great interest. He was even considering a vocation to the consecrated life. He often visited father at the Provincial office, so that the confreres knew him for an intelligent and well-bred person.

On December 28th shortly after 9.00 p.m. Mr Yiu came to visit Fr. Lomazzi. It was I who admitted him into the house, as I was about to drive to the airport to meet a confrere.

As I recall the event, I remember that Mr. Yiu on that particular evening was not the cheerful and warm-hearted fellow we knew but looked rather worried.

The vice-provincial Fr. Norbert Tse was invited by Fr. Lomazzi to take part in the conversation which sounded rather unusual. Fr. Norbert noticed at once that the visitor did not look normal; he talked strangely and kept repeating that his people back home had all been murdered and he himself was being hunted.

While speaking he was wielding a small instrument that looked like a paper-cutter: urged by Fr. Norbert, Fr. Lomazzi withdrew it from the man.

At about 10.30 Fr. Lomazzi yielded to the advice of Fr. Vicar and accompanied Mr. Yiu to the local police station to make a report. The officers there, after listening to the story, concluded that the man was out of his mind and dismissed him.

At midnight I was back from the airport with the cleric who had just arrived after concluding his studies at Newton, N.J., U.S.A.; Fr. Lomazzi was still in the parlour with his friend. A little later as I was having a cup of tea in the dining-room, he joined me followed by Mr. Yiu. I suggested that the visitor better stay down in the parlour; Fr. Silvio replied that it was impossible to get rid of him and suggested that the latter should be allowed to spend the night in the house and added that he would provide a camp bed for him. Although I did not like the idea, I agreed because it was not the first time that father provided a shelter for the night for his "friends". When we retired to our rooms, it was about 1.00 a.m.

The bed-rooms of the community are all on the fourth and fifth floors, except mine which is on the second. No one heard any suspicious noise during the following hours. At about 2.30 a.m. our Fr. Thomas Yu who suffers from insomnia got up and went to the dining-room to have a drink. He was greatly surprised when he was joined there by Mr. Yiu who asked to see Fr. Provincial. As Fr. Thomas knew he was a good friend of Fr. Lomazzi, he tried to contact the latter on the phone but failed to find him in his room. A little while later Mr. Yiu came to the refectory again to converse with Fr. Thomas who eventually realized that the fellow was out of his mind, so he went down to the hall and phoned Fr. Norbert to inform him. At that time Mr. Yiu also came and opened the main door to depart. As he was about to leave, holding his head with both hands, he shouted in desperation, "Now I have lost even the person who cared the most for me!"

At these words Fr. Thomas became suspicious, rushed to the parlour, switched on the light and made the terrible discovery.

Fr. Silvio was lying dead on the floor: his head was covered with a plastic bag, the latter held tightly round his neck by means of a rope; this was tied to the window and kept the head a few inches off the ground. A blanket covered the body and on the chest lay a small missal which father was in the habit of using every morning.

There were signs that a struggle had taken place; on the table there lay a heavy metal ash-tray. When the bag was removed from the head, a wide wound appeared above the right eye. There were blood stains near the body and later it was discovered that much blood had been wiped off the floor by means of the cushions of the sofa. About an hour later, as the Police were making their inquiries, Mr. Yiu came back to our house and practically surrendered to the officers without uttering a single word and looking very much out of his mind. As he was being taken away, he fainted.

Later on we came to know that on Christmas night he had attended midnight mass at the Caritas Medical Centre, where he used to help out by taking care of mentally retarded children; there he had also given a hand in entertaining them. It had indeed been noticed that of late he looked rather abnormal but nobody was much impressed. How the poor man had been the victim of a sudden fit of madness was very mystifying and even what happened between him and good old Fr. Silvio after the confreres had retired was anybody's guess.

The news of the murder shocked the whole city and grieved the many who knew Fr. Lomazzi. Here at the provincial office his demise has left a great gap which will be very hard to fill. Fr. Silvio had been living and working with us so closely and so long. However, after the first shock as we calmly ponder over the situation, we are convinced that the passing of Fr. Silvio has been a worthy conclusion to his life: he had lived heroically and we feel that father would have loathed an "ordinary" death!

Divine Providence had long prepared Fr. Silvio for the supreme sacrifice. A life of heroism had been his indeed. He used to face problems bravely and to deal with them unflinchingly: he was really "a man"!

A solemn mass of the resurrection was concelebrated by many confreres and friends at St. Anthony's in the evening of December 30th. A great number of people came to pay their last respects to the "Martyr of Charity", including many priests both diocesan and religious, brothers, sisters, parishioners, friends and admirers (including some of the ex drug-addicts he had loved so dearly). The diocesan Bishop Mons. J.B. Wu, unable to attend, was represented by the two Vicars General Mons. S. Einaudi, P.I.M.E. and Mons Gabriel Lam. Rev. Fr. Joseph Zen, Provincial in his homily spoke very highly of the heroic figure of Fr. Silvio, "the good shepherd who had given up his life for his sheep".

The funeral took place the following morning Dec. 31st at St. Michael's

cemetery again attended by many people. H.L. Mons. Dominic Tang, exiled archbishop of Canton, presided over the rites and praised the heroic priest who had been loyal to Christ and his message of love to the very sacrifice of his own life.

CONCLUSION

We may conclude this short biography with the moving words of Fr. Silvio's sister in a telegram she sent us for the occasion: "In union with the Salesian Family I offer up to God my deep sorrow, convinced as I am that the tragic death of my brother has not been in vain for the community of Hong Kong."

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SOURCES FOR THE PRESENT BIOGRAPHY:

1. Archives of the Salesian Province of Hong Kong;
2. Messages

Mrs. Luigia Chierichetti, younger sister of Fr. Silvio, Milan	
V. Rev. Fr. Thomas Panakezham, SDB, Regional Superior for Asia	— Rome
Fr. Remo Bati, SDB	— the Philippines
Fr. G. Colombini, SDB	— Thailand
Fr. L. Compagnoni, SDB	— Ivrea
Fr. B. Gelosa, SDB	— Hong Kong
Fr. W. Joyce, SDB	— Hong Kong
Bro. E. Kowala, SDB	— Hong Kong
Fr. A. Majcen, SDB	— Yugoslavia
Fr. A. Maringoni, SDB	— Thailand
Fr. L. Massimino, SDB	— Hong Kong
Fr. O. Pelli, SDB	— Turin
Fr. G.B. Personeni, SDB	— Thailand
Fr. E. Rescalli, SDB	— Macau
Fr. Peter Tsang, SDB	— Taiwan
Fr. J. Carpella, SDB	— Hong Kong
Fr. M. Rosso, SDB	— San Francisco, USA
3. Personal reminiscences of the author of this biography.

