

Salesians in Cambodia: The Shore Remains

The Case Study of Don Bosco Kep

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Abstract

This thesis explores how Salesian Institutes are related to religious peace-building in post-colonial and post-conflict Cambodia. It examines if and how the Catholic-Salesian multi-religious educational mission system is able to peacefully co-exist in a Buddhist Cambodian society, and collaborate with other minority religions present – Protestant, Muslim, and non-religious in promoting education for poor children and demoting inequalities. I conducted a 3-month mini ethnography and case study of Don Bosco Kep, one of the 5 Salesian communities in Cambodia, and analyzed the issue through Johan Galtung's Negative and Positive Peace Framework with a special focus on the Positive Peace that overlaps with Salesian Preventive System that both seek to prevent conflict rather than end the already existing violence. I discovered that thanks to fulfilling 4 points of Galtung's Positive Peace, all the religious actors present at community missions were not only able to peacefully co-exist but also collaborate in poverty-alleviation which supported the advancement of the religious peace-building on a local community level in Kep, Cambodia.

Keywords: religious peace-building, friendship, dialogue, poverty-alleviation, Salesians of Don Bosco, Catholicism, Buddhism, Cambodia

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His love for wisdom and truth has inspired me to be fearless in the pursuit of the common good, justice, and peace for all religions and nations.

“Christianity shall be less dogmatic. More ecumenical. Expressed in new communities and forms. Words don’t matter as much when they come from a loving heart.”

- *Fr. Anton Srholec SDB (1929-2016)*
“The Experiment of Love (1989)”

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Abbreviations

In “Abbreviations”, I aim to specify abbreviations used in my thesis and clarify their meaning in the context of my research.

Abbreviations:

- DBK – Don Bosco Kep
- FMA - an abbreviation to signify one’s membership in Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the female line of nuns (Salesian sisters)
- Fr. – “Father”, a polite title to refer to the Catholic priests
- Salesian Charisma – in the Catholic Church, the "charisma" emphasizes the unique role of each Catholic religious order, e.g. the Salesians = education via the Salesian Preventive System of poor children and youth, the Redemptorists = folk missions centered around the news of the Christian Gospel, or the Jesuits = advanced education and spiritual exercises
- SDB – an abbreviation to signify one’s membership in the Society of Saint Francis de Sales, the male line of priests (Salesian priests and brothers)
- Sister – a polite title to refer to the Catholic nun

1. Introduction

In the “Introduction”, I elucidate the background, research theme, research question, purpose as well as the position and academic contribution of this thesis.

1.1 Background

It was one of the days when the atmosphere was indescribably peaceful. The sky was ocean blue, and the gentle wind played with the palm leaves creating a harmonic sound with the close sea waves. I could not help but be captivated by the sunrays ricocheting from the beautiful green nature we were surrounded by that January day. I was following the footsteps of Catholic Salesian priest and director of Don Bosco Kep, Fr. Albeiro Rodas, who was showing me around their residence community in Kep, a small seaside town in southeastern Cambodia. We were deep down in the Salesian Garden where the joyful screams of children from the Don Bosco Kep Community, who were enjoying a free Sunday afternoon, could no longer be heard.

-“This is sea hibiscus, my favorite tree,” Fr. Albeiro said suddenly. When I looked up, I could see a wonderful tree whose branches were embracing plants and flowers all around. There was a space in the middle that looked like a warm shelter.

-“I like to come here, “ he added as he touched the mighty tree branches. Then he smiled at me and suggested in a friendly tone:

-“You can sit down here and write your master’s thesis underneath this tree.” At that moment, I also touched the robust branches, and replied to Fr. Albeiro:

-“Thank you! This place indeed looks very inspirational.”

As a student researcher interested in all Salesian and Cambodian, who just arrived at the Don Bosco Kep residence, these first moments left me with a deep impression. After all, the atmosphere of peace was eminent since that was exactly what my research was about.

My fieldwork and research are built on the work of Salesians, and hence I wish to introduce them and their charisma in the very beginning. Salesians are “a family of men and women founded by an Italian Catholic priest, Fr. John Bosco” (Salesians Don Bosco, 2023) and co-founded by an Italian Catholic religious sister, Sister Maria Domenica Mazzarello. Therefore, the order has two lines – the male, formally known as the Society of Saint Francis de Sales (SDB), with a former mission to primarily care for and educate abandoned street boys with

criminal activity tendencies (Aronica, 1988), and the female line – commonly known as Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA) that was mainly concerned with the education of girls which needed special attention in the 19th Century when education to women was largely unavailable or straightforwardly denied, and many especially orphaned girls were at high risk of prostitution (Aronica, 1988). Nowadays, there are more prevalent merged mission communities with girls and boys and closer collaboration of priests and sisters. In 2023, Salesians have a mission in 133 countries across the globe (Salesians Don Bosco, 2023).

In the Cambodian context, Salesians started their mission to help Cambodian refugees in Thailand in 1988. After 2 years, in 1990, they were invited to Cambodia by the Royal Government for a reconstruction period (Don Bosco Children Fund of Cambodia, 2023). As of 2023, Salesians have one of the largest and most diverse missions in terms of servitude in Cambodia, with mission communities in Phnom Penh, Kep, Sihanoukville, Battambang, and Poipet. Salesian activities in the country range from building primary and secondary schools, empowering girls and women through education to delivering life-saving meals, rescuing children facing adversity, et cetera (Salesian Missions, 2023). The Kep mission, also known as “Don Bosco Kep”, is the “youngest” of all Salesian missions in Cambodia. The “Don Bosco Kep Idea” was born, when “in 2010 Fr. John Visser and Fr. Ly Samnang (Ly Samnang is a Khmer name of Albeiro Rodas) in Sihanoukville realized that half of the Don Bosco Sihanoukville students were coming from the provinces of Kep, Kampot and Takeo.” Don Bosco Kep opened its gates to students in 2011 under the leadership of one of the founders, Salesian priest Fr. Albeiro Rodas (Don Bosco Foundation of Cambodia, 2021). My thesis is titled “Salesians in Cambodia: The Shore Remains” to underline the Salesian efforts to co-create and co-build long-term values. The title originates from the Cambodian proverb: “The boat sails by, the shore remains” which is to highlight that long-lasting and meaningful things persist, but the rest will eventually perish (Ali, 2021).

For better clarity, I also wish to introduce Don Bosco Kep. Don Bosco Kep is a Catholic-Salesian missionary institute and multi-religious community for girls and boys primarily from disadvantaged backgrounds. The leadership is Catholic: Salesian (a priest) and Carmelite (sisters), the students and teachers are primarily Buddhists, and there is a minority group being employed and associated with Don Bosco Kep that is Protestant, Muslim, and non-religious (in “non-religious” I merged, for easier and clearer data analysis, both non-

practicing own religion, non-religious Agnostic, and Atheist). The community was built on 3 hectares of land by the sea in Kep, and I used to call it “Salesian Town” for behind its gates, the mission community features everything: residence buildings, schools, dining hall, chapel, stores, gardens, playgrounds, a pitch, a pond with fish, and so on. The Don Bosco School in the Kep community has 3 educational departments: IT, Electrical Study, and Journalism attended by young teenagers between 17-20. Moreover, the community has all-girl and all-boy residences for children aged 10-17 (Don Bosco Children’s Fund of Brother Sun) from very poor backgrounds who live in the community and receive daily support in their education. The daily assistance also includes bringing them to and back from village schools outside the community. Apart from the managers, teachers, chefs, and other employees, DBK actively collaborates with international NGO organizations and engages with laity volunteering. Important to note is that Salesian education in general (hence including DBK) is mostly centered around gaining practical rather than academic skills, and encourages community activities such as sports and games. Additionally, the Don Bosco Kep has strong ecological and environmental values and aids in caring for endangered animals and plants.

1.2 Research Problem, Aim, and Purpose

The Salesians have always been a Catholic religious order ahead of its time; they outran the Second Vatican Council for about 100 years in terms of their educational concern for the poor children, the female role in the Catholic Church, as well as more relaxed and creative ways of pastoral leadership. Although still marked by the period of ultra-conservatism of 19th Century Church and the persisting ideology of counter-reformation, the Salesian order was transformed by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) which invited the Catholic Church for “a loving and totally gratuitous dialogue of friendship” (McBrien, 1994). Currently, Salesians are, in addition to their mission of helping the poor children and youth, also known for their multi-religious schools and missions across the globe, and their willingness to lead a dialogue on polarizing issues. The Salesian charisma, or “Salesian Thought”, has been primarily looked at in academia from two perspectives – the Salesian Preventive System (19th Century) and the post-Second Vatican Council pastoral and theological implementations (20th Century) as further reviewed in the Literature Review. However, there is not an existing study, or examination on Salesian religious peace-building (here understood as peace-building via religious means) through their multi-faith educational and missionary system, and possible impacts on other societal issues (such as peace, poverty

alleviation, or improvement of the healthcare). What is more, religious peace, harmony, co-existence, and freedom might vary across the mission communities as there is not an overall concept or guideline on how the multi-religious schools should function.

I became intrigued by how Salesians were able to run their multi-religious educational institutions and missions in this religiously divided world. I believe the Salesian perspective and charism might hold valuable insights into how religious peace-building can promote mutual friendship, respect, and prosperity, and decrease extremism, discrimination, and poverty. From this perspective, I work in contrast to most former peace-building studies which tend to focus on differences and conflict rather than on functional communities where various religions are able to co-exist. The contrast, however, is in my work itself; European religious order in Asian culture, Catholicism in a Buddhist setting, a heterogenous school in a homogenous society, and advanced education in poverty. Researching peace-building in a post-conflict society, my aim is to uncover the possible impact of Salesian religious peace-building activities on Cambodian, Buddhist, and poverty-alleviation settings.

1.3 Research Question

My research topic unties the issues of religious peace-building from the Salesian viewpoint in the Cambodian context. In my thesis, I explore the research question:

“How is the presence of Salesians Institutes related to religious peace-building in Cambodia?”

The RQ assists in fulfilling the aim of the research through 3 main areas: focusing on two key agents of my work – Salesians and religious peace, comparing these two agents to one another in search for any possible relationship (may it be positive, negative, or neutral), and in positioning the research into the Cambodian context. Answering the RQ illuminates the impact of Salesian Institutes and their educational work on aspects of religious peace in larger Cambodian society, and hence might hold valuable insights on how Salesian values and education can improve religious peace-building. Therefore, my aim is to investigate if the Salesians Institutes have an impact on religious peace-building in Cambodia.

1.4 Academic Contribution

Furthermore, my thesis work contributes to the academic debates in Asian studies, peace studies, development studies, and the role of religion in society. Concretely, it offers a new perspective on religious peace-building through the lenses of the Salesian Catholic order, their multi-religious dimension as well as poverty-alleviation efforts in the Cambodian environment. The approach I am taking also fills in a gap in the focus on Johan Galtung's positive peace – the striving for a harmonious society through conflict prevention as well as in the religious peace-building efforts and contribution to the recent debates on the significance of the peace-building circled around positive peace and its preventive methods. In addition to that, my goal is to also bridge the theoretical research and actual, lived experience of people concerning religious peace-building, and the areas it affects.

2. Literature Review

In this section, I discuss and review existing, relevant literature related to religion and peace-building in Cambodia. Therefore, I have 3 main sections: peace-building, peace-building in Cambodia, and religious peace-building. The religious peace-building then expands into two branches: Buddhist and Catholic. Finally, Catholic peace-building branches out into the final sub-section, Salesian peace-building. In the end, I am identifying the gap I am trying to fill in with my research.

2.1 Peace-building

Johan Galtung was the first to introduce an elaborate “Negative and Positive Peace Framework” in a written piece from 1964 called “A Structural Theory of Aggression.” In his “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research (1969)”, he presents the theory of the Conflict Triangle which depicts the relationships among contradiction, attitude, and behavior, and Galtung formally systematizes a peace and conflict framework. The purpose is to acclaim peace as a widely accepted social goal and characterize peace more than the mere absence of violence. He identifies positive peace (violence prevention), negative peace (absence of violence), as well as personal violence (individual crimes), and structural violence (the way in which societal structures deprive individuals of their fundamental rights, also referred to as “social injustice”) as key elements in the peace theory research. In the 70s, Galtung (1976) additionally codified the term “peace-building” and further worked on the ideas of “positive/negative peace.” In the work, Galtung defined “peace-building” as “the associative approach” that actively engages in “building the peace.” In the '90s and early 2000s, Galtung was the most concerned with conflict transformation. In the early 2000s, Galtung's (2000) transcendent method became very popular. In the method, Galtung is inspired by the “diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment (DPT)” comparing the treatment of a disease to resolving conflict clashes.

According to Nolte-Laird (2022), recent peace studies literature is primarily concerned with open dialogue and the means by which it would be possible to attain positive peace as well as contemporary issues rather than conflict transformation. The most contemporary themes include the role of gender in peace structures and processes (Prügl, Rigual, Kunz, Achakpa, Myrntinen, Onyesoh, Rahmawati, & Udasmoro, 2021), diversity and sustainability (Carey,

2021), reconciliation before undertaking an active peace education (Kuppens & Langer, 2020), and peace education in post-conflict societies (Porto & Zembylas, 2020). The negative peace is still largely discussed, but mostly in relation to ongoing conflicts and crises – such as forced displacement and migration issues (Preuß, Beier, & Messner, 2022), the war in Ukraine (Forsberg & Patomäki, 2023), or the ongoing Israeli-Palestine conflict (Wolffsohn, 2021). Peace institutes such as Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), Galtung-Institut for Peace Theory and Peace Practice, and Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame continue to study and evolve concepts of peace as “a whole” through their study programs, conferences, and research work. Although there has been a present-day shift towards positive peace rather than negative, the recent years cannot yet make up for the decades of focus on the negative peace. Moreover, there hasn’t been much literature on the religious peace-building perspective, and that is where my thesis contributes to fill in the gap.

2.2 Peace-building in Cambodia

Literature regarding peace-building efforts in the Cambodian context is concerned with post-genocidal developments (1979 -) in the country. There was a lot of turmoil of conflict in Cambodia in the second half of the 20th Century: civil war of the Khmer Republic (1970-1975), Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979), civil war between four warring factions – the Khmer Rouge, Vietnamese forces, Khmer People’s National Liberation Front (KPNLF) led by Son Sann, and the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC) under the leadership of Prince Sihanouk – until finally all the four parties came together under the Paris Agreement (1991) with battles continuing until the final defeat of Khmer Rouge (1999). According to Dosch (2012), peace-building in Cambodia has been shaped by the efforts of NGOs and donor-driven processes. International funds and support, in particular, have been “the key” to transitional justice. More critically, Gellman (2010) argues that post-conflict reconstruction projects are able to bring as many problems as solutions. He highlights that peace-building projects (primarily centered on development, democracy, and humanitarian aid) not only facilitate positive developments such as community building, or communication but also reinforce the “neoliberal propaganda of the good life” that is inflicted on local communities.

Outside of the view of constructing peace from the humanitarian aid perspective, there has been a considerable amount of literature written on peace-building in Cambodia from a political science perspective. Roberts (2001) maps the political developments from 1991 to 1999. The author mainly focuses on the illusion of democratic transition as well as a post-conflict peace-keeping intervention that raised challenges to the pre-assumed victory of democracy after the end of the Cold War in the early 90s. Brown & Zasloff (1999) investigate the evolution of events from the end of the Khmer Rouge in 1979 to the de facto coup d'etat of the former prime minister Hun Sen in 1997. Moreover, they debate on the U.N. presence, its achievements, and shortcomings – the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia was present in 1992-1993. Since the 2000s, the discussions have been mostly fueled by contemporary Cambodian political happenings and their impacts on peace inside and outside Cambodia. Öjendal & Lilja (2009) are concerned with developments after the UN-supervised Paris Peace Agreement in 1991 and the first U.N.-supervised democratic elections in 1993, as well as with post-conflict society (until the time of the publication of this edited volume in 2009). Norén-Nilsson (2016) examines the role of nationalist imaginings, discourses, and narratives in Cambodia through the perspective of the 1993 reintroduction of a multiparty democratic system. There are also comparative studies on Cambodian peace-building, most prominently by Hassan (2019), a work written on Cambodia in comparison with peace attempts in Rwanda. Besides, he emphasizes the essence of reconciliation in the peace-building process. As demonstrated above, the literature on peace-building in Cambodia primarily privileges the perspectives of large humanitarian NGOs and political party actors, so my thesis adds a viewpoint from an experience of religious peace-building case study that actively engages in poverty and educational efforts, with fewer resources than large humanitarian aid corporations, or political parties.

2.3 Religious Peace-building

The literature concerning religious peace-building (defined here again as peace-building by religious means) predominantly unravels the webs of conflict transformation in religiously tense regions. Landau (2003) emphasizes the fact that religious people and religion cannot be excluded from creating peace in the Israeli/Palestine conflict and the peace-building debate. Otherwise, the author argues, authentic peace is out of reach. Sandal (2017) furthermore generates a contrast of what circulates in society – e.g. news on religious fundamentalism versus the mostly omitted news on the peace success the religious actors have managed to

achieve and their impact on policy-making and peace agreements. A considerable amount of literature is also dedicated to the role of religious women in peace-building, such as Ogega (2022) examining the success of female peace-building, the intersectionality of women's diverse identities, and their vital roles despite underrepresentation and dangers they face in conflict-torn areas. Nevertheless, there are also more unique themes debated. Ahmad (2014) claims that "religious education can counter extremist ideologies by creating awareness amongst people about their rights and duties." Additionally, Awan & Khalid (2020) offer insights into how religious and holy sites, monuments, and other tourist destinations can provide a space for inter-faith dialogue and peace.

2.3.1 Buddhist Peace-building

Peace-building from a Buddhist perspective has been studied from diverse outlooks, but the most prominent is the role of Buddhism in post-conflict and religiously conflict-torn areas. Soeung (2022) explores how not only international and state-centric peace-making but also local Buddhist influence has been able to shape peace in society. Soeung & Lee (2017) highlight Buddhist peace-making transformations in post-genocidal Cambodia through their religious networks, knowledge of local culture, religious authority, and social media. Furthermore, King (2015) discusses the growing interest in studying the connection between religion and conflict, and "explores the potentially constructive role of religions in active peacebuilding, post-conflict reconciliation and restorative justice while acknowledging that there are multiple interpretations of religious traditions that can relate to militancy, chauvinism and nationalist ideologies" from the analytical perspective of understanding Buddhism as "the universalist culture of peace" with implications in post-conflict Nepal. The Buddhist peace-building was also investigated from innovative perspectives such as economic, or gender and security outlooks. Techapalokul (2017) creatively searches for answers to possible correlations between economic progress and happiness in Buddhist ASEAN countries and international peace-building. The article attempts to generate an understanding regarding peace and happiness among the diversity of religions and cultures in the ASEAN as well as the global communities, all from the outlook of Buddhist economics. Kent (2011) aims to explain the searches for the meaning of many Cambodians in terms of social differentiation, but mainly feminist discourse, Buddhism, security, and elements of the Khmer cosmos.

2.3.2 Catholic Peace-building

Academic literature from a Catholic perspective on peace-building generally focuses on the post-Vatican II developments that have transformed the Roman Catholic Church into a more open-minded, tolerant, and modern religious institution that is also concerned with the issues of social justice. McBrien (1994) emphasizes the Vatican II Catholic theology and its essential role in social justice, peace-building, and openness to friendship and dialogue. He also underlines Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 92) need and call for dialogue in words: "For the bonds which unite the faithful are mightier than anything dividing them. Hence, let there be unity in what is necessary; freedom in what is unsettled, and charity in any case." Additionally, Headley (2000) uses post-Vatican II transformations as a lens through which Catholics in the 1960s used to express themselves, with a slogan: "justice and peace", and its implications for future possibilities. The author also discusses the feasible positions the Church as an institution can have in the peace-making processes.

A significant body of literature also deals with the role of the Catholic Church in conflict-affected places. Based on the research McEvoy (2000) discovered that the Catholic youth in Northern Ireland influence the perceptions of peace in society, paying special attention to their empowerment and impact on peace in relation to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. Besides, Murphy (2013) argues the fundamental changes in policy in Northern Ireland in 2001 began a vital peace process while exploring the Catholic nationalist community. Critically, Scull (2019) challenges the Church's past position of clerical sexual abuse as well as its standing on "controversial issues" such as gay marriage. It is imperative to highlight that more literature on Catholic peace-building can be found in various institutes' reports and specific Catholic religious orders such as Jesuits or Carmelites. In the conference report, Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies University of Notre Dame (2004) introduces Catholic peace-building as a relatively new concept and goes further on to explain the differences between "peace-building" (creating peace to prevent any plausible conflict in the future) and "peace-making" (bringing together two estranged parties). In addition to that, it presents peace strategies, tools, and approaches from all around the world, "to provide a compilation of insights from the consultation in terms of lessons learned in Catholic peacebuilding, useful practices, and gaps between theory and practice." Among Catholic religious orders, Jesuits are the most academically active. Massaro (2021) claims that Jesuits have reconciliation and peace embedded in their spirituality as well as history, and that

“among the distinctive features of the papal ministry of Francis is an active dedication to peacemaking that bears noteworthy marks of his Jesuit background.”

2.3.2.1 Salesian Peace-building

There is no academic literature exploring Salesian peace-building. Nonetheless, existing academic literature about Salesians lifts up the vision of the founder, Fr. John Bosco, and co-founder, Sister Maria Domenica Mazzarello, and can be divided into 3 sub-groups: the concept of how to raise the poor and vulnerable children stemming from the 19th-century educational method known as the Salesian Preventive System, concrete educational methods of children and youth, and poverty alleviation. The “parenting” of poor and vulnerable children is usually included in the literature on educational methods and poverty alleviation (the Salesian Preventive System also overlaps), however, there are some exceptions, such as Guzón (2010) who emphasizes the rights of the children in the Salesian Code. Education-wise, Vojtáš (2017) anthropologically examines Don Bosco’s Oratory through the lens of post-Vatican II concepts, modern educational methods, and innovational management objectives. Lydon (2022) furthermore argues that the Salesian charisma of accompaniment enables Salesian community life and education to bridge past, present, and future, and be predominantly unaffected by post-Vatican II changes, decentralization, or secularization.

There is also a rich literature examining Salesian pedagogy from various angles, including the Salesian response to World War II (Wierzbicki, 2020), religious/secular values combined with perspectives of the youth (Ariza, Magaña, González, & García, 2020), Salesian educational process (Sobrinho, 2013), and youth as well as adult trainees educated based on Salesian pedagogy (Coelho, 2013). Finally, in relation to poverty alleviation, Carroll (2015) highlights the poverty-stricken conditions, the help to the poor as well, and the historical context of the birth of the Salesian order. More reports on Salesian peace-building work are found under different non-academic institutions and publications, such as (Salesian Missions, 2023), (Salesians Don Bosco, 2023), (Don Bosco Children Fund of Cambodia, 2023), (Don Bosco Foundation of Cambodia, 2021), (Ali, 2021), (Gartland, 2019), or (Aronica, 1988) that all emphasize Salesian dedication to the poor youth, work on religious friendship, religious peace-building, and openness to dialogue.

This thesis enters the debates about how peace-building among religions can be approached and (possibly) achieved, the importance of religion in peace processes, and the means by which specific religious philosophy can be a meaningful actor in inter-religious peace dialogue in South-East Asia, most concretely Cambodia as well as discussing the interconnected ideas it affects especially humanitarian efforts in poverty reduction and education. There is an absence of literature codifying the term “religious peace-building”, and no literature discussing peace-building by religious means from the positive peace perspective in peace-building literature. Moreover, my thesis is the first research done on the Salesian multi-religious educational system and its missions, or any academic study of the Salesian charism and/or Salesian Preventive System in relation to religious peace-building. By collaborating with a concrete Salesian multi-religious mission in Cambodia, I studied the actual lived interactions of people from various religious backgrounds which fills the gap in the academic debates on bridging the theory and practice, the place of religion and religious institutions in the acts of reconciliation, conflict prevention as well as questioning if/how the Salesian charism can impact and contribute to peace-building through own beliefs, teachings, and institutes.

3. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I introduce and discuss Galtung's "Negative and Positive Peace Framework (1969)." I explore the theory's origins, examine Galtung's 1969 framework, and explain why and how I am employing it in my thesis.

3.1 The Development of the Negative and Positive Peace Framework

Scholars believe that the terms "positive peace" and "negative peace" were used for the first time by Jane Addams in her book "Newer Ideals of Peace (1907)." Addams was the first one to deal with complex ideas of peace and what "negative" (absence of tension) and "positive" (presence of justice) outcomes mean in connection to building more peaceful societies.

Addams proposed that peace can never be defined merely as "absence of war." Additionally, she rejected the past approaches to peace, deemed them "negative" and suggested that peace should be built on positive principles instead (Los Diálogos Panamericanos, 2023). Martin Luther King also expressed concern for both positive and negative peace in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail in 1953." He again described positive peace as "the presence of justice" while negative peace was described as the "absence of tension" (Los Diálogos Panamericanos, 2023).

However, academic theorizations on negative/positive peace were first offered by Johan Galtung's peace research. Firstly, it is important to note that "peace studies" is a relatively new field. Johan Galtung, "father of peace studies", introduced the field in the 1950s. In the 1960s, he founded *The Journal of Peace Studies*, and in the 1970s he coined the term "peace-building" (Galtung-Institut, 2023). According to Galtung, peace-building refers to the associative approach (engaging and preventive) of dealing with peace in contrast to peace-keeping introduced as the dissociative approach (preserving and passive). Galtung also presented peace-making known as the conflict resolution approach (Galtung, 1976).

Throughout his life, Johan Galtung officially codified and modified the theory of Positive and Negative Peace that is tied to his concept of peace-building, and how, on one hand, we shall end the conflict, but on the other, we shall create a more peaceful world. In 2012, Galtung also encouraged religious peace-building. During his lecture at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, he stated that: "Religions are enormous reservoirs of experience" (Galtung, 2012).

3.2 Negative and Positive Peace Framework

More concretely, in his “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research (1969), Galtung made a breakthrough theory on perceptions of peace, coined in “Negative and Positive Peace Framework.” The theory was born out of his initial work in 1964’s “A Structural Theory of Aggression” in the founding edition of the Journal of Peace Studies and formed a basis for Galtung’s further peace research work. Essentially, the framework became a key foundation for how to approach peace-building and create a more peaceful society.

Galtung initially emphasizes how the term “peace” is quite challenging to work with as it entails many different meanings. In addition to that, it is easily misused to achieve any type of goal – from the policy of new educational tools to promoting tourism. As Galtung writes “‘peace’ serves as a means of obtaining verbal consensus - it is hard to be all-out against peace” (Galtung, 1969). Galtung made a crucial point there by pointing out how various sectors can bend “peace” to reach their private goals without taking into account the larger implications on society. He further mentions the power of peace - the ability to be self-promoting and evoke positive emotions. Critically, he explains that frequent utilization of the word can also lead to false illusions and cover-ups in a world that is rather full of hatred, wars, and exploitation of human dignity. Galtung suggests, instead, words like “conflict”, or “violence” should gain more attention in everyday life as they mirror the human reality as it is. By stating this, Galtung also makes clear that although nobody has the sole right to create their own definition of peace, there should be an agreed consensus for a productive academic discussion. He goes on to state that peace is “a region” rather than “a point.” Peace viewed as a region reflects Galtung’s belief that peace is compatible with a number of ideologies and approaches.

Galtung proposes three main peace principles: the term “peace” shall be used by many (if not most) to achieve social goals, these social goals shall never be impossible to attain, and peace as “absence of violence” shall be retained as valid. Galtung, however, refuses to define “peace” merely as the “absence of violence.” Preferably, he only uses the expression to illustrate that peace and violence are strongly interlinked. This is a vital point of his work since he believes that “if peace action is to be regarded highly because it is action against violence, then the concept of violence must be broad enough to include the most significant varieties, yet specific enough to serve as a basis for concrete action” (Galtung, 1969). It was

Galtung's deep and complex study and commitment to grasp the concept of violence that brought to life his Negative and Positive Peace Framework.

According to Galtung, violence has 2 main typologies: personal and structural. Personal violence can be tracked to a concrete person, or persons who cause it. Galtung makes an example of domestic violence where the husband is attacking his wife. Structural violence, on the other hand, cannot be traced to specific people as it is systematic. Galtung again uses the case of domestic violence - structural violence is the case when thousands of husbands are attacking their wives, and it is thereby embedded within societal structures. In addition to that, Galtung (1981) argued that the current peace notions as well as practical developments only serve the wealthy and powerful to maintain the "status quo" in society. That is why the negative/positive peace concepts connecting the theory and practice are vital in breaking through the system. A significant development was when understanding structural and cultural violence, Galtung (1996) wrote "Peace by peaceful means" where he added dimensions of power to consider for the Negative and Positive Peace Framework, and these are cultural, economic, political, and military. Galtung believes that the vicious spiral of violence can be broken by the virtuous spiral of peace. The goal of the virtuous spiral is the achievement of positive peace flowing from cultural peace through structural peace to direct peace. By adding dimensions to look for in the Negative and Positive Framework, it became more concrete and realistic with considerations to imperative contemporary happenings.

3.3 Negative and Positive Peace Framework in My Thesis

In this thesis, I am drawing on Galtung's "Negative and Positive Peace Framework" to study and analyze the religious peace-building efforts of Salesian Don Bosco Kep missions. Based on Galtung's definition, peace-building is the highly associative, active, and engaged approach that I am employing to discuss the activities of DBK. Furthermore, Galtung compares the peace-building concept to the one of creating a healthy and strong society that is able to deal with conflicts in a peaceful manner. I argue that in the case of religion, it means to take an active step towards building a more harmonious society consisting of diverse religious backgrounds prone to, for instance, the events of terrorism, or forms of discrimination. The harmony of religions shall also always demonstrate being purposeful, not in a vague sense of the word, but rather in traceable achievements as in the cases of poverty reduction, improvement of education, or healthcare. The framework helps me to illuminate

the religious peace-building work of Salesian Don Bosco Kep from angles of negative and positive peace and subsequently shed light on the Salesian peace-building efforts in Cambodia.

First of all, I am looking at the presence of negative peace, how it reflects the contemporary Salesian work in Cambodia, and how Don Bosco Kep is situated in that setting. However, secondly and primarily, my focus is concerning future-oriented and preventive positive peace. Positive peace also connects with the Salesian charisma embedded in the Salesian educational method - the Salesian Preventive System. The Salesian Preventive System specializes in delinquent behavior prevention by centering on loving-kindness, religion, and reason rather than punishment after lawbreaking conduct (Don Bosco, 1877). Theoretically speaking, the preventive system, as the core of Salesian thinking, naturally embraces Galtung's positive peace, futuristic vision of harmony, and mutual collaboration among various parties. Beyond the theory, I put the 4 points of positive peace into practice when assessing the reality of Don Bosco Kep through them, namely: absence of structural violence, harmonious co-existence of diverse groups, orientation towards the future, and preventive methods. Substantially, I am considering the cultural, economic, political, and military dimensions to evaluate the relevant outside actors. Based on the positive peace points, my goal is to investigate the interactions of the multi-religious community of Don Bosco Kep and discover if and how they exercise religious peace-building, and how the works of the institute affect Cambodian society. Moreover, the approach fills the void in peace research when, in the past decades, in the academic literature and research studies, there has been a lot of attention given to the negative peace with finding solutions to end wars and conflicts.

On the other side, among the weaknesses of the theory is its old age, narrowness, and overcomplicated positioning in Galtung's "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research (1969)", where it became closely connected with the discussion on personal and structural violence. In the academic world, Galtung's "Negative and Positive Peace Framework" was also criticized by various scholars: Kenneth Boulding (1977) believed that Galtung downgraded the study of international peace by labeling it as "negative peace." Boulding also criticized Galtung's theoretical concept of "structural violence" that also concerns other areas, such as development studies, for peace researchers are not equipped with expertise in these other studies. Baljit Singh Grewal (2003) was critical of Galtung's broadening range of criteria for violence resulting in an even more illusionary vision of positive peace. Besides, scholars also

criticized Galtung's "Negative and Positive Framework" arguing that it only reflects the ideals of Enlightenment – European, humanistic, and liberal, and hence it is challenging to apply in contexts of other cultures and minorities. This, however, was disagreed by Galtung himself claiming he uses "a conceptual and theoretical mixture of European, American, and Asian philosophies" (Grewal, 2003).

Finally, I believe that the downsides of the theory can be balanced when accounted for and maintaining awareness of its limitations.

4. Methodology

As Luker writes in her “Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info-glut”, there is “a certain way of doing research that aims to hit that sweet spot between the rigor and theory-building capacities” as well as “the emergent, open-ended, and pragmatic capabilities of traditional field research” (Luker, 2008). In my master’s thesis research work, I am looking to find this exact “sweet spot” between existing theories and my own findings “on the ground.” I view methodology as a key framework to “sweeping the grounds of the temple while you are awaiting enlightenment” (Luker, 2008), as Zen Buddhist believers would describe it. In this section, I am discussing my methodological standing and approaches that frame my research.

4.1 Research Positioning

As “concerned with the nature of social entities” (Bryman, 2012), I am using relativist ontology to explore the nature of my study. Relativism pursues a belief that “anything is possible” (Rassokha, 2022), nonetheless “only those entities we interact with one way or another exist for us.” Studying interactions between Catholics, Buddhists, and Minority Group (Protestant, Muslim, and non-religious) in the peace-making Cambodian context in a globalized, conflict-torn world, allows me to emphasize “no absolute existence” of anything that already exists, and underline the possibility of positive change in the world. Building on relativist ontology, my subjectivist epistemological standing “implies the standards of rational belief are those of the individual believer or those of the believer's community” (Goldman & Whitcomb, 2011). These choices in research positioning allow me a high level of flexibility and creativity, but they are also “like a dark forest” – it is easy to get lost in a sphere where everything is relative and subjective, and my thesis needs clear definitions. Additionally, I have to be transparent and aware of the possible biases that come to light with relativism and subjectivist thesis work.

4.2 Research Philosophy

Saunders’ “Research Onion” and his “onion peeling” demonstrate penetrating various and necessary steps in understanding and utilizing methodology correctly (Vanková, 2022). In my paper “How to Formulate a Research Design and Conducting a Thesis Evaluation”, I expressed my own perception of methodology, I wrote, “It is almost like choosing between

the various mirrors in a kaleidoscope – the choice determines what I see and how" (Vanková, 2022). That is exactly how and why I regard a research philosophy as a vital element of my research. I have chosen Interpretivism to become “my lens.” This research philosophy gives me the opportunity to explore various meanings. Furthermore, it is suitable for my research area since “interpretivism created an overarching methodological space that allowed for the proliferation of theoretical approaches” (Scauso, 2020). Moreover, “since the 1980s, post-structuralist, feminist, constructivist, neo-Marxist, postcolonial, green, critical, and queer theories have sought to expand the study of meanings, uncover aspects of domination, listen to previously marginalized voices, unveil hidden variations, and highlight alternatives” (Scauso, 2020). My thesis research work also centers around “meaning-centered research” in the search for answering essential questions of Salesian educative institutes and peace-building in the Cambodian context. Among other things, I question “the inability of religions to get along” as well as various aspects of religious authority - as challenged by different scholars and philosophers including Friedrich Nietzsche and Karl Marx (McCoy, Corduan, & Stoker, 2016). On the other side, interpretivism can “lock me” into my own subjective views and open gates to bias. However, I believe that constant self-reflection and humility are the main tools to contest and overcome the possible subjective bias of interpretivism.

4.3 Method and Approach

The research in this thesis is qualitative in nature, and inductive approaches tend to be used within qualitative research (Phair & Warren, 2021). It is true for my thesis as well since I am focused on subjectivity and meaning-creation from a specific case study, building new ideas and concepts arising from data collection during fieldwork, to reach the general conclusion about the studied phenomena. Moreover, my concentration revolves around “understanding dynamics, robustness, emergence, resilience, focus on individual behavior, constructing alternative futures” and process-oriented research with an open-ended research question that fits very well within the range of qualitative research and inductive reasoning (Dudovskiy, 2018).

4.4 Data Collection

As Luker suggested “sweeping temple while awaiting enlightenment”, I used a case study in the form of a mini ethnography that I conducted in collaboration with Don Bosco Kep that

allowed me to “work in the temple” while at the same time “await enlightenment.” My mini ethnography lasted about three months; from the 15th of January to the 4th of April 2023 directly inside of Don Bosco Kep, but from the 14th of January to the 18th of April 2023 primarily in Cambodia. Since “Ethnographers observe life as it happens instead of trying to manipulate it in a lab” (University of Virginia, 2022), apart from my thesis research work, I was additionally involved in daily life and active engagement in Don Bosco Kep in form of assisting with English learning and coordinating the Pen pals Project Slovakia-Cambodia. In this manner, I naturally took on the style of engaged anthropology (active engagement with the members of the community) (Low & Merry, 2010) and ethnographic story-telling in data collection (listening and incorporating the narratives of the members of the community) (Kritzer, 2002). All of the data I gathered are of the qualitative character – interviews, individual encounters, participant observations, and notes from my personal experiences (ethnography). In the beginning, I planned to interview two representatives from each of the groups and sub-groups of DBK: Catholic (both Salesian and Carmelite), Buddhist, and minority (Protestant, Muslim, non-religious). However, due to linguistic, cultural, and time barriers, I had to re-construct my initial plan. I didn’t see it as a problem since I wanted to mirror in my thesis research the life and community as it is, to connect the theoretical and practical gap. Moreover, I engaged in collaborations, interactions, and discussions with every member of the group and sub-group.

Then, in practice, I collected data in this way:

The Catholic Group – The leadership is Catholic (Salesian and Carmelite) from Latin America and consists of 4 people in the middle age (40-60). I had a semi-structured interview of 10 questions with a representative from the Salesian sub-group – the director, Fr. Albeiro. The interview lasted for almost 2 hours as it drifted into different sub-themes, and it was recorded. After the interview, I immediately wrote down my notes as well. Due to the time constraints and high level of responsibilities of the Carmelite sub-group - the Sisters, the formal interview couldn’t be conducted. However, one of the Carmelite members engaged with me in the unofficial semi-structured interview in a more ethnographic sense of everyday life engagement.

The Buddhist Group – The fieldwork information from this group – Cambodian Buddhist alumni school managers and teachers (in their early 20s) largely came from my daily

ethnographic work as I engaged with them daily and had many different conversations on topics related to my thesis, so I decided to retrieve my data from these more natural connections than force an artificial means of discussion about my thesis' theme since there was a general mismatch of religious perceptions and a language hindrance, I chose not to follow with a formal semi-structured interview, because it could create confusion and unreliable data.

The Minority Group – As explained later in the Analysis Section, the minority group consists of 3 sub-groups: Protestant, Muslim, and non-religious. It was the easiest with the non-religious group as they were mostly volunteers, so they had the extra time for the interviews. They were all Western European, but the age group differed from young adulthood (20s and early 30s) to middle adulthood (40s and 50s). I conducted recorded, semi-structured interviews of 10 questions with 2 participants of the non-religious groups for about 30 minutes, and again made notes after the interviews. The Protestant sub-group were mostly sponsors from outside of the community (they still viewed themselves as members of the community) in middle adulthood (40s and 50s). I didn't see it as a need to conduct interviews with them since they were willing to discuss their viewpoints on DBK's religious peace-building during my ethnographic work, and I wrote them down as narratives of the Protestant members. It was more difficult with the Muslim sub-group because they are more private about their faith, but again, I did engage with them casually (through ethnography).

Moreover, I collected data in my diary, and through my active participation – I assisted with the English classes with the older students (late teens), co-organized a Pen Pal project with middle school and high school students, attended celebrations, events, masses, and all the regular activities of the community.

Consequently, everything I have learned was put to the test, especially my “people” and communication skills - I believe those are some of the most important ones when doing research. I have a belief, easy in theory, but difficult in practice, that with integrity, humility, and moral values everything can always fall into place, and that was what I strived for during my fieldwork. I wrote "difficult in practice" because when a researcher is busy, many things can "slip through the cracks", and the level of appropriateness also differs from place to place. Besides, any misunderstandings can happen as we are all “only bounded by our own rationality” as Herbert A. Simon would say (Simon, 1982). That is why I tried to be aware of

my emotional and rational limitations while maintaining a healthy level of confidence and balance of the natural flow of my thesis work as it reflects an actual living community. It also showed during my fieldwork that my planned data collection differed significantly from the real-life possibilities.

4.5 Data Analysis

In the Analysis Section, I analyze the data based on the Negative and Positive Peace Framework:

- Negative Peace = the absence of personal violence; preoccupied with ending existing conflicts such as domestic violence, wars, or terrorist attacks. It is connected to the study of the past, conflict theory, and defined by the phrase “absence of violence.”
- Positive Peace = the absence of structural violence; preoccupied with creating a more harmonious and peaceful society without confrontations, or forms of discrimination. It is connected to the futuristic vision, and development theory, and is defined by the phrase “social justice.”

In his original 1969 work, Galtung weights the importance of the absence of violence and social justice equally. His initial approach evolved primarily from his research on violence, and equal treatment was given to the issues arising from personal and structural violence. Later on, however, Galtung insists that “the ideal to strive for” is positive peace, not negative. “Ending violence” shall not be the only mission of peace efforts, but rather finding ways to prevent the harm of conflicts. Galtung also claims that peace should be seen as the equal importance at all human levels – thus, inter-gender violence is not of less importance than inter-state violence (Grewal, 2003).

Based on Galtung (1969), there are 4 points to look for when assessing positive peace:

- absence of structural violence

When searching for an absence of structural violence, both direct and indirect, one must look for the overall system; in the case of my thesis study, I am focusing on the Don Bosco Kep as the institute establishing rules and regulations of the multi-religious community. The questions to ask are: Does Don Bosco offer the same educational and non-educational opportunities to everyone? Are they held to the same standards without discrimination? Are

the rules and regulations of the community favorable to all the students the same irrespective of their religious affiliation?

- harmonious co-existence of diverse groups

Assessing “harmonious co-existence” is always difficult, but not impossible. Based on inter-religious interaction, I will look at: – What religious feasts are celebrated and how?, verbal and non-verbal exchanges – Do the religious groups have friendly interactions, or “just” tolerate one another?, and problem-solving – What is done in circumstances of religious intolerance/attack, or any other issue that might arise?

- orientation towards the future

The future is the essence of both, Galtung’s positive peace and Bosco’s preventive system. When examining the positive peace at Don Bosco Kep, my primary goal is to see if their past work reflects in their current peace-building and educational work, and if they recognize the same patterns throughout the past years since it is what will likely continue.

- preventive methods

Salesians are known for their Salesian Preventive System. It encompasses 3 values: loving-kindness, religion, and reason, and was developed on these pillars to prevent children from misbehaving or delinquent activity rather than teach them by punishment (Bosco, 1877). Don Bosco taught that when the use of force is needed it is already too late as some harm took place and that children shouldn’t learn kindness from strict discipline, but rather be inspired by a good environment, and make their own choice to become good people. Many Salesian priests have been building on Fr. John Bosco’s initial idea continuing to the 20th and 21st Centuries. For example, Fr. Anton Srholec SDB stated that if we don’t make a world better out of love, we will have to do it anyway, but out of necessity (Čermáková, 2015) for the conflicts, wars, and various forms of unrest will force the humanity to act. The Salesian charisma overlaps well with Galtung’s view of positive peace as a “strongly immune body that is able to fight back germs” (Galtung, 2000). This way of thinking makes sense in peace-building as positively motivated people are more likely to create and then maintain peace rather than be forced to create peace after any violence takes place. The question is if and how DBK can facilitate the theoretical preventive methods and mindset, and how they manage to transform it to reality – in other words, if there are visible sights of preventive

methods in practice or any visible consequences of using preventive methods in their alumni students.

Positive Peace Framework moreover considers these dimensions (Galtung, 1996):

- cultural
- economic
- political
- military

These dimensions I classify as “outside factors” that I consider in the Analysis as they position Galtung’s view on negative and positive peace in a larger context in any society. In my case, it is the contemporary Cambodian society formed culturally, economically, politically, and militarily in which my thesis operates. It is vital to keep these 4 dimensions in mind as they can directly, or indirectly shape and intervene with the 4 points of positive peace.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

First, I want to highlight the ethical considerations of my thesis and research work. From the very start of my academic project, I took ethics and moral values very seriously. I presented myself and my work before, during, and after coming to the community honestly and truthfully; to the Don Bosco Foundation of Cambodia, Fr. Albeiro, and Don Bosco Kep Salesian Community, and everyone I met along my journey including my interviewees, or any other personal exchanges. I always emphasized that the thesis will be published online in Sweden and that I will also share it with other people. Besides, I gave the option of anonymity to everybody who, in any shape and form, participated in my research. I didn’t inflict my research on anybody and made the participation voluntary. In addition to that, I respected the time and work constraints of every member of the community. During my first days at DBK, I had a special meeting with Fr. Albeiro when I made sure he understood my research project and that I also had a clear comprehension of the rules of the community. Fr. Albeiro and I used to meet to discuss my thesis, and he was regularly updated, even after my departure from DBK. Other members of the community, especially those interested, were also informed about the thesis progress and will receive a copy. I was very much aware of my duties and the effects of becoming a member of the family-oriented and diverse community

(both religiously, culturally, and age-wise), about giving back to the community I work with, and about the sensitivity of the topic. It was this awareness from the roots of my research idea to the actual fieldwork that helped me to keep in mind these complexities and challenges every day. As I found, the primary solution to most of my challenges was quite simple; being a helpful and active member of DBK, honest and voluntary participation, adaptation, and incorporating the public and authentic community life as it is, with its peaks and downsides, into my research. Children were completely excluded from my thesis work.

4.7 Challenges, Limitations, and Self-Reflectivity

In the end, there was a captivating contrast in my research; the biggest strengths were the biggest weaknesses. Having the honor to collaborate directly with a religiously and culturally divergent community was profoundly impactful and enriching for my thesis, yet – the most challenging.

Even with respect, politeness, honesty, and having good working and personal relationships inside DBK, it still proved to be arduous to navigate the dynamic and lively interconnections of the elements compared to what I am used to – a more structural and static European approach and given differences between religions and cultures. At the DBK, they were intersecting. Subsequently, as I took part in the community, adapting to the tropical climate, and balancing health problems, it was difficult at times to stay focused on my thesis work and navigate in such a sophisticated environment. Besides, there are my own personal limitations that I am bounded by the rationality of my age, gender, family environment I grew up in, education, language, nationality, culture, and so on. Despite my efforts, this might lead to personal bias, and pay attention to the positive aspects of religious collaboration more than the negative ones. Additionally, there were restricted ways in which I could collect the data, and again transform them into my work through my and other people's limited rationality, human understanding, work responsibilities, and time constraints. My research time and thesis word limit were also the boundaries I had to take into account.

Finally, I have to underline the limitations of my thesis in general. The topic of religious peace-building is very broad to be researched on a deeper level in the scope of the master's thesis and the time constraints of 3 months of research fieldwork, especially from a fresh Salesian perspective which had never been done before. Again, the thesis is focused on the

positive peace premises of religious collaboration and dialogue that can create an illusionary bias of religious peace-building while the downsides might slip through. Furthermore, my research primarily reflects only one Salesian community that can differ significantly from others. Naturally, there are limits I consider in the theory part, especially since theory always offers only a specific frame to look through, excluding other possible angles on studied phenomena. It also means that one specific viewpoint was offered in the Analysis and Discussion, and the Research Question is answered by reflecting on subjectivist, relativist experience.

5. Analysis

In the Analysis section, I am researching data collected during my Don Bosco Kep fieldwork through Galtung's Negative and Positive Peace Framework with a focus on positive peace. Therefore, the Analysis is organized into 3 main sections: Positive Peace – The Catholic Perspective, Positive Peace – The Buddhist Perspective, and Positive Peace – The Minority Perspective. The aim of my examination is to see if and how the theoretical ideals of religious peace-building and collaboration reflect in the actual life in Don Bosco Kep based on positive peace points and dimensions. As mentioned, the main focus is on positive peace and uncovering if and how DBK promotes peace, how the theory of Salesian multi-religious mission with various religions plays out in practice, if there is any visible impact in Cambodian society, and what the work of Don Bosco Kep says about Salesian peace-building in Cambodia. The 3 perspectives allow me to give a voice to each group represented at DBK, and make the Analysis section more transparent and well-rounded.

Firstly, I shall mention the negative peace occurrence in Cambodia. In the second half of the 20th century, the civil war was still going on in the country. Between 1975-1979 under the brutal and bloody period of the Khmer Rouge, and then between 1979-1989 Cambodia was under the Vietnamese occupation that led the puppet government until the Vietnamese withdrew in 1989. It was in 1989 when socialism was abandoned to attract foreign investment, Buddhism was re-introduced as the state religion, and Cambodia started anew as a democratic country. These events were followed by the 1991's Paris Peace Agreements which were signed under UN supervision. Salesians came to Cambodia by an invitation from the Royal Government in 1990 as a part of the reconstruction period. It implies that Salesians were seen as a part of the social justice mission – the positive peace force – when the absence of personal violence allowed them to conduct their work. This event correlates with my observation that Salesian charisma and purpose are primarily centered around positive peace as they deal with education of the poor children and youth, and education and poverty reduction largely require the presence of negative peace first as a foundation. The following 21 years of negative peace's presence, economic growth, and development followed just as Salesians grew their presence in Cambodia into 5 communities with Don Bosco Kep being the last one established in 2011, which has remained unchanged until my thesis research in 2023. The circumstances imply that Salesians, including the community of Don Bosco Kep, have a certain space for

positive peace and religious peace-building in the presence of negative peace. To which extent and how do they tackle the issue I am analyzing it in the Positive Peace section.

5.1 Positive Peace – The Catholic Perspective

- Absence of Structural Violence

According to my ethnographic stay and Catholic interview side, there have never been any laws and regulations causing unfair discrimination, or judgment toward any religion stemming from community, or educational codex. However, there was one thing that I had always been wondering about regarding structural violence. In the community, there are daily masses at 18:15 Monday-Thursday, apart from Saturdays when there is the early Sunday mass at 18:00. These masses were regularly attended by the Buddhist children and youth living at DBK. Some of them would even help as altar servers, readers, or other responsibilities during the Catholic masses. I had been regularly thinking about how exactly attendance was defined, if it was compulsory, and how the Catholic leadership viewed the Buddhist children's and youth's participation. During an interview with Fr. Albeiro, I asked him how he perceived this complex issue. Firstly, it is essential to note that the attendance of the masses isn't unique to Don Bosco Kep, and it is a standard of Salesian and Catholic communities since sacramental life is a center of Catholic religious identity. Secondly, I also want to highlight that my question was critically aimed at the negative consequences that might arise for the youth, especially teens, arising from their mass attendance, including faith confusion, abandoning of their faith, or general feeling of uneasiness. Fr. Albeiro replied to me that the matter of my question originates in the way I perceive this occurrence; that I look at DBK's community masses through my "European, doctrinal eyes." As he implied, it is not my fault since that is exactly the Catholic culture I was raised in, hence I automatically viewed the DBK's chapel as an institution, the masses as a structure, and the procedures as doctrines. Nevertheless, he went on to explain to me that the way he and, in his representation, the students think about mass attendance is not this static, but rather dynamic; an interconnection of Catholic and Buddhist elements that join together to celebrate, from their own beliefs, God as a mystery and source of all goodness (for Fr. Albeiro, who also studied Buddhism, is of opinion that Buddhism doesn't reject the possibility of the existence of God). Thereby, he claims that the chapel attendance is viewed as a family, a source of love, and a diverse community joining together in trying to understand the mysteries, gifts, and the Creator of life. Here, it is also vital to highlight that indeed the masses are adapted to

Khmer culture and have some Buddhist characteristics; such as bowing instead of kneeling or burning incense to appreciate God. Fr. Albeiro furthermore noted if somebody straightforwardly rejects the mass attendance they don't have to come, however, he also added that he believes that most of the students willingly chose to attend the masses for they view it as a mutual dynamic, interconnection of spiritual elements as well as community prayers for "universal goodness" and help in their everyday life. Additionally, as time proceeded, I realized that the sacrifice was significant on the Catholic side as well since permitting students of a different religion to come into an intimate holy space to celebrate Catholic sacramental life posed a risk of students taking out the sacraments to study them, or accidentally disrespect the religious site (as to maintain their religious freedom they didn't have any formal Catholic education). In the end, from the account of the Catholic perspective, structural violence was absent.

- Harmonious Co-existence of Diverse Groups

Coming to Don Bosco Kep, I was especially curious and interested if and how the "theoretical goal" of harmonious co-existence of diverse, in this case, religious groups demonstrated in practice from the founder's perspectives - since people of all religions have tendencies to claim religious exclusivity (that their belief is the only pathway to salvation/heavens/afterlife), or engage in "othering" (excluding people of different faiths from the particular group) (McCoy, 2016). I personally experienced how well the Salesian Catholic side got along with Buddhists and other religious groups in everyday life activities to professional sides of things. Nevertheless, in the beginning, I couldn't exactly tell what was the source of Catholic peace-building success from the Salesian standpoint. When I asked Fr. Albeiro what he saw as the "Salesian secret" behind his well-functioning multi-religious community, he shared his opinion that it was the initial idea of Don Bosco, the founder of the Salesian order. According to Fr. Albeiro, Fr. John Bosco's goal of helping the poor youth, in its simplicity, has survived since the 19th Century until the present day. Complex ideas tend to perish, but the simple ones can always move forward as their core is easily grasped. And then everything else just evolves from Don Bosco's idea of charity as a center of Salesian thinking that puts mutual aid as the highest value which naturally results in peaceful approaches with other religious systems. I was then critically inquiring as Don Bosco was marked by the 19th Century's post-counter-reformation Catholic thought and movement, so he initially was not as keen to embrace mutual collaboration with other Christian denominations and religions. Fr. Albeiro replied that, indeed, the context of Don

Bosco's era matters, but in the end, it doesn't make any difference as he calls Don Bosco "a visionary, who is the same in every age." By this, he implied that Don Bosco's key point of charity puts good deeds at the center of our attention, hence all of the subsequent positive values emerge from it, including peace and friendship as we grow in maturity as humanity. Fr. Albeiro also went on to tell me they always celebrate each religious holiday and festivals that are represented in the community. He mentioned that he reminds the managers and teachers when Ramadan begins every year to be sensitive about the Muslim students and their needs; for example, not to put them to play sports. Similarly, he asks when the Holy Week starts before Christian Easter that loud music isn't played in the community. Again, when there is Pchum Ben (the Buddhist, Cambodian festival of offering to the monks and ancestors that runs for 15 days in Autumn), the Don Bosco Kep community emerges in lights and encourages the students to decorate the lamps as they please. Besides, he noted that in his personal experience, there was never any issue with respecting each other wishes during any religious season. Additionally, I found it very interesting when one of the Carmelite Sisters described the Don Bosco Kep community as "a piece of Heaven on Earth" where everyone gets along very well. She emphasized how nice it is that the students keep their Buddhist faith, but also live in the Catholic community with contributions of their skills to the daily activities, together with participation in the holy mass. She was very satisfied with everyday life as, in her view, it was producing "peace" and "happiness." So, the community's feeling as "a piece of Heaven" is interpreted by the Catholic leadership as a result of genuine efforts of mutual friendship, love, family atmosphere, and successful peaceful co-existence.

- Orientation Towards the Future

In my work with Galtung's positive peace, I measured orientation toward the future seeking and understanding the effects of past initiatives on the present times, and appreciation for future plans and opportunities. Probably the most evident effect of the past on the future orientations that were currently visible was the employment of Don Bosco Kep's Buddhist alumni. Many of the Buddhist alumni of DBK were working as teachers and managers in the community, more concretely at one of the DBK's technical schools. In addition to that, the future was brought up a number of times by Father and the Sisters - they said the best part of their work is to see the future fruit of the students who were from very, very poor circumstances to be able to, thanks to the support and assistance of Don Bosco Kep, stand on their feet. Most of their alumni were working good jobs being able to afford to help their poor parents financially as well. One of the Sisters said it was especially encouraging to see the

transition from fragile children to strong youth. Fr. Albeiro described the same transition as “small trees growing into majestic and robust forest.”

- Preventive Methods

The preventive methods were naturally present in the community as the Salesian Preventive System is deeply embedded in the Salesian charisma which evolves around religion, reason, and loving-kindness. They demonstrated in the forms of family and friendly-oriented spirit of the community, role models in leadership living a life of honesty and simplicity, assistance not only with education, but also encouragement to play sports and games, and evolving skills in various, but especially practical, sides of life. On one occasion, the Carmelite Sister noted that the environment of love is one of the most basic preventive methods as it teaches by example.

5.2 Positive Peace – The Buddhist Perspective

- Absence of Structural Violence

It proved to be very difficult to have deeper conversations on the topic of religious peace-building with the Buddhist alumni. It was especially so because of the difference in our perceptions of the matter. They could not quite understand what exactly I was doing in my research work as our assumptions on religion, religious differences, and religious conflict were divergent. Interestingly, I was made aware of a story concerning a similar problem. In one Cambodian Catholic Salesian community, there was a related “religious perceptions mismatch” incident many years ago with a priest from Italy. A visiting Italian priest to the Cambodian community asked one Buddhist assistant of a priest working there at the time “What was his religion.” The local Cambodian Catholic community was startled by the directness of the question stating “Nobody in Asia would have asked a question like that.” The Buddhist assistant working for the Catholic priest, however, very authentically and obviously replied: “I am a Catholic Buddhist.” The Italian priest was astonished by his answer and had no idea how to continue a conversation with him. I personally had a related encounter in Europe when my acquaintance from Sri Lanka told me how she was merging Catholicism with Buddhism without any issue – quite unimaginable and unacceptable from most of the European Catholic perspectives that are rather structural and dogmatic. Although Catholicism officially recognizes “a ray of sunshine in each religion” based on the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate)

(McBrien, 1994), it also draws a strict line between Catholic and "other." The same approach, however, is common in many Christian denominations and Abrahamic religions in Europe, where the focus is on structure, dogma, and fixed understanding of God. While in the Asian religions, the religious leaders and followers seem to concentrate more on the mutual interconnections not only of the entire humanity, but also nature, and cosmological elements are stressed as unified, coordinated, and mutually enhancing (as seen in the cosmology of Ying and Yang in Buddhism and Daoism) (Grim & Tucker, 2014). Yet, there are still similar instances where, for instance, Buddhism draws "strict lines" between other religions, such as in the case of the brutal Rohingya Muslim genocide in Myanmar, or Sri Lanka's tragic civil war (1983-2009) where Tamil Hindus were persecuted (Arnold & Turner, 2018). However, at DBK, the strict lines didn't seem to be drawn from either side, and the Buddhist alumni were very relaxed about working in the Catholic community expressing to me that they recognize the similarities between Catholicism and Buddhism in trying to live a good and meaningful life. This occurrence has not only been a confirmed finding reappearing in my research but in the case of my fieldwork in Don Bosco Kep, also an identifier of the absence of structural violence. The Buddhist alumni were almost startled at how anyone would even need to research something so natural as religious peace. It suggested to me that they have never experienced any violation, or discrimination from the Catholic missions, or the Church. The knowledge of the Buddhist co-since at the Catholic-Salesian community became a piece of common knowledge in Kep where DBK had a very good reputation, and the leadership of DBK was regularly invited to the local events, such as weddings, and even Buddhist festivals, and it further helped to create a bridge of dialogue.

- Harmonious Co-existence of Diverse Groups

Since the Buddhist alumni made a choice to return to DBK as teachers, it implies they had to have positive experiences attached to the community. They seemed to accept the "religious blend" in a natural way, possibly because of their childhood/teenage ties to DBK. They didn't talk about it very often, but once one of the managers expressed to me that they accept Buddhist/Catholic religious cohabitation as a very genuine way of life. One of the reasons for this circumstance compared to many contrasting others where religions struggle to get along might be the family and charity-oriented spirit of the community. They found a home in DBK as children and youth, and the very positive experiences that helped them out of poverty and lead a more hopeful life seemed to be a contributing factor.

- Orientation Towards the Future

The orientation toward the future was similarly strong in the Buddhist group to the Catholic one. Their entire purpose as former students was to have a more meaningful and prosperous future. Thereby, DBK can be seen as a bridge of hope for them from their life in poor circumstances to attaining a good education for their future endeavors. Many times, the Buddhist alumni themselves still refer to the future as what they are still planning to actively achieve (for instance bettering their education, or traveling) even more prominently than other groups.

- Preventive Methods

Rather than the religious side of the Salesian Preventive System, the Buddhist alumni mostly seemed to view prevention as the reduction of poverty, lack of education, and social inequalities. Nevertheless, the preventive methods can also be seen as the result of the Buddhist alumni regarding the Catholic Church positively, and treating other religions in a friendly manner based on their everyday interactions with Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, and non-religious.

5.3 Positive Peace – The Minority Perspective

- Absence of Structural Violence

I didn't know in advance before joining DBK that there would be such a strong and diverse minority group present – Protestant, Muslim, and non-religious (either non-practicing own religion, non-religious Agnostic, or Atheist). One might wonder why Protestants, Muslims, and non-religious share one and the same group. The reason behind my choice is that these 3 sub-groups together represent the entire “minority group” of DBK that has no ties to either; the Catholic missions' community, or Cambodian Buddhist society. Yet, they are still involved and have a significant influence on the daily life in the community. Their presence in itself signals an absence of structural violence. Firstly, if structural violence is present, the likelihood is they wouldn't be allowed to volunteer or work there (now I refer to the Muslim employees, not the very few Muslim students). Secondly, they don't have any extra bonuses to be involved with a Catholic community with Buddhists (you could say, they might even have more negatives back in their divergent religious home communities), so it would be much easier for them to detach or not engage with DBK if the structural violence would be

present as based off the interviews with the non-religious sub-group, and my ethnographic discussions with the Muslim and Protestant sub-groups.

- Harmonious Co-existence of Diverse Groups

The presence of a Protestant Christian sub-group was in the form of Protestant sponsors assisting financially and volunteers taking a gap year before planning on attending university. They appreciated DBK greatly for the family orientation of the community, and the friendly and warm atmosphere, and especially the young volunteers enjoyed the beautiful location by the sea in southeastern Cambodia. Their outlook reflects their personal values and that they individually didn't see the private religious beliefs as either something high on their agenda, or valued the other factors more; including friendship, mutual respect, and collaboration over "being religiously correct." It was the same phenomenon as with the non-religious sub-group. In my interviews and individual interactions, they emphasized that as long as their absence of participation in the religious services and practices is accepted, they don't have a problem working in a religious community, no matter its religious origins. Again, they highlighted they appreciated greatly principles like "community", "family", and "friendly atmosphere" which they recognized in DBK. One of the Atheist employees mentioned, particularly, that in DBK, compared to various NGOs, the charity is perceived as "a way of life" rather than "a job." The employee furthermore gave an example that illustrates the way Father Albeiro and the Sisters live a simple lifestyle and fully focus from mornings till evenings on assisting the children from their very poor circumstances. In contrast, the person mentioned that this is not a norm in other charity organizations where the leadership, or employees although caring about the poor, still see their help to those in need as a job, and want to keep living a more lavish lifestyle. The employee emphasized how encouraging and hopeful the approach of DBK was to his own personal efforts. Interestingly, the entire non-religious sub-group shared the same opinions on many issues, including the answer on what they see as a success of Salesian religious peace-building and multi-religious communities. The reply was "the leadership of DBK", and more specifically "the approach of Fr. Albeiro." This observation might help to explain why the Salesian communities can differ so much within one country's context as the leadership is always different, flexibly able to decide on specific principles guiding the community. Finally, there was the Muslim sub-group. The Muslim sub-group was more private about their religion, almost reflecting the stricter dogmatic viewpoint of Abrahamic religions in Europe. For instance, they rarely used the Cambodian greeting of gratitude, known as "sampea" in Khmer (originating as "anjali mudra" in Indian Sanskrit)

which bears a symbolic meaning of “I bow to the divinity within you from the divinity within me” (Rea, 2021). It might also be historically founded as Muslims suffered excessively during the Khmer Rouge under Pol Pot, who not only tried to ban Islam but also tried to eliminate the Cham Muslim community in Cambodia as such (Kiernan, 1988). However, they were actively engaged in the community's daily secular activities. Not only Muslim students among the community members but there were even Muslim employees in various positions, including a Muslim family owning a shop at DBK. It was not uncommon to see them play sports with others and take an active initiative in conversations.

- Orientation Towards the Future

In the minority group, the orientation towards the future is the least clear. The Muslim sub-group were mostly students and employees for whom it was meaningful to engage with the community at the present with educational future goals, or some employees finding it as a pleasant workplace long-term. The non-religious didn't really reflect on it either, and again were most focused on enjoying the good atmosphere in the community and imagining the pleasant place as a part of their future. Moreover, this sub-group told me upfront that they don't see yet how the Salesian multi-religious peace, friendship, honest and caring approaches to life could affect Cambodian society at large. They added, however, that the DBK community is still very young (only turning 12 years old in 2023), and the effects might be more visible in the distant future. Nonetheless, one of the Atheist employees offered a glimpse of the futuristic vision when the person expressed to me once how personally felt transformed by his/her engagement with DBK. Based on his/her own words, the well-functioning religious community helped him/her to realize that no matter own religious preferences we all have the same common goal – to do good. Something that he/she was more restrained to think in the past. One of the things I found most interesting was how critically the non-religious sub-group reflected on various other aspects of DBK, unrelated to my research, with a passion to improve the community even better. Thus, their future investment into DBK was clear. Regarding Protestants, especially the Protestant sponsors perceived the DBK's values and environment as very meaningful, educational, and life-changing for many, thereby they see the future as brighter for not only the students but everyone who comes into contact of any form with the DBK community. That was the reason they decided to support the community financially, and many times would travel, or stop by to spend their time with the leadership, teachers, volunteers, and students. On some

occasions, the Protestant sub-group helped to organize and attend various trips and community activities for the children and youth.

- Preventive Methods

The most prominent mirroring of the preventive methods is in the mutual and positive engagement of the minority group and the scope of the realization they are given within the DBK. The past of these actions already showed in the present with their very positive and vital interactions in the Catholic community; Firstly, they decided to invest either their personal finances and time (Protestants), again the time but combined with skills and talent (the non-religious and Muslim), and hope and trust (the Muslim). Secondly, upon their openness there had to be the same open-minded Catholic and Buddhist side that would welcome their presence. When these two elements meet, they automatically transition into preventive methods by joining people of diverse backgrounds into one community of friendship that sees each other as a family. The individual family experience then reflects into each person's personal life and connections. Afterward, it is much harder for any violence or political misuse to penetrate people's positive lived experiences where they lift each other up daily.

6. Discussion

In this section, I am going to discuss the findings of the Analysis based on Galtung's 4 points of positive peace:

- Absence of Structural Violence

As Galtung states in his "Three Approaches to Peace (1976)", peace-building calls for "building peace from the bottom ground up on the healthy peace foundations" (Galtung, 1976). This is a vital element of "associative peace-building" creating active and effective engagement with all the elements it touches on. Galtung also claims that building positive peace relies on the presence of negative peace, and structural violence has to be completely absent. The absence of structural violence is why at Don Bosco Kep, the 3 religious groups were not only able to encounter one another but rather form meaningful, active friendships working on poverty-reduction and education assistance of children from poorer circumstances. Indeed, the Salesians found strength in their charisma building their vision on Jesus' open-hearted ministry to the marginalized which requires being Catholic in the fullest sense of the word – universal. But as the minority group pointed out, a lot of the well-functionality and non-discrimination has to do with a concrete approach of the leadership of DBK, and taking their mission seriously, which can vary across the Salesian missions. Based on their accounts at DBK, thanks to the absence of structural violence, they were able to cooperate on, as the non-religious sub-group noted, "the common good." The Buddhist group was then able to profit from the educational support and assistance in turning their life around as well as experience the absence of religious violence, which helped to shape their view of other religions more positively.

- Harmonious Co-existence of Diverse Groups

If something was explicit from my research, then it was the complete lack of worry about religious differences in light of the common goal - in the case of DBK, the assistance with education to lift up from the poverty economically disadvantaged children. The religious differences seemed to completely disappear "in the heat" of mutual collaboration of poverty alleviation, which was the identical phenomenon in all 3 groups. Naturally, the groups had divergent perspectives on the harmony. The Catholics - Salesians and Carmelites - saw it as a central factor in helping the poor children and fulfilling Jesus' ministry through transformation thanks to education without force, infliction of ideas, and similar. The

Buddhists saw it as a home community and charity organization of a different religion, which assisted them in gaining more opportunities in life. Besides, they saw the presence of a different religion more dynamically and appeared to be more focused on similar traits to Buddhism (love, doing good, searching for something Higher and Better, reaching Afterlife, and so on). The minority, especially Protestants and non-religious appreciated the successful humanitarian work of DBK, family spirit, honesty, and good atmosphere as a volunteering/working environment. The Muslims had more private opinions but mostly were drawn to the community for charity needs and values, or appreciation for openness and goodness.

- Orientation Towards the Future

The groups probably differed the most in understanding the concept of orientation towards the future. For Galtung, it is an imperative area as positive peace shall be futuristic and try to change something for the better, build peaceful structures from foundations where negative peace is present, and have an active vision thus conflict might be avoided through present action. Since Salesian charisma is tied around the Salesian Preventive System of loving-kindness, religion, and reason and educative methods of primarily poor and/or disadvantaged youth, they were aware of the future impacts of their work. Fr. Albeiro, in particular, always emphasized that community life should reflect love, peace, joy, and love for Mother Nature as he believes that “the children and youth will witness it and reflect on it through their own lives in the future.” The Carmelite sub-group considered the positive impact of the Salesian support as a life-changing element in the students' lives and merged it well with their own Carmelite charisma. The Buddhist alumni themselves naturally mirrored “the vision of the future” as the community assisted in turning their lives around, and at present, they work as teachers and managers at DBK and still actively pursue additional education, or other endeavors. Seeing the fruits of past success, the Protestant sponsors also wanted to support the DBK’s mission, and Muslims felt attracted to the charisma of the community. Moreover, the non-religious sub-group saw a positive impact on the individual students, and they also explored the larger context of DBK the most. When asked, they were keen to discuss if and how DBK possibly affects Cambodian society today, and what impact it could make in the following years.

- Preventive Methods

Fr. Albeiro mentioned the founder Don Bosco a number of times and underlined how the simplicity of his ideas was able to survive since the 19th Century. He liked how “the prevention by love” is always relevant anywhere, and he viewed it as impactful. The Salesian preventive methods match with Galtung’s idea of positive peace-building, and I saw a strong overlap since Galtung also believes in “building peace by prevention” for when a conflict occurs, it is already too late. I found the Salesian approach meaningful, especially how religion, reason, and loving-kindness were able to furthermore connect with the Buddhist teaching, and contribute as the peace-building factor at DBK. The Buddhist students were, after all, the living example of preventive methods as most of them became successful in life, and are actively involved and engaged positively in Cambodian society. The minority group, although didn’t know much about the Salesian Preventive System, witnessed the results of Salesian presence describing it as “it is family-oriented”, “everybody is welcoming here”, “I like the culture of honesty”, or “It is a very good working atmosphere.” All in all, the presence of preventive methods and positive peace-building resulted in peaceful cohabitation that was also appreciated by the local community.

7. Conclusion

In the end, I wish to answer my research question:

“How is the presence of Salesians Institutes related to religious peace-building in Cambodia?”

To answer the RQ, I collaborated with Don Bosco Kep multi-religious community consisting of the Catholic-Salesian and Carmelite leadership, Buddhist alumni and students, and the minority representation consisting of Protestants, Muslims, and non-religious (non-practicing own religion, non-religious Agnostics, and Atheist). The Catholics were working on their mission stemming from the Salesian charisma of helping the poor and/or disadvantaged youth and the Preventive System, which overlaps with Galtung’s view of positive peace. This approach allowed them to focus on the universality of Catholicism and be embracing and open to the different faiths, highlighting the similarities, and collaborating on the common good. The Buddhist group also saw the interactions from the community dynamically, focused on the shared elements – but they had the freedom of completely preserving their faith, which was a contributing factor. The constant presence of Buddhist alumni indicated how the assistance of Don Bosco Kep helped them to turn their lives and the lives of their families around for the better. They maintained good relationships with DBK and later gave back to the community to support future generations as teachers. The Minority Group is an enriching addition to the DBK community and represents an interesting outlook. The entire group agreed that the community positively contributed to their lives (concerning education, experience, career, atmosphere, charity, etc.), but naturally, there were differences in perception. Protestants centered around the vision of the common goal as well as the non-religious with a special emphasis on the enjoyable volunteer/work environment, while Muslims were respected to keep their faith more private and contributed to the community with their talent and skills.

My 3-month long case study at Don Bosco Kep in Cambodia showcased that religious peace-building in pursuing shared positive goals is not only possible but also impactful for all religions and individuals involved. My research demonstrates that Salesian Institutes, such as DBK, spread meaningful values thanks to their charisma to youth and others of different religions they work with, or encounter, and these individuals are a part of society who are affected by these interactions. This was clear, especially on the local level as DBK was very

well received in the Kep community. If DBK and other Salesian Institutes continue and develop their charisma, then more people might experience and be included in a positive peace force of religious peace-building through prevention by friendship, love, kindness, education, shared memories, and mutual collaboration on social justice. What has proven to be the most challenging is the variations across the Salesian missions in Cambodia, how much the leadership can change/impact, the lack of an overall agenda on how to approach multi-religious educational systems in Cambodia, and the generally very different understanding of “what religion is” across the miscellaneous religions and cultures present. It makes the Salesian charisma very prone to misuse, or personal understanding and definition.

Finally, I have to express that I cannot be more grateful for this life-changing and inspiring opportunity to work directly with the Salesian community, Don Bosco Kep in Cambodia, in my own quest for learning how to make a world a bit more peaceful and pleasant place for everyone. And that I cannot agree more with Salesian Cardinal, Cristóbal López Romero (the Archbishop of Rabat in Marocco), who stated that tolerance is actually worth very little because what is far more worthwhile is “friendship, mutual knowledge, mutual enrichment: to build together universal fraternity starting with ourselves an understanding shaped by a life of servitude in wide variety of places and people!” (Gartland, 2019).

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