

## SALESIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY IN THE PHILIPPINES NORTH PROVINCE

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The need or the desire to write history is caused by different circumstances. Some wrote history because of obedience from superiors while another wrote history because his twilight years called him to write it. One wrote for scholastic requirement while still others because of a need to give a talk in a seminar or an article to commemorate a memorable event. In all these circumstances, not to mention also the non-accessibility in archives of recent documents, there were at least attempts to write history whether it may be scientific, a simple memoir, or based on interviews.

Chronologically, according to the time they were written, they are as follows:

### 1. Don Bosco's Work in Education and Technical Instruction with Special Applications to the Philippines<sup>1</sup>

A *thesis* presented by Fr. Gianluigi Colombo SDB in June 1975 to the Faculty of the Graduate School at the De La Salle College.

This scientific study made extensive use of sources for its bibliography like books, manuals and reports, published articles and periodicals, newspapers, unpublished materials, essays and interviews. These are sources or materials that are available at that time to understand the current educational situation particularly on technical schools and to show the extent of Don Bosco's contributions in Philippine Education from 1951 onwards, not only on skills and their productive work in the society but also on the integral formation of youth, using Don Bosco's way of educating the young. In a nutshell it shows the significance

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<sup>1</sup> Gianluigi COLOMBO, *Don Bosco's Work in Education and Technical Instruction with Special Applications to the Philippines*. Manila 1975.

of Don Bosco Technical Schools, at that time when the Philippines was in its early process of transition from an agricultural-handicraft state of development, with most of its people directly dependent on the farms, to an industrialized economy urgently in need of technical education and large urban employment. However, the short history of the beginnings of the Salesians in the Philippines was based more on interviews rather than on archival documents. Important topics include:

- a. Socio-Economic Background and Status of the Technical Education in the Philippines at the Arrival of the First Salesians;
- b. The Salesians and the Beginnings of their Activity in the Philippines;
- c. The Organization of the Salesian Technical Institutions in the Philippines;
- d. Extent of Don Bosco's Possible Contributions.

## 2. Pioneers<sup>2</sup>

A booklet written by Fr. Miguel Solaroli SDB and translated by Fr. Adolf Faroni SDB in 2000, on the work of the Salesians in Tondo, Manila.

This small book is a *short memoire*, very limited in scope, of Fr. Miguel Solaroli SDB, who started the work in Tondo in 1968 together with Fr. John Benna SDB and Fr. John Andreu SDB. It is a memoire highlighting some anecdotes describing the slums of Tondo and when the Salesians started their work in the midst of this incredible subhuman condition. Many anecdotes however are not dated. Some interesting anecdotes are:

- a. The Gangs of Tondo;
- b. The Visit of Pope Paul VI in 1970 in Don Bosco Tondo;
- c. The Great Fire in 1971.

## 3. A Dictionary of Asian Christianity<sup>3</sup>

A *dictionary* edited by Scott Sunquist, year 2001, with an article written by Fr. Francis Gustilo SDB on the Salesian work in Asia but with special emphasis in the Philippines.

Practically, the entry, "Salesians" in the dictionary highlights only the presence of the Salesians in the Philippines and its development, mentioning only in passing India and China, rather than Asia. The author used only two main books as references in its bibliography:

<sup>2</sup> Miguel SOLAROLI, *Pioneers*. Translated by Adolf Faroni. Manila 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Francis GUSTILO, *Salesians*, in "A Dictionary of Asian Christianity" (ed. Scott SUNQUIST). Cambridge 2001.

- a. Vasco TASSINARI, *Don Braga, L'uomo che ebbe tre patrie. Appunti storiografici per la vicenda esistenziale di Don Carlo Braga in Italia, in Cina, in Filippine*. Bologna, GESP 1990;
- b. Emiliano SANTOS, *Don Bosco Philippines, Silver Jubilee*, Makati 1976.

#### 4. The Arrival of Don Bosco in the Philippines<sup>4</sup>

A *historical book* written by Fr. Gregorio Bicomong Jr. SDB in 2001, on the requests made to the Salesians from 1891-1951 before the start of the Salesian work in the Philippines.

This book, as a fitting work to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Salesians in the Philippines (1951-2001), it made use of primary sources researched in numerous archives both here and abroad like the Salesian Central Archives in Rome, Salesian Archives Hong Kong, Vatican Archives, National Archives Manila, etc. The book is not the history of those 50 years but of the 60 years before that; a kind of pre-history of the Salesians in the Philippines (1891-1951).

Far from attempting to be comprehensive and complete, in which no historian would pretend to accomplish, it aims more at providing the readers a glimpse of the original letters and other pertinent documents to help them understand the reasons for the seeming postponement of the arrival of the Salesians in the Philippines, in spite of the many requests made to fill a need in the Philippine Church especially after the Philippine Revolution of 1898.

Topics include:

- a. Request made by Governor-General Eulogio Despujol himself in 1891, under the *Patronato Real*;
- b. Requests from other bishops, priests and lay persons;
- c. The "Salesian Presence" of a Salesian Apostolic Delegate to the Philippines, Msgr. Guglielmo Piani (1922-1948) and his secretary, Fr. Louis La Ravoire Morrow;
- d. More requests and the first foundations during the time of Fr. Braga.

#### 5. Ang Kasaysayan ng Parokya ng Mayapa sa Unang 25 Taon (1973-1998) (=The History of the Parish of Mayapa in the First 25 Years, 1973-1998)<sup>5</sup>

A *book* written by a cooperator, Andres Molintapang, in the Tagalog language, to commemorate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Parish of Mary Help of Christians in 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Gregorio BICOMONG, *The Arrival of Don Bosco in the Philippines*. Makati 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Andres MOLINTAPANG, *Ang Kasaysayan ng Parokya ng Mayapa sa Unang 25 Taon (1973-1998)*. Laguna. 2003.

The author, born in 1930 in Palo Alto that became part of the Parish in 1973, made use of the archives of the parish, his own knowledge of the parish, and his interviews with priests, catechists and parishioners. An important contribution was the interview with Fr. John Benna SDB, an Italian missionary, who became the parish priest for 20 years.

Although it is a simple history of a young parish, it gives an idea of the challenges and growth of a parish with about 60,000 parishioners and 19 chapels (Six of which would form part of the new Parish of Fatima in 1996).

## 6. The Beginnings of the Salesian Presence in East Asia (two volumes)

The two-volume work was the collection of reports/articles of the Seminar on Salesian History held in Hong Kong on 4-6 December 2004, edited by Fr. Nestor Impelido SDB.

In the first volume we find the *article, Salesians in the Philippines (1949-1963): Historical Notes*<sup>6</sup>, written by Fr. Nestor Impelido SDB. It is a study of the beginnings of the Salesian work in the Philippines from the negotiations for foundations (1949) to the first foundations or works started by the Salesians. This 25-page article made use of books and documents researched from archives like the Salesian Central Archives in Rome, Salesian Archives Hong Kong and some Salesian local archives in the Philippines.

The author tried to show the timely expulsion of some Salesians from the Chinese Mainland during the ongoing Communist expulsion of the religious and the much needed requests for Salesians to start the work in the Philippines particularly on technical schools. The author also noted to study more the contribution of the Salesian coadjutors as well as the impact of the Salesian technical schools in Philippine education.

## 7. Salesians in the Philippines<sup>7</sup>

A *historical book* written by Fr. Nestor Impelido SDB in 2006 on the establishment and development of the Salesian work in the Philippines starting from the Delegation to Province status (1951-1963). It is therefore a good continuation of the “pre-history” book written by Fr. Gregorio Bicomong Jr. SDB. It wishes to study the beginnings of the Salesians in the Philippines when they finally started and settled in the Philippines after 60 years of “pre-

<sup>6</sup> Nestor IMPELIDO, *Salesians in the Philippines (1949-1963): Historical Notes*, in ID. (ed.), *The Beginnings of the Salesian Presence in East Asia*. Makati 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Nestor IMPELIDO, *Salesians in the Philippines. Establishment and Development from Delegation to Province (1951-1963)*. (= ISS - Studi, 24). Roma, LAS 2007.

history”. The author wishes to answer some questions like: What were the first Salesian foundations in the Philippines? How were these established and how did they develop in their first years of existence? Who were the Salesians responsible for the establishment and growth of the Salesian presence? What were the initial problems and difficulties they encountered? Interesting were also the difficulties in personalities, characters and mentalities among the pioneers (“fondatori”).

The author utilized the documents extensively researched in numerous archives both here and abroad like the Salesian Central Archives Rome, Salesian Archives Hong Kong, Salesian Archives Manila, Salesian Archives of some houses in the Philippines. Many documents are recent and the author tried to exercise caution in his research and writing.

Some topics include:

- a. The Philippines as a Delegation during the time of Fr. Braga;
- b. The First foundations in Tarlac, Victorias, Mandaluyong, etc.;
- c. The “Founders” who laid the foundation of the Salesian work in the Philippines;
- d. The Philippines as a Visitatoria (1958-1963);
- e. The Philippines as a Province (1963-1964).

## 8. Passing on His Brilliance<sup>8</sup>

A book written by Fr. Remo Bati SDB in 2008 on his interviews with some Salesians regarding the shining examples of the Salesian Pioneers who worked in the Philippines from 1951-1963.

As a methodology, the book is not a historical research based on archives but a compilation of interviews containing personal impressions, memories and experiences of individuals with the pioneers. It is a kind of *oral history*.

Using Don Bosco’s Dream of the Ten Diamonds, the author listed the Ten Diamonds (i.e., faith, hope, charity, work, temperance, obedience, poverty, chastity, fasting, reward) and fitted appropriately the examples, traits and values of the pioneers in the Ten Diamonds.

The author made use of the two books of Fr. Gregorio Bicomong’s *The Arrival of the Salesians in the Philippines* and Fr. Nestor Impelido’s *Salesians in the Philippines* in chapter 3 on the origin and beginnings of the Salesian work in the Philippines.

<sup>8</sup> Remo BATI, *Passing on His Brilliance. Salesian Pioneers in the Philippines 1951-1963*. Makati City, Don Bosco Press Inc. 2008.

## 9. Implantation of the Salesian Charism in Asia: Ideas, Challenges, Answers, Results

This book is a collection of reports/articles of the Seminar on Salesian History (East Asia-Oceania Region) held in Batulao, Philippines last 24-28 November 2008, edited by Mathew Kapplikunnel.

We find three *articles* related to Salesian History in the Philippines:

9.1. *General Background and the Expansion of the Salesian Work in the EAO Region in the 1950s*<sup>9</sup>, written by Fr. Gregorio Bicomong Jr. SDB. The author showed a general background of the difficult political and ecclesial situation vis-à-vis the Salesian expansion in the EAO region in the 1950s. One difficulty is the feeling of animosity towards Christianity as a western or foreign religion after the collapse of colonialism in the years immediately before and after the 1950s. The other is the problem of Communism as primary antagonist of Christianity; or the Catholic Church in transition from a defensive mood to greater openness to dialogue with other Christian denominations and religions, etc.

The author made use of sources from books that were specialized on this particular period of the 1950s.

9.2. *The Growth of the Salesian Charism in the EAO Region: Religious Institutes Founded by Salesians*<sup>10</sup>, written by Fr. Nestor Impelido SDB. It aims to present the various congregations founded by some of the Salesian missionaries who worked in the EAO region. It is largely based on primary documents collected from archives of the respective congregations and the Salesian Central Archives in Rome. The article however is incomplete, as mentioned by the author himself, due to the current lack of clear and scientific histories of these congregations.

The following are the congregations highlighted in the article:

- a. Sisters Announcers of the Lord;
- b. Caritas Sisters of Miyazaki;
- c. Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary;
- d. The Daughters of the Queenship of Mary.

<sup>9</sup> Gregorio BICOMONG, *The General Background and the Expansion of the Salesian Work in the EAO Region in the 1950s*, in Mathew KAPPLIKUNNEL (ed.), *Implantation of the Salesian Charism in Asia. Ideals, Challenges, Answers, Results*. Acts of the Salesian History Seminar East Asia - Oceania Region (Batulao [Manila], 24-28 November 2008). (= ACSSA – Varia, 7). Bangalore, Kristu Jyoti Publications 2009, pp. 65-80.

<sup>10</sup> Nestor IMPELIDO, *The Growth of the Salesian Charism in the EAO Region: Religious Institutes Founded by Salesians*, in M. KAPPLIKUNNEL (ed.), *Implantation of the Salesian Charism in Asia...*, pp. 81-122.

9.3. *The Implantations of the Salesian Charism in the Philippines in the First Thirty Years (1951-1981)*<sup>11</sup>, written by Fr. Remo Bati SDB. The article was just a synthesis of the book written by the same author, Fr. Bati, *Passing on His Brilliance*.

## 10. Finally I am Home<sup>12</sup>

This *book*, printed in 2010, is a personal memoir or story of Fr. Rocky Evangelista SDB about his life journey in responding to a vocation to work with streetchildren. He presented a series of engaging short stories that helped shape his vision before and after he founded the Tuloy sa Don Bosco Streetchildren Village. In a way it is also the history of the beginnings of the said Streetchildren Village.

Some interesting chapters include:

- a. His Journey to a Call to Work for Street Kids;
- b. His Encounter and Journeys with Children;
- c. His Building of a Dream Home, the Tuloy Sa Don Bosco Streetchildren Village.

These are the attempts to write the Salesian histories in our province. Some were scientific and some were not. Ideally more written histories of scientific nature are desired in the future. But at least, after more than 60 years of Salesian presence in the Philippines, something was written about the work and its beginnings. As the province becomes older and the memories of the past grow it is our hope that these memories will be passed on to the next generation.

<sup>11</sup> Remo BATI, *The Implantations of the Salesian Charism in the Philippines in the First Thirty Years (1951-1981)*, in M. KAPPLIKUNNEL (ed.), *Implantation of the Salesian Charism in Asia...*, pp. 367-376.

<sup>12</sup> Rocky EVANGELISTA, *Finally I am Home*. Manila 2010.