



Panjim :
+3rd October 1977

REV. BRO. CONSTANTIUS PO, s.d.b.

On September 3, 1977 — the first Saturday of the month — Bro. Constantius Po, whilst still at work stopped to answer God's summons, beckoning him to his eternal reward.

He was the first Salesian vocation from the House of Goa, started in Panjim, the capital city, in 1946. Bro. Constantius joined just a year later, on June 1, 1947.

Constantius Po was born at Taleigao, Goa on 30-1-1910. After completion of the Primary Course in Portuguese, he worked for the Government Printing Press in Panjim. The quest for better prospects took him to Beira, Portuguese Africa.

Losing no time there, he took up a job in the line in which he was trained. Eventually, he started his own small printing press, and did sufficiently profitable business.

His parents, meanwhile, were in Goa and Constantius would visit them from time to time. He helped his two sisters to get married. He was the only boy in his family and all insisted that he, also, should think about his 'future'. Constantius would invariably reply, "We shall see to it the next time," and return to Africa.

One day, when he was in his thirties, he read in the "Dor Mhoineachi Rotti", the Messenger of the Sacred Heart in Konkani, that the Salesians had come to Panjim, and the appeal for Vocations, inserted therein, caught his eye. He wrote a letter to the Superior. Fr. Vincent Scuderi, the Rector, invited him to Goa for a visit whilst he studied his vocation.

Constantius promptly sold his press, and with his money gathered over the years in Africa, came to Panjim. After making due arrangements to meet the needs of his parents, he came to Don Bosco. It must have been really difficult for the good parents to permit their only boy to join the religious Society. But generous they were and great was their sacrifice.

Constantius joined Don Bosco as an aspirant on June 1, 1947. The money he had brought back from Africa proved to be very useful for feeding the many orphans whom the Salesians had taken in and sheltered. In this he was a real instrument of Divine Providence, and he remained so to the end.

The Rector put him in charge of the little Press he had started, and Senhor Constancio began training the lads in hand composition. Fr. Zola looked after the book binding, and the work began to progress.

But Constantius, who had given up his own work in Beira to follow Christ 'in a life of prayer and penance', found himself doing the very same work he had been doing before, and the 'religious life' he had been dreaming of appeared to

have evaporated. It took time to make him understand that it was quite a different spirit with which he now worked. And eventually realising that this was his apostolate, he found that peace for which he had longed.

A year and more passed by, and Constantius' longing to join the Novitiate grew. But Fr. Scuderi could find no suitable substitute to manage the Press. At long last, in 1949, Constantius went to the Novitiate in Kotagiri. His intense desire to be a religious began to see its fulfilment.

Constantius found in Fr. Alfred Cogliandro a zealous Novice Master, who guided him along the path for obtaining further tranquility of mind and soul. Constantius attended the Sunday Oratory, where he would assist the children and organise their games in his own way. His dreams now found expression in an active apostolate for poor youth, and Don Bosco surely must have smiled to see the transformation going on in the mind and heart of this, his new son.

The great day came when he was given the Missionary Crucifix; and he reached the climax of his joy when, on the Feast day of Mary, Help of Christians, in 1950, he made his First Profession and received the Brother's Medal from the hands of the Provincial, Fr. Joseph Carreno. All of his former fellow-novices are loud in their praise of the exemplary manner in which he spent that truly unforgettable year of religious life.

Soon after Bro. Constantius' Profession, he was sent by Fr. Carreno, the Provincial, to Tirupattur, to take charge of a modest Press that had been started by the Salesians. He remained there for two years. When the formal aspirantate for Coadjutors was opened at Basin Bridge in Madras, Bro. Constantius was sent to Madras. Here, likewise, he remained for another two years.

But the Printing Press in Goa was without a Salesian Manager, and Fr. Scuderi began insistently claiming the assistance of Bro. Constantius. In 1953, then, Bro. Constantius returned to Goa and worked in our Panjim House right up to 1958. The Press went into production and a good many boys were trained in this field by Bro. Constantius. Meanwhile, good Fr. Scuderi had to leave for Italy for a well-deserved rest, and Fr. Carreno was appointed as the new Rector.

Not so much for the purpose of training as to make Bro. Constantius imbibe greater love for Don Bosco, was Bro. Constantius sent to Colle Don Bosco in Italy, where he studied new techniques in Press work. He remained in Italy for two years.

In 1959, he returned to Goa to take charge of the Press, once more. Whilst in Italy, he was accustomed to automatic machines; on his return, he had to be content with hand composing. It was in this, as in so many other things, that Fr. Carreno saw and appreciated the great quality of adaptability in good Bro. Constantius. Fr. Carreno, however, decided it was time to upgrade our little Press. He secured an Italtype, then a benefactor in U.S.A. presented us with a monotype, and great was the sacrifice that was made to buy a genuine Heidelberg.

These years were ones of very considerable hardship for the Goans in Goa. There was an escalation of the cold war between India and Portugal for possession of this lavishly beautiful and historic territory. Our Boarding Section was filled with about 300 poor boys, who could pay neither for their board nor for their tuition. The subsidy being given by the Portuguese Government was barely enough to buy raw rice for the month. The Press, with Bro. Constantius in charge, strove valiantly to make a little profit, which was duly passed over to the House to help maintain these poor laids. These ever-grateful Past Pupils occupy enviable positions today and are the glory of our House in Goa.

At this time, there was no one to take charge of our Carpentry section. Bro. Constantius took this up as well, realising that here, too, was a source of additional income which would help support our poor boys. The mechanical side was looked after by Bro. E. C. Joseph. These Brothers were, for the House, the Bank of Divine Providence.

Eventually, when Goa became a part of the Indian Union and trades began to develop along with the industries, the boys preferred to go in neither for printing nor for carpentry. The Salesians felt it their duty to provide for the future of the boys in their charge. Accordingly, then, the Press and Carpentry sections began to be managed by hired labour; and hence there was no scope for an apostolate for Bro. Constantius. He therefore asked to be relieved, and the kitchen was entrusted to his care.

Later, the Government in Goa was poised for passing the Tenancy Act, when the land would be given automatically to the tiller, and those who were on the land as cultivators would acquire the rights of ownership. The House in Panjim owned a coconut grove and cashew plantation at Odxel, some three miles from the House. It seemed certain that this property would pass into the hands of the labourers who attended on the plantation! Bro. Constantius volunteered himself to hold on to this property which belonged to the Salesians, and to prevent it, by all legal means, from going into the hands of those who had otherwise no title to the land. He was given a motor-cycle, with which he would make the trip to Odxel each morning, spend the day there and return only in the evening. His presence on the premises in Odxel prevented many an encroachment on our property.

Good Fr. Remery, when in Goa in the 1950's, had laid the foundation for a small Retreat-cum-holiday house in the Odxel property, facing the sea. Brother Constantius persuaded his Superiors to have the house completed. While the work was still in progress, death knocked at his door.

On September 3, 1977, he invited us to come to Odxel to inspect his work. In the evening, after tea, Fr. Loddy Pires, the Vice-Principal, Fr. Thomas Fernandes, the Vice-Rector and I, started off in the car driven by Bro. Alfred Goncalves, a fellow-novice of Bro. Constantius from the novitiate days. As we approached the place, we saw the motor-cycle parked by the way-side, not far from the house, and good Bro. Constantius was sitting with his face to the ground. Going at once to his side, we found him just warm.

The workers informed us that Bro. Constantius had told them that he was feeling very uneasy and that he was returning to Don Bosco. They had seen him set off for Panjim, then park his motor-cycle by the road side, and calling to the workers' children so as to tell them something, possibly that he was not feeling well. I had good Bro. Constantius put in the car and rushed to the Hospital. He was pronounced dead on arrival. The last Rites were administered 'sub-conditione' and all we could do was to obtain the medical certificate and bring his mortal remains back to the House.

Promptly, a trunk call was booked to Fr. Tony D'Souza, the Provincial in Bombay, to inform him about the calamity. He was away from the Provincial House just then, but when he received the message later in the evening, he called Panjim back. He told us that he would be arriving in Goa for the funeral of Bro. Constantius, but to get here he would have to wait for the following noon, to catch the afternoon flight. In the meantime, other Salesian Houses would be informed.

The Provincial, accompanied by the Provincial Economist, Fr. Salvador D'Souza and Bro. E. C. Joseph, arrived in Goa at 5-45 p.m., just in time for the funeral Mass at 6-00 p.m. The Shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Fatima was packed to capacity; conspicuous amongst the throng who had come to pay their last respects to the one who had looked after their needs with genuine brotherly love, was a very large

number of Past Pupils. The Don Bosco High School Band played the funeral dirges, slow and solemn. And it was said that a funeral ceremony like that had seldom been observed in Panjim.

At the grave-side, Fr. Provincial, who performed the obsequies, eulogised Bro. Constantius' great devotion to Our Lady, his sincerity of heart and of purpose, and his overwhelming simplicity in religious life. "He has gone to Heaven to pray for us", he said.

Brother Constantius Po came from a middle-class family. He had been working and knew what comfort meant. Yet he persisted in living a quiet and simple life till the very end. Though always neat and tidy, his clothes were simple fashioned. Whenever he went to Bombay, he would take along a sackful or more of coconuts, the produce of his untiring labour. He was always serene and cheerful, and more so towards the end. On rare occasions when his anger was aroused, the most explosive word that he uttered was 'Animal'!. He might have imported it from Africa. However, he did not like that others use it. Poverty and economy had become a way of life for him. Having renounced the world, he lived the religious life and loved it. His talks with his intimate friends were liberally interspersed with holy sayings of St. Alphonsus. He must have been reading those books during his earlier days.

He was always punctual for the Community practices of piety. He himself had a great devotion to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. In the evening, after work, he would come and sit on the last bench in the Shrine, before the Blessed Sacrament, and pass one, two hours, there — without a book, without the beads. At night, before retiring, he would be seen walking with the Rosary in hand, fondling the beads. Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and to our Blessed Mother were in fact the poles of his spirituality. For his retreat, the book he would take along was the book of the Constitutions and Regulations.

Brother Constantius Po lived an exemplary life as a Salesian Brother. His utter simplicity and his great devotion have carved for him a niche in many a heart. May God grant eternal rest to his departed soul and a fair share in the bounties of His Kingdom. In turn may good Brother Constantius, who has left a big void in the line of Salesian Brothers, obtain that many more, such as he, may come forward to serve God in a consecrated life as Salesian Brothers in the Society of Don Bosco.

Yours lovingly in Don Bosco,

Fr. John Samala
Rector

Brother Constantius Po, born in Taleigao, Goa, 30-1-1910;
First Profession 1950; died at Odxel, Taleigao 3-9-1977.

