

Sunnyside

UPPER SHILLONG
SHILLONG – 793005
MEGHALAYA

24th May, 1983

Fr. Dennis Troncana

Dear Confreres,

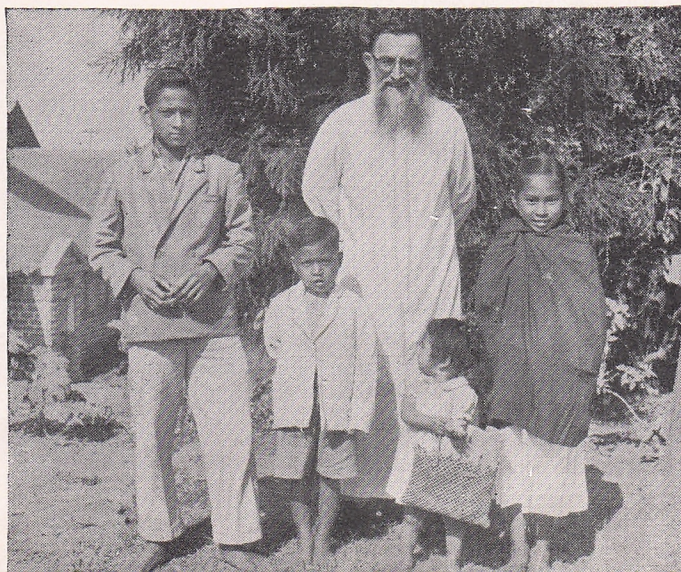
The news of the sudden death of Fr. Dennis Troncana on 9th August 1982, was indeed a shock for this community, where he had been working for the past eighteen months. He had gone to spend a few weeks with his dear ones, and while at home the Lord called him to his eternal rest. In everything that he did, there was always a sense of urgency, and even in his death, there was not much delay. While saddened by his death, the fragrance and splendour of his life is still something that impresses us very much. He was an instrument in the hands of God, and He led many people to the person of Christ, through his work and energy. His baptismal registers do speak in some way of the efforts of this great missionary to propagate the work of God.

He was born on 4th October 1900, in Travigliata, Brescia, Northern Italy. He was the second son of devout Christian parents, and his elder brother was also a priest of his native diocese. From his earliest years, he manifested a deep sense of religious discernment, and at the age of twenty five he became a 'Son of Mary to study for Salesian life. In 1928, he left his dear ones behind and came to India, to answer the divine call in the mission of his dreams. He began his Novitiate in 1928, and professed on 6th January 1929, and he had as his Novice Master, Fr. Joseph Foglia, and earlier Fr. Stephen Ferrando. After his Novitiate, he studied philosophy in Our Lady's House, where he came under the influence and inspiration of Fr. Vendrame. Fr. Vendrame was the great

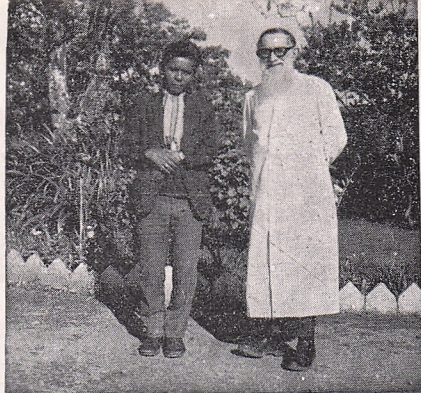
model for these early Missionaries, and he was truly the manual of missionary life for them. For his period of 'Tirocinium,' he went to Madras, where he came into close contact with Mons. Mederlet, who had helped him very much in his missionary vocation.

After three years in Madras, he returned to Shillong to prepare himself for his priesthood, and beside the intellectual formation, there was much apostolic opening, available to the Salesian clerics, who did have a great influence in the Catholic life of Shillong. Fr. Gutierrez would often remark that the years of Our Lady's House in Shillong, were the golden years of the Society in the Northern Eastern section of India, where the family spirit and a profound orientation to the Apostolate were the characteristics of the Salesian Community. He was ordained priest on 29th June 1935, together with Fr. F. Colussi, Fr. Vigada, Fr. F.M. Botto, Fr. Convertini and Fr. Bonomi. After ordination he worked for some time in Tezpur, and then he went to Dibrugarh, where his main work was touring the gardens and visiting the Christians. When the war broke out, he was sent to the Concentration Camp of Dehra Dun, where he passed the next five years in confinement. At the end of the war, after being released from detention, he came to Raliang where he spent much of the time touring and carrying the message of Christ to others. Few would dare to try to assess the number of miles he travelled in this mission. Later he came to Laitumkhrah, where he also was a touring missionary, making very extensive tours to meet the children of God. He spent some years in the mission of Marbisu and then he was posted to the mission of Cherrapunjee. Here he purchased a motor cycle, and he quickly learned the vicissitudes of the motor cycle, when he was stuck on the road, or caught in the storms and rain. Tra-

Fr. Dennis brought so many to God by his love and goodness



*Fr. Dennis
with his
faithful helper
the Catechist
Bah Linus*



straying and the wayward back to Christ. Regularly he would administer the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist to the bed-ridden, and he really brought Christ into the lives of so many. He himself spent his regular half-an-hour daily before the Blessed Sacrament. He was deeply concerned about family life, and tried to be the harbinger of peace and reconciliation between men. He showed great concern for the sacrament of marriage, and he prayed and worked to bring back the erring Christians. He dearly loved the young, and so many people would see him, giving a sweet, a sympathetic smile or that touch of personal affection, so characteristic of this Evangelizer.

The Missionary

From his earliest years, Fr. Dennis directed his steps to the life of a missionary and his ardour and love for the missions was expressed by the way in which he lived to the full his missionary vocation. His heart really went out to the poor and he would say, 'the poor and the needy are our masters', these are the people we must serve. He could never turn the other way, when the poor came for financial assistance – his life was a life of service to the poor. The sick came within the special purview of his attention, and he was at the bedside of those who were in need of assistance, – hail, thunder, lightning, or the intense cold, would not keep him away. In his missionary endeavours, only God will know and be able to estimate the number of miles he travelled throughout the length and breadth of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, but God who measures a man by his goodness of heart, must have found joy in weighing the merits of such a long and beautiful missionary career.

A Sense of Humour

Life in the missions can have its share of frustration and disappointment, but the man who is able to accept the sweet and bitter, and to do so with a smile, will win the battle. Fr. Dennis was able to look at himself, always with a smile, for he could find in his

the people for whom he was working. Always living close to his people, he was a force for good in their lives, and all admired his zeal, which was expressed in a life of self-less donation for the good of the people. He had quite a number of people with whom he was corresponding in order to help his mission. He answered his letters in a very systematic way, and seasoned his letters with a breathe of his missionary zeal. His finances passed through his hands for the good of the poor, and he would often say, "When we help the poor, we get the blessing of God." Like Don Bosco he wanted to help the poor especially in times of illness and need. He could never forget those in need.

A Salesian of Don Bosco

The life of Fr. Dennis was truly a living testimony of his deep personal love for Don Bosco. He always placed his own interests, as secondary to that of the congregation. He was imbued with a strong sense of Salesian values and he always showed an affability for others, by a simple pleasant and human way of treating them. He would continually make reference to Salesian life and Salesian spirituality, in his talks and sermons, and he realized that goodness of heart and persuasion, were vital forces for the Apostolate. Vocations to the religious and priestly state were always encouraged by Him, and he went out of his way to help and direct those who were promising, to their real vocation. Salesianity was a big part of his life, and he lived a very deep commitment to the traditions and spirit of our Holy Founder.

The Priest of God

In his own life, he was always the priest, and showed that he was deeply in love with his priestly charism. Like Don Bosco he was always and every where the priest. He always showed that priestly concern for others in dealing with them, he was at the bedside of the sick and dying – he led sinners back to the healing hands of Christ, and practised that love and gentleness, in leading the



*Fr. Dennis
was always
a lover
of the Poor !*

velling in the monsoon season on 'fourwheels is always difficult, and much more so is it on a 'war horse' with two wheels. Very often he and the motor cycle parted company.

In Cherrapunjee he spent more than a decade travelling through very difficult areas, to bring the message of Christ to others. In this mission he built many churches, so that the Christians could gather together on Sundays for the 'Jingiaseng.' In this mission he worked really hard to establish schools for the children, and built up the boarding so that the children could be brought to understand their Christian faith more fully.

In 1965, he came to Mawlai, where he continued to work for the next fifteen years, with great enthusiasm, and great love for the work of Christ. His great means of helping the people was through personal contact, and he believed very much in the importance of visiting families, and meeting people in their own homes, educating people around their home fires. He loved the poor, and would go out of his way to visit the sick, comforting those in need, and bringing back many souls to the love and mercy of Christ. In 1980, he came to the Novitiate to prepare himself, through his last Novitiate, to offer God, the service of His life. He lived in the Novitiate, an exemplary life of regularity and punctuality in all that he did. Hastening to the chapel to be on time for the religious services, was a most edifying life-style that impressed those who saw him. In the month of June 1982, he left for a few weeks of rest with his dear ones at home, but unfortunately he was not able to return to us, because God had other plans for him.

The Familiar Figure

He was a familiar figure, with short quick steps, the khakhi toppe on his head, the beard silvered with years of work – and that was just him! Every 'Khublei Phadar,' was met with an affectionate response, a word that meant so much to the people. The walking stick in his hand, (dogs can be dangerous) the sweets in the pocket for the children and a heart full of love for others, was the man going about doing so much good to others. He had his camera always ready, to make his friends know that he needed help for his mission. He would show his films to the children to instruct, and help them know about God and his wonders. Another wonder of this man – and people often thought, 'How is it that he can move about so fast? Even younger men, find it hard to keep pace with him!'

A Builder of God's Kingdom

Fr. Dennis wanted to build his Christians into persons of Faith. He was a man of the place, and knew how to adapt himself to

life, the plan of God. He could come out of himself, and laugh with others at himself. This ready sense of humour was evident in the various situations of his life, for a humorous smile and a joke bought him through the most perplexing of situations. Falling from his motor cycle and suffering a severe leg injury, that made him limp slightly for the rest of his life, he would point to his leg and say, "I got this, but the dog got worse." While he was a little afraid of his command of the English language, we all know that he spoke the languages of the heart for the meaning of love was there.

Rain, hail, storms and even the bleakest of nights would not prevent him from being present at the bedside of the sick, comforting the dying and helping those who needed to return to their merciful father.

The Mission of North East India, owes much to Fr. Dennis – a debt of gratitude, not so much for what he did, outstanding though his achievements may be, as a Salesian Missionary and a priest – for what he was, for the lessons he left us, by his style of life, as a consecrated person in the service of God's kingdom. He was a great missionary and he entered the lives of men and women with the message of love. He always conveyed the sense of simplicity – in him there was no guile or pretence. He exemplified the personal availability and human understanding of the 'oratorian heart' of Don Bosco. In the internment camp, he shared most of the things that he possessed, and he was popularly known as 'Zio,' because of this quality of concern that he so remarkably displayed. God does not count the days, the months and the years of men, for they are merely a breathe, compared with eternal life, but God counts the intensity of love and dedication in the service of others and in the maturity of holiness. God has given Fr. Troncana a new obedience, – 'to be a model for us to imitate on earth, and an ardent intercessor in heaven!' In conclusion, we do pray that God may give us others of the calibre of these first great missionaries, who blazed the trail of mission work in North East India. We thank God for these men who have done so much for the work of the Church, and we pray that we may be worthy to carry on the work, they have started.

Do pray for the Salesian Novitiate in Sunnyside, that the orientation we give to Salesian life, may be intensely Salesian and missionary.

Affectionately yours in C.J.,

L. J. HERIOT, SDB.

For Necrology

Born – 4.10.1900. Professed 6.1.1929. Ordained Priest 29.6.1935. Died – 9.8.1982, Brescia, Italy.