

# fr. theodosius bonomi

Salesian Community  
"St. Dominic Savio"  
Salerno.

June 24, 1979.

"Like the disciples, I will follow you  
and I will come and see where you live.  
Perhaps your hut by the river Jordan  
was poorer than the hut of my christi-  
ans in Assam. Let me come and see ...  
and I'll see your tabernacles."

(From his personal notes)

With deep longing for heaven, on the 18th of April 1979 our dear confrere Fr. Theodosius Bonomi has left us for the Father's house. He was 78; for 52 years a salesian, for 44 a priest and for 22 years he worked in the mission field in India.

He left us silently, the same silent manner he lived habitually. A silence of deep human and spiritual richness, which he broke from time to time to give some eagerly awaited advice, or to tell some fascinating episode of his missionary experience.

Fr. Bonomi was born in Lumezzane (Brescia) on 9-11-1901. He joined the Salesian Congregation rather advanced in age; Fr. Rinaldi gave him the clerical habit at Ivrea, and in 1927 he made his novitiate in Shillong. He was ordained a priest in 1935, in that wonderful period of great missionary experience for the Church and the Congregation.

One only was the ideal of his whole life: the mission field in India. But failing health forced him to leave the missions and to return home in search for a more favourable climate. Yet his heart (a confrere from India wrote in 1972), his cares, his thoughts were ever among "his" boys and "his" people in India. Fr. Convertini, another great missionary who died in India, wrote to him in 1967: "If now you are well you must come back, because the good Lord has given you the missionary vocation; you must work for these people." But this was to be for him the bitter chalice of his life; and we are convinced that a certain apparent bitterness of his character was due to the deep attachment he had for the missions and which he was not able to realize.



The same Fr. Convertini a few years later wrote again: "St. Theresa was a missionary from her cell". And Fr. Bonomi carried on his missionary activity from his room, on the bed of his sufferings. His spiritual direction was very much appreciated; with rare wisdom he was able to give serenity and courage to souls. Even after several years people remembered him with affection and gratitude.

His contact with great personalities of the Congregation, like Msgr. Mathias and Msgr. Ferrando, fostered in him grand ideas and a large heart.. Msgr. Ferrando wrote to him in 1974: "Last year I returned to Assam, and there I remembered you and your vast plans; and from what I have seen I must admit that you were right. But then I did not have the same courage and faith you had."

True, Fr. Bonomi realized many of his grand ideas; but above all he left an unforgettable picture of goodness and love in the confreres who lived close to him. His correspondence with missionaries was very frequent till the end. Confreres, even after as many as 30 years, used to write to him about everything: the harvest of the season, or the number of baptisms; opened to him their apostolic plans and difficulties; asked for his prayers and thanked him for everything.

Two Indian confreres add to their signatures the words "fruit of your missionary labour". Another calls himself "your missionary" and writes to him: "Often I do not know how to pull on; but then I think of you, and the thought gives me courage to go ahead. Do not abandon me." Yet another recalls to mind the "holy madness" of apostolic work in the missions which spread around serenity and salesian joy. Still another thanks him for a generous donation (how many he was able to send to the missions !) and assures him that it will be a help to "the very poor" people.

And last came an affectionate gesture from the confreres and boys of Ranchi, only a few days before his departure for heaven. Fr. Bonomi had sent much help to Fr. Colussi for the building of the aspirantate in Ranchi. Fr. Colussi wrote to him on 6-4-1979: "We want to invite you here in June next for the inauguration of the new building on the feast of the Sacred Heart. We shall pay the fare for you, and you must come; all the aspirants are fervently praying for this intention."



Good Fr. Bonomi did not go for the opening of the new house in Ranchi, but left this world for the Father's house, where the good Lord rewarded him for his love for the poor and the humble for whom he worked during his long life.

Let us pray the Lord to send many worthy workers to our Congregation; we are sure that the saintly figure of Fr. Bonomi will be like the grain of wheat that dying gives life.

NOTE: Rapport will publish the mortuary letters of Salesians from the various provinces of the world - thanks to Fr. F. Zola who has consented to translate the letters into English.

# chandur mission: A RETROSPECT

We read in the provincial circular No. 1/1981, dated 22nd Jan. that in the council meeting held at Guntur on 18.1.1981, it was decided that the experiment of the new presence that was begun at Chandur is to be discontinued and that according to the desire of the bishop, direct evangelization would be taken up. We wish to present before you a brief report of what we did there during the short period of five months and the circumstances which forced the provincial council to take this decision.

**First Fears:** During our first visit to Chandur, it became quite clear to us that there was high expectation that the Salesians would start a school, a technical school, build a church and even begin a hospital in the developing town of Chandur. In fact two plots of land had already been bought for this purpose in the town. When we met the bishop on 29th August, he too expressed the same desire, but granted six month's time to study the situation and formulate a plan. Hence we wrote to the provincial explaining the situation.

"The community finds certain difficulties with regard to the expectation of the bishop. From the talk that Fr. Sebastian had with the bishop, it is clear that he expects the Salesians to start a school, or a tech. school in Chandur within an year. Now this is not the new presence according to the mind of GC 21. The members propose that they



they start living in Chandur and study the real needs of the people there. This will reveal what kind of work is needed - school? another institution? What type?....."

Provincial council's guidelines: The provincial council discussed this point in the meeting held in Bangalore on 5.9.1980, and gave the following guidelines:

1) The confreres of Chandur are sent out as priests, for the purpose of evangelization. It is their mission to come to the establishment of a community of baptized believers.

2) However, in the way they perform their mission, they may not necessarily follow the traditional way - i.e. they may experiment another approach.

3) This approach needs the approval of both the provincial council and the local bishop. Their pastoral plan, submitted to and eventually amended by the provincial council will be taken into account when drawing up the agreement between the congregation and the diocese.

4) Our confreres are therefore requested to study the real needs of the people with an open mind, and with the willingness to provide for these in so far as they come within the scope of our salesian mission.

Our stay at Chandur: We reached Chandur on 4th Sept. As our main objective was to live close to the people and to study and understand their situation and their problems, we thought it would be better to stay in a rented house in the nearby village Kotayagudem. Since we were strangers to the language, region and culture of the people, it took sometime for us to get acclimatised. In the five months that followed our efforts were directed towards:

a) Building up relationship with people around, to know their situation, needs and problems. We gathered quite sufficient information and established some sort of rapport with the weaker sections of 6 villages and a general first hand information about 10 others.

b) Looking after the pastoral needs of two communities, one of 33 families in catechumenate, the other of 44 families newly baptized.

c) Improving the methods of tanning and finding markets for the products of a community that is engaged in leather tanning and chappal making.