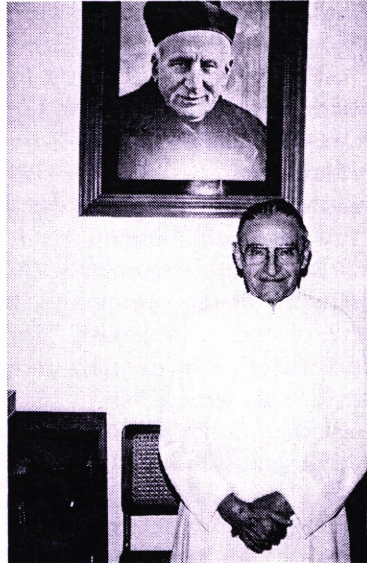




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OBITUARY **of** **FR. ALFRED** **COGLIANDRO,** **SDB**



Dear Confreres,

With heavy heart I announce to you the death of our dear and revered confrere FR. ALFRED COGLIANDRO, SDB. He passed away peacefully into God's loving embrace early in the morning of September 11, 1992.

It can be said with certainty that he was called to be possessed by God at the time in which "he was most ready"; because he was always most ready for this "happy occasion". In fact, he often asserted that "God loves us so much that He will take us to Himself at the most appropriate time." During his last days with us and especially on the eve of his death, Fr. Cogliandro showed unmistakable signs of knowing the day he would be called to Eternity.

On the afternoon of the eve of his death, he went for treatment to the clinic, because he had a skin lesion on the back of his hand: he didn't know how it was caused: the nurse gave him an anti-tetanus injection which somehow weakened him visibly... it appears that Father understood this as the immediate sign for him to say farewell to the community. He began telling persons that it would be their last get together with him.

For the spiritual reading Fr. Alfred sought a brother whom he tasked with reading chapter 17 of the Gospel according to St. John: it was Our Lord's last words to his apostles. Father insisted that the reader should also comment on the words of Our Lord as a preparation for the community day for which they were getting ready... "real unity in a community can only be effected if it is centered on Christ!" That extraordinary spiritual reading naturally surprised the members of the community, which did not quite understand his style of urgency in saying, "goodbye". He was his usual self in the confessional that evening, though one or two brothers, who assisted him, noticed his strength was failing him, as they accompanied him to the community dining room. During the supper Fr. Alfred was again urgently insisting on devotion to the Sacred Heart, Our Blessed Mother and Don Bosco's tremendous love and care for the poor boys who had nothing but Don Bosco and were satisfied with just having Don Bosco. Sometimes his words would drift into whispers, and would be drowned in the din and clatter of the dining hall of the young Salesians. Some confreres were worried and concluded wrongly that Fr. Cogliandro might have had an overdose of antibiotics.

Soon after supper, Father and some brothers went for the recreation in the TV room. The doctor was called to check on Father's blood pressure. His blood pressure was normal, and the doctor recommended an early rest if he should develop a fever. In the usual small talk of the after-supper-recreation, Fr. Cogliandro again recommended some Salesian virtues... he was so specially urgent and insistent that one brother had the inspiration of taking some pictures of him as he sat among the brothers like Don Bosco among the young ones. These were the very last souvenir pictures of our "povero Cogliandro!", as he used to call himself.

It was now past 9:00 p.m., on going to his room, he insisted on saying the "solemn vespers in preparation for the feast of the morrow." A young cleric showed him the "ordo", insisting that there wasn't any feast the next day to warrant solemn vespers that night. Don Cogliandro smilingly told him that the ordo was wrong - there was a feast... that was the way he'd describe the day of his death! "The day of our death is the best day of our life."

Even on his desk-calendar, we found an entry which showed us how accurately and definitely he knew his "dies natalis". The community was scheduled to hold the yearly community day on September 19. In his calendar he noted, "Community Day" in red ink and a question mark... and under the same he wrote in red, "11th"... that was the day he would die. All this we found out later when we visited his room with Fr. Provincial on the day of his burial.

That last night, Father Cogliandro found it hard to breathe, so the clerics took turns to be with him - he'd often apologize for causing them so much inconvenience. At around 11:15 p.m. he sat up in bed and told the young confrere "Jesus was here, he was here just now!" The cleric soothed him, and made him lie back in bed.

It was dawn at around 5:30 a.m., Fr. Cogliandro sat up in bed - he wanted to dress up for the Holy Mass that he would celebrate at the FMA novitiate, as he did every morning. He was told that another would substitute him, and that he would perhaps go to the hospital. Around this time Fr. Prefect brought the doctor to examine him, and state if he could make the trip to the hospital in Manila. The doctor counselled that he be taken at once, because Father was visibly spent in strength. Whilst preparations were being made to bring him the hospital, the brother who was assisting him noticed that he was breathing heavily. The cleric held him and hummed a hymn "The Lord is my Light" - a tune that Father had mentioned that he liked. As the song came to the end of the verse, Father breathed his last and went to the Father's loving embrace.

The death of this exemplary Salesian is an occasion of sorrow but at the same time of gratitude to God for privileging us to see at close quarters what a model Salesian is... how Don Bosco's spirit

is still being lived . He has ever been an edifying Salesian everywhere: always doing what he was supposed to be doing, available, cheerful and amiable to one and all. He was always approachable, always had a good word for every person he encountered, always welcoming and gracious. He was punctual in the confessional and God only knows how many of us he sanctified and helped in this sacrament of reconciliation. His deep love for God made us want to have the same experience.

The Salesian Sisters can very well attest to his commitment and meticulous preparation of classes, conferences, homilies and instructions. One marvels at how much love and care he put into his preparations for his sermons, homilies, goodnights and conferences. All his writings attest to this.

At community gatherings and at mealtime he'd have some news of interest more often than not: and he'd listen with equal interest to anyone who'd have anything to say .

His sense of order and neatness was marked. He wanted everything well ordered: even his necrological services and obituary letter were indicated (I have been given the "license" by Fr. Provincial not to follow his instructions as I write this). We all have had a living model of "the Salesian" in Father Cogliandro.

The FMA's definitely had a tremendously large share of his care and solicitude for their spirituality. They got much of the time and energy of this saintly priest - even in his last days he was busy translating a book of conferences on their spirituality: he completed the last chapter just before he passed away.

What is amazing about his death is that he seemed to have everything arranged and accomplished. His last recommendations to us, his necrological services, the stole and cassock for burial, the persons who'd have to be informed of his demise, what needed to be mentioned in his obituary... all these had been arranged in advance. His books were well arranged on their shelves, and his room was in its usual neatness... all this, an outcome of what he assiduously practiced all his Salesian life.

Indeed he couldn't have done more than what he actually did, in order to make us realize what a beautiful thing it is to live and die as a Salesian.

Fr. Alfred was born in Genoa, Italy on May 16, 1911. He mentioned that he had very good, Christian parents who lived to be nonagenarians. He is the first born of three. He is survived by his brother and sister. He made his novitiate in 1932-1933 in Shillong, India and was blest in having Fr. Stephen Ferrando (who later became the first Archbishop of Shillong) as his novice master.

During the World War II, whilst interned in the concentration camp at Dehra Dun (India), he was ordained priest on January 30, 1943. On being released from the camp after the war 1945-1948, Father was appointed administrator in the Salesian Theologate and Parish of Mawlai, Shillong. Here, he was the life of the youth center - the young men of those times remained lifelong friends of Father Cogliandro: even after 46 years, now in 1992 these once-upon-a-time-young-men write to him telling him of their children and children's children! From this happy atmosphere of the missions of Assam, Father Cogliandro was called to South India, Kotagiri, to be novice master in 1948. Two groups of young men were the happy novices with their lively and totally Salesian novice master... some of them are well known salesian figures like Fr. Thomas Panakezham, Fr. Thomas Thayil (provincial in Africa) and Msgr. Tarcisius Resto (auxiliary bishop of Shillong, India).

But such a treasure could not be unknown for too long a time: Don Cogliandro's enthusiasm and brand of Salesianity attracted the extraordinary visitor, Don Alvin Fedrigotti who was visiting the provinces of India that year in 1949. And so "povero Cogliandro" was called to be the new Fr. Provincial of the Province of San Francisco in the United States. In one of his interviews with the editor of the Salesian Bulletin, he speaks about this obedience: "One day I received the shock of my life when I was asked by my superiors to leave India and proceed to North America. It was quite an experience. The day I left "Mother India", as we used to call it, I thought I was going to die."

Fr. John Malloy of that province writes on the occasion of his death: "We are sad not to have a representative from our province at the Mass and burial service. Fr. Cogliandro spent 13 years as provincial here, and was responsible for the foundation of many of our present institutions. Our province owes him a great deal. I spent 13 years with him as his secretary and then director and felt close to him... He will be remembered in our prayers and Masses and so will your province, which has lost a treasure, but gained a patron in heaven."

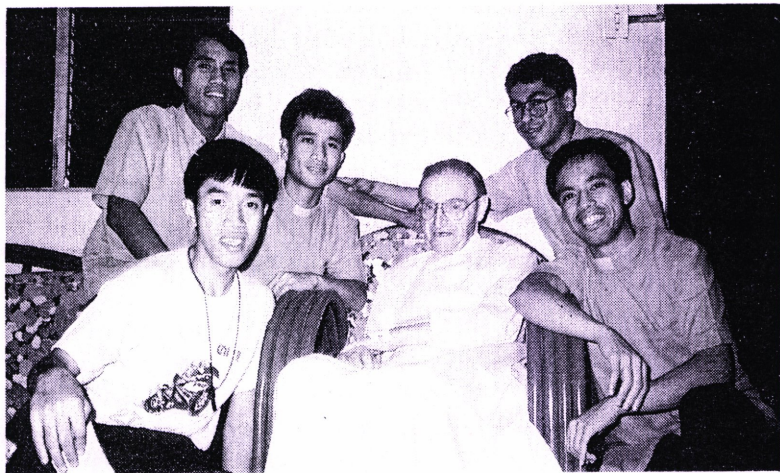
From the land of "the Stars and Stripes", Father Cogliandro was again asked to cross the ocean, back to the Philippines in Southeast Asia, in 1964 to lead a Province as its first Provincial. The six years in which he served as Provincial, and later years as Rector of Canlubang, and then as Novice Master of the Province have made an impact on our salesianity for most of us. We have benefitted by his sage counselling, example and presence among us. His unrelenting spirit of work was an inspiration to us all. His service was never obtrusive, it was always there with grace and correctness. Our province admires this salesian and thanks God for having given him to us.

Fr. Jose Carbonnel, a past provincial of the Philippine Province, writes from Jakarta, "The Lord has been visiting us frequently this year... Fr. Cogliandro leaves us a beautiful memory with such an edifying life... he was always serene, balanced, wise, cheerful, good humored, pious, a good counsellor and a good formator. I'll never forget Don Cogliandro: I have always treasured his collaboration, when I was Provincial and later novice master after him. He was my confessor, a very effective one!"

When Fr. Panfilo, our Provincial was newly appointed in 1987, Fr. Cogliandro wrote to him: It's years that I have daily made the way of the Cross and prayed for the province and its provincials. And now that it's your turn to pray for, I do it very willingly. May our Lord be with you.

In every circumstance, always be a SINCERE FATHER - and when there is need for correcting, do it always with firmness: "Becoming all things to all, in order to save all (1 Cor 9: 22)."

Dear Confreres during his 50th Anniversary of of Profession in the Salesian Society in 1983, our beloved deceased was interviewed by the editor of the Salesian Bulletin. It was his will (as written on his notebook) that the same interview be published in place of saying many other irrelevant things in his obituary letter. Respecting the departed's wishes, I here insert what he said about himself in the interview:



Interview with the Editor of the Salesian Bulletin on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of Profession in the Society

Q: Father, can you tell us how old you were when you entered the novitiate? An where was it located?

A: It is hard for me to tell you how old I was when I entered the novitiate because it seems to me that I became younger and younger with the passing of years, of places, of events, and of people. I made my novitiate in SHILLONG, India when I was about 20, and I was fortunate to have as my novice master a young priest, Salesian from head to foot, who later became the archbishop of the place, the first DIOCESE erected in the province of Assam, where at present the Church counts five flourishing dioceses. The novice master was Fr. Stephen

Ferrando, a man of God who passed away a couple of years ago.

Q: What do you remember best of your novitiate days?

A: Not much, to tell you the truth. For sure one of the trials of my novitiate was to have to give a detailed report on the Treatise on the Love of God by St. Francis de Sales, a classical, voluminous book, written in archaic English. I did not mind the Love of God, of course, but what bothered me was the English, since I knew only a dozen of words in the language then. What remained in my mind of that book is the fact that if we pass through life without LOVING GOD, we miss life altogether.

Q: What are the things in your Salesian life that you are glad to have lived in your 50 years of hoping through the Salesian word?

A: That's it: the things that has impressed me most is precisely the Salesian world! I believe that after the Catholic Church, the Salesian Society is the most wonderful thing that God has given life to in this last century of ours. And mind you, I only travelled through Italy, India, USA, Canada, Australia, some parts of Latin America and Southeast Asia. I have had the privilege to attend five or six General Chapters of the Society, indeed quite an opportunity for self-education.

Q: What did you admire most in your travels? Which nations impressed you most? Which organization? Where do the Salesians have their best schools?

A: You ask me too many questions at a time; you are actually straining my weak memory. No particular nation has impressed me specifically, because everywhere I found plenty to admire: good and evil everywhere - however, in the long run the good wins all the time. The Salesians and also the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians count marvelous institutions catering to the young of all nations, especially with their technical schools, boys' clubs, and specialized work in mission fields in the most remote corners of the world.

Q: Forgive me, Father, for being so inquisitive, what were the best years of your 50 years as a son of Don Bosco?

A: You surely are inquisitive, even though the "inquisition" was abolished quite a long time ago! Here again it is difficult for me to say what was the best in my years as a Salesian priest - because the way God leads us through the circumstances of life cannot but be the very best that a FATHERLY GOD can provide for his children. However, if you want to know, I believe that my best years - eighteen of them - were spent in India. There I grew as a religious, God blessed me with wonderful superiors, understanding and exemplary confreres, learned teachers, wonderful companions. There I walked my first timid steps as an educator dreaming of a missionary work that never came true, because the Lord knew best. I'll never forget the young lads who came to the FAITH during those years in which practically I worked all alone organizing a bit of OPEN ORATORY - "open" because there was no way of closing it, since it was organized in the open air. Some of these lads still write to me after more than 40 years and recall the days gone by. Some of them have already died and in particular case one family has given to the religious life three of their children!

In India I was ordained priest in a concentration camp as a war prisoner. I had always prayed for the grace of being able to say my first Mass quietly and forgotten, and the Lord was really good to me. I said my first Mass at four in the morning in the silence of a military barrack, with only one attending lay brother serving the Mass, Bro. LAMALFA. When the Mass was over and I was removing the vestments, said the good man: "This was no first Mass - it seems you have said Mass all your life!" I wish I had, since the war had delayed my ordination considerably - but God knows best.

Q: Did you have some other personal experience that you would like to share with us?

A: Well, I do not know what you mean by personal experience. I believe that whatever one goes through is a personal experience.

Q: What I mean is to ask of you an experience you alone went through, but would be good for us to know too.

A: Yes. One day I received a shock of my life when I was asked by my superiors to leave India and proceed to North America. It was quite an experience. The day I left "MOTHER INDIA", as we used to call it, I thought I was going to die, but as you see I am still alive. And since I left, the Salesians in India began to prosper. Indeed, nobody is needed!

Q: Is this the experience you want to share with us?

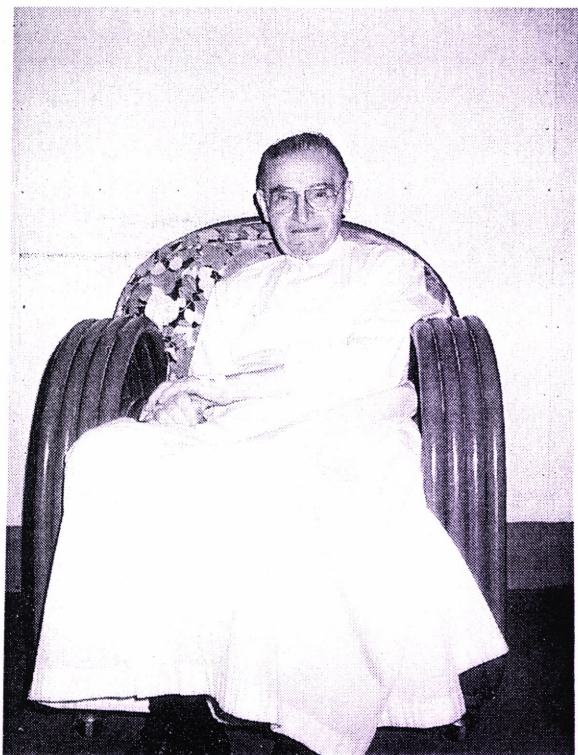
A: Not precisely. Just give me a chance. The experience began on my arrival in USA where I spent thirteen happy years with Salesians that I admire; old timers - and the new generations so full of vitality and capabilities. I learnt a lot from them, and I believe the world would be different if it could only learn so many good things.

My personal experience was that, suddenly uprooted from the poverty of India, I found myself in the midst of American wealth. I thank God for the experience: for having made me see and touch the two sides of the medal - the worlds of extreme poverty and unchecked profusion! The misery of want and the tragedy of opulence! I for one, prefer the peace of the Lord's Beatitudes.

Q: One last question Father, can you furnish us with some of your bio-data so that we can place you in the right perspective.

A: Thank you for the question for which I am kind of allergic. Data and achievements have no importance. What counts, my friend, is the LOVE you put into your life.

Dear Confreres, Don Bosco has told us, "The day a salesian dies of hard work, will be a gracious day for our congregation". This has been verified in Fr. Cogliandro's life and death... he was literally consumed working for God. In our bereavement at his death, we are happy that Father is being given the reward of his labours lovingly done in Christ Jesus.



We pray for this soul, pray too that, if it please the Lord He be glorified through a greater recognition of our “povero Cogliandro’s sanctity...” pray for us too as we push along deeply feeling the loss of such a good father of all of us.

Sincerely yours in Don Bosco,

Rev. Fr. Alton Fernandez, S.D.B.
Rector

