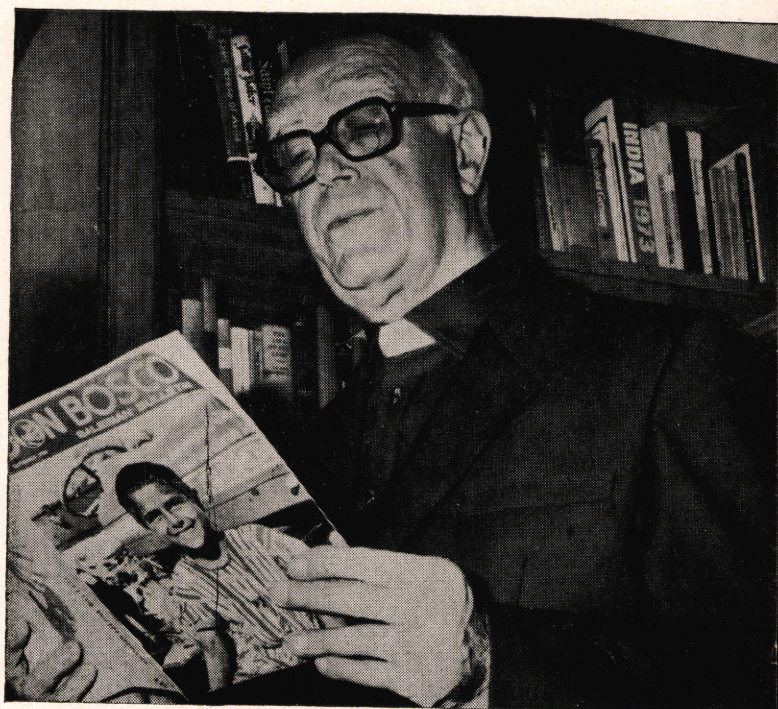


Don Bosco Technical School
Okhla, New Delhi
India 110 025

*He Loved and Served the Church
and the Congregation
with Sacrifice and Generosity*

**50 years
SALESIAN**



Fr. Hubert Colzani

4 January 1908



10 March 1982

Fr. Umberto Colzani passed away quietly at about 5.30 a.m. on 10th March 1982. A sudden heart attack struck him down as he was about to go and say Mass. He was 74 years old on 4th January 1982.

His death shocked and took everyone by surprise as he was known to be healthy and active even at his age. In fact, just a few days earlier, he had accompanied a benefactor to Agra. In Fr. Colzani the province has lost a veteran missionary who also gave valuable service to our province as its economer. We owe him a debt of gratitude for his long service to the Church and the congregation.

His body was flown to Calcutta on 11th morning, accompanied by Fr. Rector of Delhi, Bro. James Mampilly, and his secretary. From Dum Dum Airport it was taken straight to Bandel and laid out in the Seminary Chapel. In the meantime, all the confreres were informed that the funeral would be at 4.30 p.m. A good group of Salesians and Sisters turned up to pay their last respects to Fr. Colzani. After a solemn Concelebrated Mass in the Seminary Chapel, the body was taken in procession to the cemetary and interred in the Salesian Cemetary.

Fr. Colzani came to the Salesians as a young man, after working two years in a bank in his native Monza (Milan). Hearing God's call to be a missionary, he joined the "Istituto Card. Cagliero", Ivrea (Turin), an institution specially meant to train young men for the Salesian life and the Foreign Missions. After spending three years there he donned the clerical habit at the hands of Fr. Philip Rinaldi, Rector Major, and then set sail for India in the company of such companions as Frs. Augustine Guareneri, Aldo Decaroli, Pampilio Doro and others. He landed in Bombay on 29th October 1931 and proceeded to Our Lady's House, Shillong, to begin the novitiate. His Novice Master was Fr. Stephen Ferrando, the future bishop of Shillong. The following year he made his first profession on 8th December.

His Philosophy Course too was in Shillong, in Our Lady's House, which, at the time, housed both the Novitiate and the Philosophy Studentate. At the end of 1934 he was sent to Calcutta to help Fr. M. Uguet at the Catholic Orphan Press, and three years later, in 1937, he returned to Shillong, Mawlai, to begin his Theology Course.

was already feeling a bit "tired", he agreed to take only two periods a week. He was very meticulous about giving the account of the money he got from these classes.

His love for the poor boys of the Technical Institute made him do a lot of correspondence, at times even late into the night; typing letters to maintain the Hostel section and even purchase some more machines for the non-formal section. With one such good friend and benefactor, Dr. Daniel Sipione, he had travelled by taxi to Agra some 200 km, just two days before he suddenly left us.

I never heard him complain of any serious sickness. Yet the end came most unexpectedly and unannounced. Quite often he used to be out of the House early in the morning to hear confessions of communities that could not afford any other free time. On 10th March, it was the Hindu festival of Holi (spraying colours), and we thought he was out for his apostolate before the spraying of colours started. It was only late in the afternoon that we noticed that his room was locked from inside. On forcing the door open, we were surprised to find that he had already gone to his eternal reward.

As the sad news spread, friends and acquaintances of all Religions crowded in to pay their respects to their friend. His Grace, the Archbishop of Delhi, Angelo Fernandes, offered the funeral Mass together with many other Friends. The Counsul General and other dignitaries of the Italian Consulate were also present for the Mass. The body was embalmed that same night and by the morning flight of 11th March brought to Calcutta—for burial at Bandel, in the Salesian cemetery. At the request of his sister, the body was later transported to Italy.

Fr. Colzani has left behind his sense of indefatigable work and dedication for the poor and suffering. He could not see any-one suffering of any pain, not even domestic animals.

As I beg the charity of your prayers for the repose of his soul may I also request you to remember our House,

yours sincerely,

Fr. Anthony Thaiparambil
(Rector)

Then the Forest Department of the Government of Assam very kindly donated 12 sal posts and some planks to enable Fr. Colzani to erect a wooden structure for himself. One end of this structure he used as his living quarters and the other end became the first church in the area.

Things were rough here in those early days of the Damra Mission. Food was hard to get ; travelling was always on foot, as there were no roads and no transport of any kind ; sickness, such as Malaria, Kala Azar and dysentery, was rampant everywhere.

In spite of it all, Fr. Colzani scoured his district from end to end numberless times, often returning home burning with fever. For about two years he was all alone, till Father George Stadler joined him in 1948. Things developed since those early beginnings. Fr. Colzani found a few hundred Catholics scattered in about half a dozen communities when he went to North Garoland. When in 1962 he was transferred to Calcutta, he left behind a well established Church, over 4,000 souls strong.

In Calcutta he took care of the finances of the Provinces, having replaced as Provincial Economer Fr. M. Ferrario, who had gone home and had died in Italy. While in Calcutta, Fr. Colzani took care also of the D. B. Charities, the official name for the Raffle we were then running.

On his return from home leave, early in 1969, he went to Gauhati for a short while, and from there in 1971, he was sent to New Delhi to help, as an additional Secretary in the Papal Nunciature.

When his assignment here was completed, he stayed on in Delhi, where besides being the Confessor of the Salesian Community, he became available for spiritual and pastoral duties to a number of religious communities. And it was at Don Bosco Technical School, suddenly and unexpectedly, death overtook him.

His weekly conference were highly appreciated. The Italian Cultural Centre had him as the teacher of Italian language for many years. Even this year they had insisted that he should take classes. As he

Fr. Aldo Decaroli remembers him as an agreeable companion, ever lively and dynamic. In particular he remembers his talents for drama, music and mimicry. During the holidays spent at Laikynsew, Fr. Colzani, together with Fr. Bili and Fr. Aldo, would make the rounds of the villages attracting the children and the villagers with comic skits, jokes and singing. He really had a talent for stage acting.

He was ordained priest in Shillong on 5th June 1941 by Bishop Ferrando.

When the war came to India in 1941, along with Italian and German Missionaries, he was interned and taken to the Dehra Dun Internment Camp for the duration of the war. He was released early in 1946. The years in the Internment Camp were hard and painful in many ways. Particularly painful was the inactivity he was forced to. He was a young priest eager to start a life that had been his cherished dream for many years now—true mission life in some outpost in Assam where Christ had not yet been announced.

On being released from Dehra Dun Camp he was asked to go to Shillong and then to Gauhati, where he was to receive his posting. He was sent to North Garo Hills.

This was an area which was hardly known. Fr. A. Pianazzi, the first Catholic Missionary to enter Garoland and establish the Church, had visited the area a number of times and had built a few scattered communities; so had Frs. E. Zanon and G. Costa, later. But it was Fr. Colzani who with sweat, sacrifice and tears really planted the Church in North Garoland.

He established himself in Damra, then a small centre on the border between Garo Hills and Goalpara Districts of Assam. This was to be the home of good Fr. Colzani from 1948 to 1962.

With Bishop Ferrando, he selected a spot in the thick jungle around Damra, built himself a hut—mud floor, thatch walls and thatch roof; a locally made charpoi, and a small table presented to him by his brother missionary in Gauhati—this was his residence for nearly three years.

FOR NECROLOGY : **Fr. Hubert Colzani**

born on 4th January 1908 at Monza (Italy)

died in Delhi on 10th March 1982

74 years old, 50 years Salesian, 41 years Priest.