

The perception on saint John Bosco in the Philippines during the 20th century [Percezione di san Giovanni Bosco nelle Filippine lungo il secolo XX]

*Nestor IMPELIDO**

1. PREMISE

People in the Philippines already knew of the Salesians of Don Bosco before the latter finally arrived and opened works in the second half of the 20th century. The purpose of this study is to show how the Filipinos perceived Don Bosco before and after the Salesians came to work in the Philippines.

The Salesians definitively came to the Philippines in 1951, after the negotiations conducted by the out-going Provincial of China, Fr. Carlo Braga and with the first Salesian presence in a school that was established by an U.S.A. military chaplain. But even before their arrival, the invitations and requests made to the Superiors of Turin by bishops and laymen revealed how they valued the Salesians and their possible working in the Philippines.

This study wishes to contribute the theme of this Congress on Salesian History on how St. John Bosco was perceived by people beyond that of the Salesians, in the period that covers the 20th century. It is, in fact, a first attempt to try to document the perceptions of peoples regarding the Saint within the previous century. Certainly, the method used is the historical, attempting to give details that are documented.

The study gives information on the attempts by non-Salesians – people who were “inspired” by St. John Bosco and his spirit -- to have the Salesians get involved in their ministry or in their Christian way of living. It lists the perceptions and the consequent initiatives that reflect the name and influence of St. John Bosco. But at the same time, it will attempt to deepen and provide some reasons and motives for these initiatives by non-Salesians.¹

2. INTRODUCTION

The Salesians were invited to come to the Philippines because certain people in the Philippines already knew Don Bosco and were impressed of what his sons had been doing in other parts of the world.

The Salesians first arrived in the Philippines in 1911, in response to the request of the Archbishop of Manila, Jeremiah Harty (1903-1916) and the insistence of the Apostolic Delegate to the Philippines, Archbishop Ambrose Agius (1905-1911).² Fr. Paul Albera (1910-1921) had sent two Salesians as a response to the request of the Manila Archbishop. Unfortunately, the two Salesians,

* Salesian Nestor C. Impelido is professor of Modern Church History and of Philippine Church History at the Don Bosco Center of Studies in Manila, Philippines. He is a member of ACSSA and works for the Istituto Storico Salesiano in Rome.

¹ I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Miss Divine Solano, professor of theology at Don Bosco Center of Studies in Manila for this research. She helped to obtain information that serve as materials for the study.

² Cf. BICOMONG Gregorio Jr., *The Arrival of Don Bosco in the Philippines. Requests made to the Salesians 1891-1951*, Makati City 2001

Fr. Luigi Costamagna (1866-1941) and Fr. Giovanni Fergnani (1874-1932), did not stay long and decided to abandon Manila and to default the invitation to the Salesians.³

Meanwhile, in the subsequent years, the Philippines continued to send requests to Turin asking that the Salesians come, revealing their perceptions on St. John Bosco. During this period, from 1922 to 1948, they witnessed who the Salesians were and what they were able to do for the Filipino young. In this first half of the 20th century, the Filipino Church experienced the influence of the Salesian Archbishop Guglielmo Piani (1922-1948) as Apostolic Delegate.

By second half of the 20th century, in 1951, the Salesians returned to the Philippines, re-starting with two schools in the north (Tarlac) and in the south (Victorias); this time, they stayed. Salesians from the United States of America arrived to administer the school in Tarlac, and to the school in Victorias, Salesians came from China where they had been expelled and where they had lost their works. Turin and Fr. Pietro Ricaldone (1932-1951), who had ignored the previous requests of Manila, now had asked the Provincial of China, Fr. Carlo Braga (1889-1971), to look for possible work in the Archipelago for the Salesians who had “lost their job”. The Salesians came to the Philippines because Turin needed to channel their energies elsewhere.⁴ This time, Turin had been attentive to what the Filipinos thought of St. John Bosco and the Salesians.⁵

The works that the Salesians were asked to administer were indicative on how the Filipinos perceived the Salesians whom they invited to come and what they expected them to do in the Philippines. Moreover, the definitive coming of the Salesians reinforced the Filipinos’ perception of Don Bosco.

3. “INSPIRED WORKS”

Beside the works established and actually administered by the Salesians, others initiated works of a similar or a different type, inspired by St. John Bosco.⁶

They established schools for the education of the young. The Fathers of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM) put up in their mission territories north of Manila Don Bosco School (Baguio City, Benguet) and Don Bosco High School (Lagawe, Ifugao). The Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC) asked the Salesians to collaborate in the establishment of St. John Bosco Technical School (Bislig, Surigao del Sur). Lay people named the schools after St. John Bosco that they knew and considered as a Christian educator of the young: St. John Bosco School (San Fernando, Pampanga), St. John Bosco Institute of Arts and Sciences (Manila), St. John Bosco Academy (Tayabas, Quezon), St. John Bosco School (Marikina), and St. John Bosco College of Northern Luzon (San Fernando, La Union).

Some bishops named the parishes they erected in honor of St. John Bosco: St. John Bosco Parish (Diocese of Baguio, Benguet Province), St. John Bosco Parish (Diocese of Laoag, Ilocos Norte), and St. John Bosco Parish (Diocese of Ilagan, Isabela).

Some named their organization on behalf of the needy and the emarginated like the Don Bosco Foundation for Sustainable Development and Don Bosco Multipurpose Cooperative (Kidapawan,

³ The two confreres arrived in Manila in 14 December 1911 and abandoned it sometime in April 1912. Cf. IMPELIDO Nestor, *The Salesians in the Philippines. Establishment and Development from Delegation to Province (1951-1963)*, Manila 2006, 315-315.

⁴ Cf. ASC (Archivio Salesian Centrale) Cina: Corrispondenza (Braga a Ricaldone, Hong Kong 29 March 1951).

⁵ Cf. SAHK (Salesian Archive Hong Kong) Philippine (Ricaldone a Braga, Torino 18 November 1949) Cf. also IMPELIDO, *The Salesians in the Philippines*, Manila 2006, 33.

⁶ Cf. Summary report of Ms. Divine Solano submitted to Fr. Nestor Impelido SDB.

North Cotabato) and Don Bosco Multi-Specialty Clinic (Manila) and the Bosconian International Chamber of Commerce (Manila) on behalf of past pupils involved in business.

Urban developers named the areas they established on behalf of St. John Bosco: Don Bosco Village (Parañaque City, Metro Manila), Don Bosco Executive Village (Trece Martires, Cavite) and Barangay Don Bosco (Parañaque, Metro Manila). Even the skyway that eases the southbound traffic of Manila had even a Don Bosco exit.

4. PERCEPTIONS BEFORE THE ARRIVAL OF THE SALESIANS

The Filipinos had just won its independence from Spain. But the United States of America had come to tutelage democracy in the newly born nation. Moreover, in the Philippines, there was a lack of religious personnel on account of the departure of the traditional Spanish religious orders who were responsible for the pastoral ministry. Besides, the Archipelago wanted technical schools or schools of arts and trades. For it sought to answer the needs brought about by industrialization.

St. John Bosco was known as someone who worked for the poor young who wanted to learn a technical trade to be able to find a decent work. The Governor-General in the Philippines, Eulogio Despujol (1891-1893), had asked in 9 October 1891 his nephew, the Marquis of Palmerola, to write to the superior of the Salesian community in Sarrià in Barcelona, Fr. Philip Rinaldi (1922-1931). His uncle had thought of founding a vocational training school in Manila similar to the Salesian work in Sarrià. In Turin, Fr. Michael Rua (1888-1910) who was Rector Major had discussed this proposal of “a house of arts and trade” from Manila with his council in a meeting in 13 August 1894. The General Council in Turin had said no.⁷

Archbishop Jeremiah Harty had asked the Salesians to transform a building that had a capacity for a hundred students into a school of arts and trades “with the most advanced system of hygiene and modern pedagogy”.⁸ Moreover, he wanted the Salesians to give to the young the same educative presence that he had personally observed when he went to the Oratory in Valdocco in December 1906. For this, he asked the Salesians to take over “an Institute with 70 young boys”. And the Apostolic Delegate to the Philippines, Archbishop Ambrose Agius, while in Rome, had recommended to the Salesian Procurator General to heed the request of Archbishop Harty.⁹

Concretely, the Archbishop of Manila, expressive of what he thought the Salesians were good at, offered a reformatory, an agricultural school, a boarding house, plus a ministry for the Chinese.¹⁰ The fact was that Fr. Luigi Versiglia came in January 1911 from Macao to deal with the Archbishop, which resulted into a contract between the Archbishop and the Salesians.¹¹

Certainly, the arrival in 29 November 1922 of the Apostolic Delegate of the Holy See, Archbishop William Piani (1922-1948) and his secretary, Fr. Louis La Ravoire Morrow (+1987), had created a perception on St. John Bosco and the Salesians. The Vatican had recently taken charge of the Church of the Philippines after the departure of the Spanish bishops caused by the war for Philippine independence. These Salesians tried to be example as a Salesian community at the Apostolic Delegation House. The Apostolic Delegate even organized a mini festive oratory for boys and girls and taught catechism classes in the residence. The Salesian Prefect General, Fr. Pietro Berruti (1885-1950), making a brief visit to the Apostolic Delegation in 23 October 1937, remarked

⁷ Cf. BICOMONG Gregorio Jr., *The Arrival of Don Bosco in the Philippines*, 1-3.

⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 207.

⁹ Cf. BICOMONG, 12-13.

¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 21.

¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 54.

on the spirit of Don Bosco lived through a domestic festive oratory and of a house open to the young. The Delegation house was a true Salesian house according to him.¹²

Bishop Santiago Sancho (1927-1966), Archbishop of Nueva Segovia, expressed his desire to Archbishop Piani for the Salesians in his diocese. He had gone to Turin to see Fr. Peter Ricaldone and ask for Salesians. In 9 January 1934, he had written the Rector Major requesting that the latter open a school of arts and trades in his diocese. Archbishop Piani, though, had a contrary opinion to the request for a vocational school: for the size of the town so limited in resources, for the distance of the diocese from Manila. He had suggested that the Rector Major gently refuse the request. Bishop Sancho, writing once more in 7 February 1935, had continued to insist and had even asked that a festive oratory be attached to the work that he asked. He further had asked the Salesians to further put up an agricultural school in two other provinces of his diocese.¹³

A few years later, in 1938, some cooperators had already requested Salesians to come to the Philippines. As persons who knew St. John Bosco, Mariano Ycasiano and Emeterio Barcelon y Barcelo, together with some others, had written in 23 August 1939 to Fr. Peter Ricaldone to send the Salesians. However, they had not presented any concrete proposal.¹⁴ The next year, the Auxiliary Bishop of Manila and a Salesian Cooperator, Caesar Maria Guerrero (+1961), had written to Fr. Peter Ricaldone in 24 August 1939, requesting Salesians for the educational need of the young.

“Here we have need to shelter the boys, who are mostly poor; there is no institution exclusively for the Christian education of poor boys and therefore there are many who wander the streets without any idea of God.... May your fatherliness have pity on the Filipino boys, who because of poverty and negligence of parents, have become a prey to immorality and vagrancy....”¹⁵

Fr. James Wilson, an American chaplain of the United States of America who remained in the Philippines after World War II, put up St. John Bosco Academy, a boys' school in Tarlac, a province about 70 kilometers north of Manila. He wanted to provide a school for boys in as much as the Sisters of the Holy Spirit had already a school exclusively for girls. But having been recalled by the Archbishop of New York, Francis Joseph Spellman, he sought to entrust the fledgling school to a “Religious Teaching Society”. For this, he turned to the Salesians who were “in search for work” after the expulsion from China.¹⁶

When the Salesian *Visitatoria* of the Philippines was established in 1958, the Salesians in the Philippines had six schools, four of which were technical and the other two academic. And these were well esteemed and considered. These schools had extraordinary results in favor of the Salesians, “even if they had a lone Salesian in-charge of every department”. The Department of Education in the Philippines exalted the Salesian schools in a congress for schools “as the only ones which answers the needs of the nation”. The politician Claro M. Rector, a senator of the Philippine

¹² Cf. *ibid.*, 69-84. Archbishop Guglielmo Piani arrived in Manila in 29 November 1922 to assume his post as 5th Apostolic Delegate.

¹³ Cf. *ibid.*, 74-77.

¹⁴ Archbishop Piani had started the Association of Salesian Cooperators and the Devotees of Mary Help of Christians during his term as Apostolic Delegate. Cf. BICOMONG, 86-88.

¹⁵ BICOMONG, 91.

¹⁶ Cf. SAFIN (Salesian Archives Philippine Nord) Tarlac Correspondence (Braga to Wilson, Hong Kong, 4 February 1951). Cf. also IMPELIDO, *The Salesians in the Philippines*. 59-70.

Republic and known nationalist who leaned to an anti-ecclesiastical sentiment, was a friend and admirer of St. John Bosco, as well as a leading benefactor.¹⁷

Don Miguel Ossorio, Catholic and President of a Victorias Milling Corporation, wanted to provide technical instruction to the children of the dependents of the sugar company he owned. He had been inspired by the social teachings of the Church contained in the encyclical “*Rerum novarum*” of Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903). He had seen for himself the Salesian technical school in Aberdeen in Hong Kong; he wanted the same in Victorias, Negros Occidental. Don Ossorio conceptualized for his Company to have a spirit of family, in which workers and management formed a Christian communion rather than a labor union. The school for boys managed by the administered by the Salesians would be part of his Christian vision and understanding of human labor.¹⁸ For Frederic, son of Don Miguel, St. John Bosco and the Salesians would help alleviate the conditions of the poor and make the province of Negros “the Capital of Catholic Social Action”.¹⁹

Even some well-off personalities of Cebu who had started to gather the boys who loitered in the port area of the City wanted the Salesians to put up “a Boys’ Town” that would take care of street children.²⁰ Archbishop Julio Rosales (1949-1983), together with concerned citizens and philanthropists of Cebu City, had insisted that the Salesians help those “homeless waifs that fought, cursed, stole and starved along the city’s waterfront and thoroughfares”.²¹

The interventions of the Pope’s apostolic delegates and bishops helped to create positive Filipino perceptions regarding St. John Bosco and his Salesians. These, in fact, had mediated and even spearheaded and pushed the coming of Salesians in the Philippines so that they might start works according to the mind and style of St. John Bosco.

Archbishop Guglielmo Piani had assured Fr. Carlo Braga that St. John Bosco was not unknown to the Filipinos, and the Salesians were “much awaited and would be well taken-cared of”. He should not be afraid “to drop his name”.²²

Archbishop Egidio Vagnozzi (1949-1958) was a strong enthusiast of St. John Bosco. He openly had advocated the coming of the Salesians. He had acted as an “unofficial spokesman” of those who had seen the validity of St. John Bosco’s educational system. He assured Fr. Braga that the Filipinos were waiting anxiously for the Salesians. One who had asked specifically for the Salesians had threatened to go to the Christian Brothers of De La Salle if they did not come fast.²³ But there were also the other apostolic delegates Archbishop Ambrosius Agius (1905-1911) and Archbishop Giuseppe Petrelli (1915-1921) who intervened that St. John Bosco’s name be established in their apostolic delegation.

But Filipino bishops wanted the Salesians to work in their dioceses because they believed in their founder and what he did for youth. There were six bishops who asked for St. John Bosco and the Salesians: Archbishop Gabriel Reyes (1934-1949, Manila), Bishop Cesar Ma. Guerrero (1949-1961, San Fernando, Pampanga), Bishop Casimiro Lladoc (1933-1951, Bacolod, Negros Occidental), Bishop Jose Maria Cuenco (1945-1972, Jaro, Iloilo), Archbishop Julio Rosales (1949-1982, Cebu)

¹⁷ Cf. ASC F164 Filippine: Relazione Annuale 1959-1960, 4-5; cf. also IMPELIDO, 226-227.

¹⁸ Cf. SAFIN Victorias Correspondence (Miguel Ossorio to Braga, Victorias, 5 December 1950). Cf. also IMPELIDO, 70-83.

¹⁹ Cf. SAFIN Victorias Correspondence (Frederic O. to Miguel O., Victorias, 7 August 1951).

²⁰ Cf. SAHK Filippine (Vagnozzi a Braga, Manila, 30 September 1950). Cf. also IMPELIDO, 99-128.

²¹ Cf. SAFIN Cebu: Newspaper *Southern Star* (3 May 1955).

²² Cf. SAHK Filippine (Piani a Braga, Mexico, 19 February 1950). Cf. also IMPELIDO 34-36.

²³ Cf. *Ibid.* (Vagnozzi a Braga, Manila, 30 September 1950). Cf. also IMPELIDO, 40-41.

and Archbishop Rufino Santos (1950, Apostolic Administrator Lipa, Batangas). These wanted St. John Bosco be implanted through either vocational and technical schools or centers for youth and street children or parishes or centers of formation for seminarians.²⁴ Obviously, they could not all be immediately accommodated.

5. THE CONGREGATION OF THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY (CICM) AND SAINT JOHN BOSCO

The Philippines, in the beginning of the 20th century, needed new missionaries on account of the departure of the Spanish missionaries who were at work in the Philippines during the more than three hundred years of Spanish presence in the Philippines.²⁵ At the same time, the Vatican now directly administered the Philippine Church with the collapse of the Spanish *Patrona Real*.

As a consequence of this, the Apostolic Delegate to the Philippines, Archbishop Ambrosius Agius, had written in 14 February 1906 to the CICM Superior General, Fr. Adolf Van Hecke, asking the latter to send some CICM religious to the Philippines, because parishes did not have priests, provinces were left as prey to schismatics and protestants and people were dying without the sacraments while begging for priests.²⁶

Eleven CICM missionaries arrived in the Philippines in 2 November 1907 to take over a territory measuring about 12,000 square kilometers who had a lone priest in-charge. There were 20,000 Catholics and some 158,000 non-Christians in the area. The Archbishop of Nueva Segovia, Dennis Dougherty (1903-1908), welcomed them and designated them to the mountainous region of the Archdiocese. After less than two years, the missionaries were constituted a religious province.²⁷

The CICM, in their mission territories, evangelized the people, seeking to learn the language of the locals. At the same time, they established schools to ensure the education of the young. Of these schools, the CICM named two as Don Bosco and made him their patron.

5.1. DON BOSCO PARISH BAGUIO

The CICM had a mission work in the City of Baguio²⁸ in Benguet Province²⁹ in the north of Manila. Fr. Renato Vernack,³⁰ a Belgian, had just arrived from his vacation when he was given a new obedience: to be the first parish priest of Don Bosco Church administered by their religious order in Lucban, Baguio City.³¹ The new parish was in fact canonically erected in Christmas of December 1949.

²⁴ Cf. Archivio Salesian Centrale (ASC) F164 Filippine (Braga al Concilio Superiore, Torino, May 1950). Cf. also IMPELIDO, 39.

²⁵ Cf. GUTIERREZ Lucio, *The Archdiocese of Manila. A Pilgrimage in Time (1565-1999)*, I, Manila 1999, 17-38. The first evangelizers of the Philippines were the Augustinians (1565), the Franciscans (1578), the Jesuits (1581), the Dominicans (1587) and the Augustinian Recollects (1606).

²⁶ Cf. DEPRÉ Albert, *From a Tiny Shoot. History of the RP CICM Province (1907-1982)*, Manila 1907, 15.

²⁷ Cf. *Carrying on the Mission 100 years of CICM in the Philippines*, 26.

²⁸ Baguio City, a highly urbanized city and the summer capital of the Philippines, is located in the south central part of the province of Benguet. Cf. LANCION Conrado Jr., *Fast Facts About the Philippine Provinces*, Manila 1999, 38.

²⁹ Benguet occupies the southern tip of the Cordillera Mountain Range in northern Luzon. It is a plateau, at about 1,500 meters above sea level. It is the home of three indigenous tribes collectively referred to as Igorots. Cf. LANCION, *Fast Facts About the Philippine Provinces*, 38-39.

³⁰ Fr. Renato Vernack was born in 13 May 1908 (Oost Roosbeke, West Vlaanderen, Belgium). He joined the CICM in 1929. After his ordination (18 August 1935), he arrived in the Philippines the following year (6 September 1936). Before he took over the CICM's St. John Bosco Mission in Baguio, he was parish priest of the CICM parish in Parañaque (Manila) from 1945.

³¹ Cf. CICM (Congregatio Immaculatae Cordis Mariae) Archives, Manila, Mission of Lucban. This mission is now located in a territory that is called Trancoville.

Don Bosco Parish, that had about 5,000 population, was the CICM's third parish. It still had neither church nor convent when Fr. Vernackt assumed his new obedience. Religious nuns from the nearby St. Louis School however went to teach catechism in the two elementary schools in the parish jurisdiction. Later, members of the Legion of Mary and the parish priest himself would join them in teaching the Christian doctrine.³²

The CICM William Brassuer (1948-1993), Vicar Apostolic of the Provincia Montañosa, blessed the cornerstone of the Don Bosco Church in 8 August 1951, assisted by the Parish Priest. He helped in rallying the benevolent people of Baguio City to help in the construction. Fr. Adolf Cansse, a CICM engineer-architect, prepared the plan of Don Bosco Church. The unfinished church was blessed by Bishop Brasseur in 15 December 1951, so that the next day, Fr. Vernackt could celebrate the first Aguinaldo mass in preparation for Christmas.³³ However, he only started to reside in the new parish convent in 19 March 1952.³⁴

But the Parish Priest, immediately after assuming his post, saw the need of providing education to the young so that he decided to start a high school for both boys and girls. By Easter of 1953, he had blessed two new classrooms of Don Bosco High School for the students who had been temporarily using Don Bosco Church as venue for classes. At the same time, he put up a dormitory in their CICM territory that he called St. John Bosco Mission.³⁵

By the year 1963, the parish population had grown to 9,000 with a Catholic population of about 6,400 Catholics. Fr. Vernackt had 68 adult baptisms and 207 infant baptisms for that year. Moreover, Don Bosco High School had increased its enrollment to 123 boys and 128 girls.³⁶

The students of Don Bosco High School consider themselves members of the "Bosconian family"; they aim to live the values of Christ in the world as baptized Christians. Don Bosco High School primarily aims at the Catholic formation of its students so they can become "honest, clean, kind, disciplined and hardworking ... credible witnesses of the Gospel values ... so that these can be effective builders of a society that is pro-God, pro-people and pro-environment."³⁷

Fr. Jean Marie Tchang (+2015),³⁸ who arrived in the Philippines 1954, further developed both Parish and School when he was assigned in 1976 to CICM mission in Lucban.³⁹ However, in the course of time, the CICM who considered St. John Bosco as father and teacher of youth, had given up both school and parish to the Diocese.

5.2. DON BOSCO HIGH SCHOOL LAGAWE

The CICM had started in 1946 a mission residence in Lagawe, Ifugao in the north of Luzon.⁴⁰ Fr. Gerard De Boeck,⁴¹ as resident priest of the Catholic Mission, arrived in 29 December 1946. And

³² Cf. *Ibid.*

³³ The preparation for the solemnity of Christmas consisted of nine consecutive masses, celebrated as early as 4 o'clock in the morning.

³⁴ Cf. CICM Archives, Manila, Chronicle of Lucban.

³⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, St. John Bosco Parish, Baguio City.

³⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, Mission of Lucban, Renseignements Generaux, School Year 1963-1964.

³⁷ Cf. <https://www.facebook.com/DonBoscoHighSchoolOriginalPage>.

³⁸ Don Bosco Parish Golden Anniversary Souvenir. Fr. Tchang was born in China (1922). He promoted the scouting movement and the Legion of Mary in Don Bosco Parish.

³⁹ Cf. CICM Archives, Manila, Mission of Lucban.

⁴⁰ Ifugao is in the Cordillera Central Mountains of northern Luzon. It covers extensive mountain ranges that have been terraced by hand to grow rice. It is the home of Ifugaos believed to have descended from Indochina. Cf. LANCION, 76-77.

because the American Protestants were on the move in the mountainous region of the northern Luzon,⁴² he also went to the different *poblaciones* of the Catholic Mission, which was earlier dedicated by the Dominicans to St. Mary Magdalene since 1894.⁴³

When Fr. Gerard arrived, he found the people in Lagawe and the neighboring barrios very much still practicing pagans, so that “he thought of putting up a Catholic School to make the people free from the fear of evil spirits and bring them to the light of the gospel by making them Catholics”.⁴⁴ At the same time, he also had in mind “to enable the young to finish high school with the hope that they finish college and come back as real Catholic men and women who would practice their Catholic faith and would eventually inspire their fellowmen to follow their examples”.⁴⁵ Thus, he put up Don Bosco High School, so that the young might have a school to go.⁴⁶

In 1946, Lagawe Municipality was the only one who had a complete elementary school, such that other children came in order to study grades five and six. Consequently, Fr. Gerard established the next year a dormitory to house these boys and girls who came to finish their elementary schooling. But in the CICM mission residence, there were also the boys and girls who were in need of high school education. Thus, in 1949, Fr. Gerard decided to put up a high school in Lagawe itself.

The Vicar Apostolic of the Provincia Montañosa, William Brassuer, gave the name Don Bosco High School to this initiative of Fr. Gerard.⁴⁷ The High School started with 49 enrollees, among whom 29 graduated in 1953, four years after. Fr. Hubert Dupont assisted Fr. Gerard in the Don Bosco High School as its first principal.⁴⁸ The High School so developed that in 1955, Fr. Gerard decided to build new dormitories most especially for boys.

Don Bosco High School describes St. John Bosco as “Father of the young. Master in Education. School Patron.” It bases its motto on 2 Timothy 4:7 - “Fidem servavi” and states as its philosophy “in service we keep the faith alive.”⁴⁹ It envisions itself as being “a dynamic school of learning ... a Catholic Christian institution which fosters a Christ-centered formation of the youth ... a transformative and integral education ... indigenous education...” Its mission invokes the intercession of St. John Bosco “to strengthen the spiritual formation of the members of the school community ... to care and protect the environment ... to ensure quality and transformative education that is sensitive to indigenous culture...”⁵⁰

Sometime in 1967, upon the request of the town leaders of Lagawe and the adjacent town of Kiangnan, the Vicar Apostolic approved the opening of a college in Lagawe. This was affiliated to the CICM’s St. Louis University in Baguio City. Consequently, Don Bosco High School was renamed St. Louis College. But in 1977, the College was closed, on account of its very limited

⁴¹ Gerard de Boeck was born in 24 March 1916 (Steenhuffel, Belgium). He entered the CICM novitiate in 7 September 1937. Three years after his ordination (1 August 1943), he went to the Philippines and arrived in 22 October 1946. He died in 11 May 2004 (Baguio City).

⁴² Cf. FRY Howard, *A History of the Mountain Province*, Manila 2006, 139-169.

⁴³ Cf. CICM Archives, Manila, Chronicle of Lagawe.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Golden Anniversary Souvenir (1949-1999)*, Lagawe, 9.

⁴⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Cf. CICM Archives, Manila, Chronicle of Lagawe.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, Mission of Lagawe. Cf. also *Golden Anniversary Souvenir*, 9. It was said that Bishop William Brasseur or Fr. Gerard De Boeck might have belonged to a Salesian parish in their homeland Belgium.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, Chronicle of Lagawe.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Golden Anniversary Souvenir*, 1.

⁵⁰ Don Bosco High School: Vision-Mission Statement.

enrollment. As a result, the High School regained its original name Don Bosco,⁵¹ which was easily done since it had been duly registered with that name in front of the Government.⁵²

5.3. DON BOSCO BOYS' ASSOCIATION

A CICM missionary, Father Oscar Deltour, founded in 1946 the "Don Bosco Boys' Association",⁵³ while he was secretary to the Bishop of Tuguegarao in Cagayan Valley Province.⁵⁴ Bishop Constant Jurgens CICM (1928-1952) had in fact founded a local school, "Cagayan Valley Athenaeum", inspired by St. John Bosco; he had blessed and inaugurated the school in 24 May 1938, feast of Mary Help of Christians.⁵⁵

Fr. Deltour confessed that he was inspired by St. John Bosco when he decided to found the "Don Bosco Boys' Association". Earlier, he had been asked by the Bishop of Tuguegarao, Cagayan Valley, Constant Jurgens CICM, to start a high school for boys after the Dominicans had closed their school "Colegio de San Jacinto". Fr. Deltour had invoked the Saint of the Young to help him in this assignment to which he felt unprepared.

"Full as I was with work as his private secretary, and moreover convinced of my inability to cope up with the ticklish job, I secretly had recourse of St. John Bosco. 'Passing the buck', so to say, to him, I placed entirely the work in his hands, telling him that as the modern patron of youth, he, not I, was going to run the institution. Frankly, up to that time, I had never felt any special devotion, nor attraction for St. John Bosco, and why I thought of him in the first place, I attribute to a signal inspiration from above."⁵⁶

And although the new school, "Cagayan Valley Athenaeum" had St. Peter as its patron since the latter was the Diocese's patron, Fr. Deltour declared that it was St. John Bosco who was "the real Director and Father of the boys".⁵⁷ He was very precise and certain that Don Bosco was responsible for the good running of the school of which he had been put in-charge.⁵⁸

Fr. Deltour planned to create to establish a boys' association when he was transferred to Manila after the World War II in 1945. He thought of this to show his gratitude to St. John Bosco whom he considered as "my great Director". He wanted more to get to know the Saint and to profit "by his wonderfully powerful intercession". He believed that this association "would enable any boy in the Philippines to come into close contact" with the Saint.⁵⁹

⁵¹ Cf. *Golden Anniversary Souvenir*, 9-10.

⁵² Atty Felix Claustro (Baguio City) had advised Bishop William Brasseur in 13 February 1979 that the CICM Director or Principal use the duly registered name of DON BOSCO HIGH SCHOOL, INC. Cf. CICM Archives, Manila, Claustro to Brasseur, Baguio (13 February 1979).

⁵³ Fr. Gerard had his own group called "Don Bosco Youth in Action" in Lagawe as a counterpart of "Don Bosco Boys' Association" in Cagayan. Cf. CICM Archives Manila, Lagawe Chronicle.

⁵⁴ Cagayan is situated at the northeastern tip of Luzon. It forms the lower basin of the Cagayan River. The province is populated by the original dwellers the Ibanags as well as by Ilocano migrants. Cf. LANCION, 48-49.

⁵⁵ Cf. BICOMONG, 92.

⁵⁶ Cf. BICOMONG, 226. Cf. also CICM Archives, Manila, Oscar Deltour, History of "Don Bosco Boys' Association".

⁵⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 227: "For the first time in my life, I experienced the wonderful, not to say miraculous, intervention of Don Bosco in the management of the school and in the proper education of the boys."

⁵⁸ Cf. *ibid.*: "In spite of the many problems which unceasingly came up, the school, thanks to Don Bosco's presence and generous assistance, steadily progressed, and the school spirit developed into a real family spirit. The boys considered themselves as brothers under one roof, with the loving, tender fathers, in an institution that was a real home to them."

⁵⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

Dutifully, Fr. Deltour had submitted a draft of the association to the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop William Piani, who had kindly approved of his initiative. He stated the clear purpose of “Don Bosco Boys’ Association”: “to place its members, Filipino boys and young men, under the special protection of St. John Bosco in order that they may profit both spiritually and materially by his powerful intercession”.⁶⁰

Don Bosco Boys’ Association was canonically erected in the Manila Archdiocese in 31 July 1946. Even Archbishop Piani spoke of the Association to Pope Pius XII in an audience given him in 1948, as he ended his mandate as Apostolic Delegate in the Philippines. The Pope blessed the Association and even granted an indulgence of 200 days to all its members. When Fr. Deltour was finally assigned to the Minor Seminary of the Archdiocese of Manila, he handed over the management and the direction of the Association to the Salesians. Archbishop Rufino Santos confirmed the transfer in a letter dated 28 June 1955. The latter even wanted the Association to be extended to the whole Archipelago.⁶¹ When the Salesians took over the Association, nothing was heard of it after.

5.4. “TO MY FILIPINO BOYS”

Fr. Deltour had written the pamphlet “To My Filipino Boys”⁶² while he was still the director of “Cagayan Valley Athenaeum”. His aim was simply to make Don Bosco known to the young. Archbishop Piani described him as that young Belgian priest of the Missionary Fathers of Scheut who loved Don Bosco in the way the Salesians did. He had hoped that this missionary’s initiative would pave the way for the coming of the Salesians.⁶³

In his pamphlet, Fr. Deltour aimed to “guide the Filipino Boy along the path of true wisdom and virtue”. For this, he chose St. John Bosco, “the heavenly patron of youth”, as a model, whose virtues were discussed in the style of one who had “a deep knowledge of boys”.⁶⁴ Writing the life of St. John Bosco as if the Saint was writing his autobiography, Fr. Deltour proposed to show what the Blessed Mother had done to the Saint and for his Boys in the past. He depicted the Saint as one to whom Mary had confided the Boys to him as their “protector from heaven”. The Saint truly wanted to bring the Boys before her presence.⁶⁵

For Fr. Deltour, who always had in mind the members of Don Bosco Boys’ Association, St. John Bosco was someone who had never shied away from any sacrifice for his “dear Filipino boys”, for whom he “was ready to give every drop of [his] blood to save them”.⁶⁶ He was one who promised to be a father to the boys, a guide and a help in their spiritual and material difficulties. These were the word of the Saint, in the mind of Fr. Deltour.

“I will always be with you and when the decisive hour will strike, whenever it may be and where ever you may be, I will take you along with me to the ever joyful shores of heaven.”⁶⁷

⁶⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 227-228.

⁶¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 228-229.

⁶² Cf. DELTOUR Oscar, *To my Filipino Boys. Life of St. John Bosco in Autobiographical Form*, (3rd Edition), Quezon City 1955. In the bicentennial celebration of St. John Bosco’s birth, the FIN Province published a Filipino version of the book “To My Filipino Boys”. Cf. DELTOUR Oscar, *Sa Aking mga Kabataang Pilipino*, (edited by PUTZU Salvatore), Manila 2005.

⁶³ Cf. ASC FIN B 733, Abp. Piani to Fr. Ricaldone, Manila, 1 March 1948. Cf. also BICOMONG, 93.

⁶⁴ Cf. DELTOUR, *To my Filipino Boys*, Quezon City 1955, 3.

⁶⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 70.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

6. SCHOOLS OF ST. JOHN BOSCO IN THE PHILIPPINES

St. John Bosco was known as the priest who taught the poor boys of 19th century Turin on how to work honestly and with dignity. The Salesians in the Philippines started their presence alluding always to vocational-technical schools.⁶⁸ The Archipelago was then in a strong process of industrialization, so that the Salesian technical school was the kind of school that the country needed at that moment. No less than a Philippine president had declared this when he visited Don Bosco Technical School in Victorias, Negros Occidental.⁶⁹ The fact was that the Salesian schools excelled in technical-academic education; and their patron happened to be called St. John Bosco.

Impressed with the Salesian's technical education that they advocated in the Philippines in the second half of the 20th century, other institutions began to establish schools for the young, seeking to answer the technical needs of the society. They, however, adopted the Salesians' founder as the patron of their educational institutes.

There are presently several schools that carry the name of St. John Bosco: St. John Bosco Institute of Arts and Sciences (Metro Manila), St. John Bosco College of Northern Luzon (San Fernando, La Union), St. John Bosco School (San Fernando, Pampanga), De La Salle John Bosco College (Bislig, Surigao del Sur), St. John Bosco Academy (Tayabas, Quezon), and St. John Bosco School (Marikina City, Rizal).⁷⁰

6.1. DE LA SALLE - JOHN BOSCO COLLEGE

Sometime in the mid 1950's, the philanthropist-owner of the Bislig Bay Lumber Company Incorporated (BBLCI), Don Andres Soriano Sr., started the Bislig Bay Elementary School for the children of the dependents of his company.⁷¹ However, in 1961, BBLCI turned over the school to the MSC (Missionaries of the Sacred Heart) Fr. Albert Grol,⁷² who was missionary priest of the Parish of St. Vincent de Paul.⁷³ Fr. Albert, with the permission of Bishop Charles Van den Ouwelant MSC (1955-1973),⁷⁴ converted the elementary school into a parochial school where children of non-dependents of BBLCI could also attend. For the school year 1962-1963, the parish school was transformed into an elementary for girls with the name St. Margaret Mary School that was administered by the Augustinian Recollect Missionary Sisters (ARM).⁷⁵

⁶⁸ Cf. COLOMBO Gianluigi, *Don Bosco's Work in Education and Technical Instruction with Special Application to the Philippines* (a thesis presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School De La Salle College), Manila 1975.

⁶⁹ Cf. IMPELIDO, 83.

⁷⁰ The former Salesian Brother, Mario Viel (+2014), founded St. Martin Technical School when he left the Salesian Society. He, however, was one of those responsible for making the Salesian schools "technically famous".

⁷¹ Surigao del Sur is in northeastern Mindanao Island. It is known largely for its logging and wood-processing industries. Cf. LANCION 156-157. The BBLCI, which would later become Paper Industries Corporation of the Philippines (PICOP), was located in Bislig, making it into an important and booming town of Surigao del Sur and the island of Mindanao.

⁷² Cf. MSC (Missionari Sacratissimi Cordis) Archives, Manila, Biographical data (Albert Grol). Fr. Albertus Vornelis Grol (born in 11 October 1911 in Amsterdam, Netherlands) arrived in the Philippines in November 1938 and returned to the Netherlands in 3 July 1967. Fr. Albert Grol was parish priest of Mangagoy, Bislig (1960-1965), before he was made MSC vocation director in their seminary Talisay, Cebu (1965-1967). The MSC sold their seminary in Talisay, Cebu to the Salesians sometime in 1976. He was one of the three Grol brothers who entered the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. (Cf. e-mail Ad van Hest to Nestor Impelido, Manila 26 September 2015).

⁷³ St. Vincent de Paul Parish, located in the adjacent barangay of Mangagoy of Bislig town, was founded and entrusted to the MSC in 1952.

⁷⁴ Charles Van den Ouwelant MSC was bishop of the diocese of Surigao (erected into a diocese in 1939 from the Diocese of Cagayan de Oro) where the MSC was active in the work of evangelization.

⁷⁵ Cf. Lasalliana Resource Center, Bislig City, Historical Background of John Bosco School.

However, Fr. Albert envisioned also a school for boys. In 1963, asking the support of Bishop Ouwelant and Don Andres Soriano, he got in touched with the Salesians represented by Fr. Pierangelo Quaranta SDB (1916-1992)⁷⁶ who wanted to start a presence in Mindanao but who could not realize this because of the lack of personnel. They, however, agreed to give technical assistance by supplying the pioneering teaching staff of St. John Bosco Technical High School.⁷⁷ The focus of the school, subsidized by the BBLCI, was to train young males who could answer the increasing demands for skilled workers of the Company.⁷⁸

In 1969, St. Margaret Mary School, which had opened a high school for girls and which was now administered by the Maryknoll Sisters, transferred and merged with St. John Bosco Technical High School. The school had become co-educational; it was renamed St. John Bosco School.

In 1974, the Paper Industries Corporation of the Philippines (PICOP), the former BBLCI, established another school for the children of its employees who lived distant from the site of PICOP.⁷⁹ The school was put under the supervision of the De La Salle Brothers who merged it, in 1983, with St. John Bosco School that became John Bosco College in 1997 and was accredited by the La Salle Schools supervision office.⁸⁰ However, in February 2007, the FSC renamed the school De La Salle John Bosco College (DLS-JBC).

Fr. Albert Grol aimed to lift the lives of the young Bisliganon of Mindanao and found the need of a good Catholic school for his community. Don Andres Soriano wanted to provide its employees the best facilities that included the education of their children who could be prepared to work in his business company. Thus, the decision was made “to open a ‘vocational school’ to produce high school graduates with technical skills who could work with confidence in their respective field”.⁸¹ St. John Bosco Technical High School, which could have been by the Salesians, realized this benevolent dream.

6.2. ST. JOHN BOSCO’S EDUCATION

St. John Bosco Institute of Arts and Sciences was founded in 1996 by a Bosconian, Arnie Abad, who sold it to a non-Bosconian, Mr. Enrique Pingol.⁸² The latter had evolved it into a corporation, leading the School to erect other centers in order to extend its educational system from Pasig City (Manila) to other branches in Manila and in adjacent provinces: Mandaluyong City, Makati City and Pateros in Metro Manila; San Mateo, Cainta and Antipolo in Rizal Province; and San Pedro in Laguna Province.

In a visit of a branch of the School in Guadalupe, Makati, one can observe the logo of the School as well as the courses it offers. These certainly express the technical slant of education typical of the

⁷⁶ Fr. Pierangelo Quaranta, former missionary in China, was rector of Don Bosco Technical Institute in Mandaluyong, Metro Manila.

⁷⁷ The technical staff that came from Don Bosco Technical Institute consisted of Percival Buenvenida, Andres Dujale, Roberto Samia and Jose Padilla who became the first principal of St. John Bosco Technical High School. Cf. Lasalliana Resource Center, Bislig City, Souvenir Book 1988.

⁷⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, Historical Background of John Bosco School.

⁷⁹ Jose Maria Soriano – Learning Center (JMS-LC) was located 13 kilometers away from PICOP, a La Salle supervised school in Coletto, Bislig. This was in order to take care of the children of the employees of its company employees who lived in Forest Drive Village.

⁸⁰ Cf. Lasalliana Resource Center, Bislig City, Souvenir Book 2001. To note that in 1997, the PICOP finally withdrew its financial support for

⁸¹ Cf. Lasalliana Resource Center, Bislig City, Historical Background of John Bosco School.

⁸² Cf. Mr. Danny Pagaduan, Executive Director of the Bosconian International Chamber of Commerce, interviewed by Ms. Divine Solano (26 September 2014, *Kapihan ng mga Bosconian* in Racks, El Pueblo, Pasig City).

Salesian schools. Clearly, the School caters to a training program⁸³ that seeks to teach young boys and girls who could not afford a college or a university education but who wanted to learn a trade in order to find work after. It aims to help students coming from the masses to be competitive in the workplace through “non-traditional computer technology education.” Nonetheless, at the lower left of the School’s logo, there is an open book: on left page is a picture of St. John Bosco and on the right page an inscription “St. John Bosco Teacher”. At the bottom right is an inscription that primarily referred to the School’s students: “You are a student and a friend”.⁸⁴

In an interview with the staff of the campus in Pio del Pilar in Makati City, the School sought, through its teachers, to inculcate values that were typical Bosconian. It adopted the “Youth Encounter Program” that it learned through the Salesian **Fr. Mario Baclig** who had taught this style of youth animation in the Philippines. Thus, it tried to utilize its content in order to give Christian values to a non-sectarian institution.⁸⁵ The School’s present owner had simply adopted St. John Bosco as the name of the school, since he had only thought of a computer school at a time in which this was very much in demand.

However, the name “St. John Bosco” was more than a label since St. John Bosco Institute of Arts and Sciences advocated “the Saint’s values and teachings”, aiming to form its graduates to be “socially, morally and technologically responsible”. The Institute, “guided by the vision and teachings of St. John Bosco” wishes to impress the teachings of St. John Bosco in the student’s daily life.⁸⁶

St. John Bosco School in San Fernando, Pampanga,⁸⁷ was founded in 2009 by a couple who were doctors by profession. Dr. Lourdes Hedy Silverio-Bustos is an anesthesiologist who dreamt of putting up a school. She, in fact, is a professor in the faculty of medicine of Angeles University Foundation (Angeles City, Pampanga). Her husband, Dr. John Bustos a surgeon, whose uncle was a priest of the Diocese of San Fernando, supports and helps realize her dream.⁸⁸

The founders at first thought of naming their school as Mary help of Christians but decided not to, since there was already a school of the Salesian Sisters with this name in the area. Dr. Lourdes, searching for a possible name, chanced on the name St. John Bosco who advocated the education. Moreover, she also read that this Saint worked very much on behalf of the young. Furthermore, she also claimed that it was also a prayer to St. John Bosco contained in a pamphlet of the novena to Our Lady of Manaog⁸⁹ that inspired her to make the Saint the patron of the school. Furthermore, she considered it a coincidence that her husband and her son were both named John.⁹⁰

⁸³ The School’s program included computer hardware servicing, computer programming, finishing course for call center agents, as well as hotel and restaurant service.

⁸⁴ Cf. Ocular visit of St. John Bosco Institute of Arts and Sciences by Fr. Nestor Impelido, Guadalupe Campus (20 August 2015, Makati City).

⁸⁵ Cf. Interview with the staff of St. John Bosco Institute of Arts and Sciences by Fr. Nestor Impelido SDB, Pio del Pilar Campus (20 August 2015, Makati City). This campus is within the jurisdiction of the Salesian Parish of San Ildefonso, whose priests come to give spiritual assistance to its students.

⁸⁶ “About SJB-Profile,” cf. <http://www.sjbosco-ias.com>.

⁸⁷ Cf. Pampanga is situated north 60 km. of Manila, in a very fertile central plain of Luzon. LANCION, 126-127. The Archdiocese of San Fernando was erected in 11 December 1948. Cf. *The 2012-2013 Catholic Directory of the Philippines*, 289.

⁸⁸ Cf. Interview with Dr. John and Dr. Lourdes Busto in St. John Bosco School (27 August 2015, San Fernando, Pampanga). Cf. also <https://www.facebook.com/pages/St-John-Bosco-School-of-San-Fernando-Pampanga-Inc>.

⁸⁹ Our Lady of Manaog is the Patroness of the province of Pangasinan.

⁹⁰ Cf. Interview with Dr. John and Dr. Lourdes Busto.

The founders of St. John Bosco School first thought of buying an established school; but they opted to put up a new school with a good reputation. They wanted a legacy and a standard, a school where values were valued and not a school for the sake of doing business, where students became better even if these perhaps were mediocre in the beginning.⁹¹ They desired a private Catholic school that sought “to offer quality education at an affordable price”.⁹²

Dr. John and Dr. Lourdes were also connected with a Salesian, Fr. Gene Taqueban (+2015) who was a cousin of their consultant and a former superintendent of the Provincial Department of Education. Fr. Gene, in fact, had contributed to making St. John Bosco known to them and their students through his priestly ministry and through sharing information materials regarding the Saint. The founders of the school also claimed that St. John Bosco made his presence felt in the School. They stated that during the construction of the School, workers claimed to have seen the Saint, walking during the night, accompanied by some young people.⁹³

The Salesians were actually present in San Fernando since 1959 when they started a school in the adjacent town of Bacolor, Pampanga. Certainly, they had made St. John Bosco known in the province as an educator of the young.⁹⁴ But one more dream of the founders of St. John Bosco School was to put up in the future a St. John Bosco Medical Center.

Further north of Manila, City of San Fernando in the province of La Union, lies St. John Bosco College of Northern Luzon. This institution for higher learning, which started in 2000, aims “to provide quality technical and general education that is focused on achieving gainful employment, workforce development and lifelong competency through pro-active and innovative methods of affecting learners”.⁹⁵

Mr. Rodolfo Abat, a businessman and a city councilor, who had been passionately sending poor young people to school, had decided to put a school that aimed to make its students job-ready and to offer livelihood that should benefit the community especially economically. ies of the area. As a consequence, he put up a technical school that taught the young how to operate heavy equipments, to be caregivers and cooks. He did not want a school for business purposes, even if he was in fact an owner of business establishments. For this, he named the school he wanted St. John Bosco.⁹⁶

Mr. Abat knew of the Salesian schools that gave vocational-technical education. He also knew that St. John Bosco as someone who wanted poor young boys and girls to be skilled so that they might work, as someone who wanted these “to become good individuals for their families and for their communities”. For him, St. John Bosco was someone to whom the students “can relate and can emulate”. He expected those who graduate from St. John Bosco College to be able “to give back” to others like them what they have learned and earned.⁹⁷

7. DON BOSCO CORPORATIONS

⁹¹ Cf. *ibid.*

⁹² Cf. <https://www.facebook.com/pages/St-John-Bosco-School-of-San-Fernando-Pampanga-Inc>.

⁹³ Cf. Interview with Dr. John and Dr. Lourdes Busto.

⁹⁴ IMPELIDO, 190-194. The Salesians closed the school and the junior seminary that were covered by volcanic lahar in 1995. But presently, they have plans to build up a school in the same location that they had sold.

⁹⁵ Cf. <http://ph.shop.88db.com/saintjohnboscollege/about-us>.

⁹⁶ Cf. Interview with Ms. Brenda Pulido Gandeza (San Fernando, La Union, 15 October 2015). Ms. Gandeza, an environmentalist and licensed forester by profession, is the registrar of the school and is co-founder of the St. John Bosco College.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

St. John Bosco's influence did not stay in the realm of education. His name also created an impact people who had a deep Christian sense even in their seeming material initiatives but which they wanted to give a higher and spiritual sense.

7.1. DON BOSCO FOUNDATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Don Bosco Foundation for Sustainable Development (DBSFD) started within the Church organization of the Diocese of Kidapawan.⁹⁸ The foundation was established in 1988 "to help alleviate the poverty of out-of-school youth found in rural communities" that lived by tilling the land. For this, it promoted these young through a sustainable organic agriculture. Founded by former members of the Diocesan Youth Program of the Diocese of Kidapawan, it eventually aimed to help the entire family, where often adult farmers looked down on the inexperienced youth who "had no voice inside the patriarchal family structure".⁹⁹

The Executive Director and founder of the Foundation, Maria Helenita Gamela,¹⁰⁰ declared that she was inspired by St. John Bosco sometime in 1986 when she heard the Saint's story during a project planning and management seminar workshop in Cebu. Bishop Leo Drona SDB, head of the Episcopal Commission on Youth (ECY) of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, together Fr. Mario Baclig SDB, National Director of the ECY, had organized this activity. The latter had shared a booklet entitled "Great Dreams Come True". She claimed that she was struck by the story of the boy John Bosco being who was snubbed by a priest whom he greeted one morning. The boy had promised that he would attend to and be the first to approach the young when he became a priest.¹⁰¹ Ms. Gamela reflected on how a negative experience challenged the Saint to make it into a positive one.¹⁰²

Ms. Gamela admitted that adopting the name of "Don Bosco" had created interest and sympathy to DBFSD. The Foundation had to explain that "Don" did not mean that a wealthy landowner owned the foundation; that it was not a project by the Salesians of Don Bosco; that it was not related with any of the well-known Salesian schools in the Philippines. What they knew most of Don Bosco was what they read in Teresio Bosco's biography of the Saint.¹⁰³

Furthermore, Ms. Gamela gave the name Don Bosco to the Foundation because the Saint "took care of the youth directly". She did not realize that the Saint was the son of farmer. And yet DBFSD had the also the aim of taking care of youth "through farming and in their farming families". Through the name Don Bosco, she and her co-workers took the chance to introduce the most especially to farmers. For them, Don Bosco was in a very special sense someone who was "very down to earth".¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Kidapawan is the capital of the province of Cotabato, in the island of Mindanao in southern Philippines. It was created as a prelateure in 12 June 1976 and was later elevated to a diocese in 15 November 1982. It covers an area with a significant Muslim population and the three provinces of Cotabato, Maguindanao and Sultan Kudarat. Cf. *The 2012-2013 Catholic Directory of the Philippines*, Quezon City 2012, 162-164.

⁹⁹ Cf. Maria Helenita Betsy Ruizo-Gamela, Executive Director, email interview by Divine Solano (13 October 2014). The DBFSD aimed to provide services and sustainable development initiatives by advocating "organic farming and provided sustainable agricultural technology to farmers". Cf. <http://r12.pia.gov.ph/index.php>.

¹⁰⁰ Maria Gamela founded DBSFD together with leaders of the Diocesan Youth Program of Kidapawan: Nestor Gamela, Willy Flores, Dinia Laurequez and Romano Laurilla.

¹⁰¹ This incident had made the Saint promise that if he ever would become a priest, he would give attention to the young, be approachable and be the first the first to approach them.

¹⁰² Cf. Maria Helenita Betsy Ruizo-Gamela, email interview (13 October 2014).

¹⁰³ Cf. BOSCO Teresio, Don Bosco. *Storia di un Prete*, Torino 1988. The DBFSD certainly had access to the English translation of this book published by the Daughters of St. Paul.

¹⁰⁴ Ms. Gamela, Executive Director, email interview by Divine Solano, 13 October 2014.

Ms. Gamela insisted that more than the name of Don Bosco, they valued his essence, his person as someone who was for the young.

“We started our initiative when we were young and being related to St. John Bosco reminds us to always stay ‘young and fresh’ as the Spirit truly is always young, always open, always fresh and looking forward to a new day of discovery.”¹⁰⁵

She dared to declare that she and her co-founders had started to create a kind of spirituality that was somehow influenced by St. John Bosco’s spirituality. The fact was that the foundation was not merely for the practical but also for the spiritual.¹⁰⁶ They considered the Saint as one who had combined prayer with action. They liked his concept “Work as Prayer”.¹⁰⁷

7.2. DON BOSCO MULTIPURPOSE COOPERATIVE

The Don Bosco Multipurpose Cooperative (DBMPC), derived from the DBFSD in November 2007, was designed to meet to handle the business side of the Foundation. Through the Cooperative, the beneficiaries of the Foundation were thus empowered to manage its brand and product of certified organic rice, as well as its shops.¹⁰⁸ For “Don Bosco” had developed into a special brand that meant “organic” because of the foundation’s efforts.¹⁰⁹

The purpose of the DBMPC was to sustain the agricultural work of the farmers, so that these might be entrepreneurs themselves and that they did not need to depend on business traders to sell their produce. It put up in 1998 a shop specialized in organic products (Don Bosco Healthy Food Center). This marketing service, in fact, was what developed into a cooperative that was duly registered in November 2006. But the Cooperative had something more than the product and the market: it had the Christian sense in it.¹¹⁰ And Don Bosco had a say in it.

7.3. DON BOSCO MULTI-SPECIALTY CLINIC

Don Bosco Multi-Specialty Clinic, a diagnostic and laboratory clinic, was established in 1998 within the Salesian parish of Mary Help of Christians, along Doña Soledad in Better Living Subdivision in Parañaque City, Metro Manila.¹¹¹ This clinic later transferred to another location in Makati City.¹¹²

The Clinic has a section that accepted paying patients who availed of a variety of medical services - laboratory tests, diagnostics, ultrasound, skin treatment, etc. But at the back of the clinic, it offered weekly charitable service to the poor consisting of free medicines, treatment of diabetes, care of babies, eye care, home visitations for the terminally ill or the bed-ridden and medical missions.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*: “We aim to touch the souls of the people as the spiritual is the true seat of sustainability. We call this backdrop in our consciousness as ‘The Big Picture,’ our *raison d’être*.”

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*: “... *saving souls* from sin and idleness through practical skills. Through livelihood, (Don Bosco) helped poor youth find the meaning of *life*”.

¹⁰⁸ Ms. Gamela, Executive Director, email interview.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*: “DBSFD has built its credibility, its integrity over the years; it has also gained respectability (for) its passion and advocacy for the environment. In fact, among the circles related to agriculture, ‘Don Bosco’ is like a brand and people are attracted to it”.

¹¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*: “... essentially, the value is something that has to do with the inner life of the cooperative ... its staff and members are anchored on something noble and holy ... LIFE ... which goes ‘beyond the economics and the livelihood of people’.”

¹¹¹ The sources of this study, Dr. Nelson Pacia MD, (proprietor of DBMSC) and Ms. Susan Alquiza (secretary and pioneer employee), were interviewed by Divine Solano in 18 September 2014.

¹¹² Cf. Dr. Nelson Pacia, interview, 18 September 2014, Makati City.

This Don Bosco Clinic was established and owned by a certain Dr. Nelson S. Pacia MD.¹¹³ He, a parishioner of the Parish of Mary Help of Christians, always saw the statue of Don Bosco at the entrance of the main thoroughfare of the subdivision where he lived. For him, Don Bosco was so popular, so that he concluded: “I named my clinic after him because of his popularity.”¹¹⁴

People thought that Dr. Pacia was a past pupil of a Salesian school, of which he was not. He admitted that he was not really familiar with the life of the Saint. But one thing he knew -- that the Saint generously shared.¹¹⁵ For this, he personally sought to make the poor a priority to whom he offered free medical care since he started his clinic, an initiative that drew other doctors to volunteer and help out.”¹¹⁶ When DBMSC was transferred to another location, the name Don Bosco was kept “because we’ve already been known by that name and it is easy to remember.”¹¹⁷

8. CONCLUSION

When the Salesians came to the Philippines in 1951, other religious had already established themselves in schools that were well recognized. The Salesians tried to match them, in spite of their being late comers in the particular field of education. Fr. Carlo Braga, the provincial delegate then in the Philippines, was wont to say that the Salesians should not be inferior to them. Certainly, the Salesians reached their level and even became an example for others to follow and to emulate. For some witnessed how good the Salesians were in the education of the young, including the poor and abandoned, who were in need of being technically adept to the needs of the time. They made a name for themselves because of the name of Don Bosco too. However, there could also be that possibility that those who have adopted Don Bosco might have known vaguely as a saint for the young.

Bishops were the first “perceivers” of St. John Bosco in the Philippines. They, apostolic delegates (Agius, Piani, Vagnozzi), local ordinaries (Rosales, Lladoc, Guerrero, Santos), plus those belonging to religious orders (Brasseur, Jurgens, Ouwelant) certainly were instrumental for a positive perception of the Filipino of the Saint. And because they were enthusiastic of the Saint and his sons, they somehow became “conceivers” in as much they mediated and insisted that the Salesians come to the Archipelago; they encouraged the Filipinos to insist that the Salesians come. Their outlook on the Saint was certainly good, since they were even among the first to ask the Salesians to come.

Certain religious orders (CICM, MSC) were also involved in having St. John Bosco known. These must have known and experienced the impact of the Saint in the European countries of origin who had witnessed the work of the Salesians and who had celebrated the beatification and canonization of the Saint as well as of others who shared the Salesian charism. What particularly impressed these was the Saint’s being ideally a father and a teacher of the young, which they attempted to inculcate in the centers of learning that they initiated. They validly considered St. John Bosco of their own educational apostolate.

¹¹³ Dr. Nelson Pacia was an ophthalmologist who had been a director of a city government hospital (*Ospital ng Makati*) for ten years (1988-1998) and a prime mover behind the Makati Elderly Care of the Makati City Government as a councilor.

¹¹⁴ Dr. Nelson Pacia, interview.

¹¹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*: “What I know about Don Bosco is that he’s good to the poor, that he helps them.”

¹¹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Ms. Susan Alquiza, secretary at Don Bosco Multi-Specialty Clinic, interview by author, 18 September 2014, Makati City. In the course of the interview, upon learning about the bicentennial of St. John Bosco’s birthday, Dr. Pacia offered to treat the poor that would be referred by the Salesians in 16 August 2015.

But there were also very well-known personalities (Soriano, Ossorio, Aboitiz) who perceived St. John Bosco and his educational style as an answer to their longing to do good to people, especially to their workers and their immediate dependents. These were men who had a keen Christian sense, who tried to respond to the industrial needs of their times. They sought to find a Christian model who could perhaps help them express their honest social concern. They somehow found this model in St. John Bosco.

However, the study reveals how the perceptions on St. John Bosco are seemingly limited and little, if not few. Herein is the challenge to study and to go to the details of the perceptions of the Filipinos, and to discover more of their impressions and the possible impact of the Saint in their lives. One can legitimately ask: after more than 64 years of permanence of the Salesians in the Philippines, is it possible that St. John Bosco has not had any wide relevance in the Filipino and in Philippine society?

Some of those who founded schools with St. John Bosco as patron revealed a vague knowledge of the Saint. They have not even heard of his educational philosophy. Perhaps, the desire to know the perception on the Saint should now be accompanied by making him known to these institutions. These can certainly be “peripheries” where Salesians can proclaim St. John Bosco as a valid educator of the young today.

There seemingly is a need of a deeper consultation of the products of the Salesian schools, of parishioners committed to the life and ministry of Salesian parishes, of Bosconians of the technical-vocational program they have received: these could help contribute to know what has been the impact of St. John Bosco in their lives.

Truly, in the Philippines, St. John Bosco and the Salesians have been known as technical educators, who responded well to the needs of the time. Nonetheless, there has been no study yet on how the Salesians became the pioneers of technical education in the Philippines. It would be good to know how much there is of the Salesian way of educating the young, in the example of “good Christians – honest citizens”. Besides, one can also ask how “Bosconian” were the initiatives that took St. John Bosco as their patron, as well as the products of their educational ministry.

A further and deeper study of the theme of the Congress will be difficult on account of absence or lack of documentation and of archives. However, this now becomes a challenge that can certainly be overcome since St. John Bosco continues to inspire even in the present time.