



Chronicles from Manila n°9

October - November 2008

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Summary

Holidays, celebrations and classes resume for the second semester this November. Yet there are changes in the community. Novitiate is well on its way and the community has a lot of international exposures.

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1. Holidays, celebrations... and back in class.

November was the month for celebrations and some holidays from school. On All Saints' Day, the community rejoiced with Father Paul Hu in celebrating his 5th anniversary of priesthood. This young Chinese priest has been a guest of our community for the last six months. He invited some religious and Chinese priests: all of them helped out in preparing a delicious Chinese meal.

On the next day, the brothers went home in order to honour the deceased members of their families. Meanwhile, Father Bernard and the postulants went to Antipolo and joined the Novitiate community praying for the deceased members of the Assumption family. The different Superiors of the Religious of the Assumption communities were ending their annual gathering with a festive meal to which the Assumptionists were invited: a time for fraternal get together and sharing of the latest news.

Father Gilles Blouin spent the whole month of October abroad: his annual retreat with the Assumptionist brothers in South Korea, a computer workshop with the treasurers of the North American Province in Boston and fund raising activities in Quebec and Toronto.

"Rediscovering America under the beautiful Fall colors was not really bad after all, neither spending a week end with the family", was his comment as he returned to Manila. From January on, all the communities of the Province will have an integrated finance reporting program which will facilitate the administration of our finances. *"It was a good opportunity to be aware once more of how generous are our benefactors in helping us support the studies of our seminarians and the expenses of our Vocation ministry: they are all in our prayers everyday"*

On November 5 and 6, the religious, novices and postulants got together at the Novitiate for a workshop on the spiritual writings of our founder, Father Emmanuel d'Alzon. They were introduced to the data base put together by the d'Alzon Center as a research tool. Appropriate exercises were also given after each presentation. Father Richard Brunelle was the right man to facilitate this workshop since he has been a key person on the international team that worked on this project for many years. Before the end of the gathering, all the religious met for the second *assembly meeting*. That same day, one of our postulants, Glenn Galvez flew to Saigon where he was to discover another way of living the Assumptionist community in Asia.

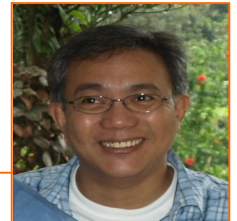
The high moment of November was the Novena to Father Emmanuel d'Alzon. It started on November 13 with the feast of our Bulgarian martyrs, a solemn Mass in our Parish of Our Lady of Pentecost in full attendance.



Among the participants were the Religious of the Assumption of the Novitiate community, the Little Sisters of the Assumption and some lay friends of the community. During the meal that followed, the idea of inviting these lay friends to share in our prayer more regularly and explore ways of collaboration was proposed. The novena ended on November 21, the death anniversary of Father d'Alzon, with a Eucharist at the Novitiate.

2. Classes resume at the university, changes in the community set up.

On November 10, students went back to school, some at Loyola School of Theology, while others at Santo Tomas for theology or philosophy. Two of the postulants are also back to school as well: Rodel Cervantes starts theology and Rowell Casino reviews for his board exam as a communication engineer. In Pavel House, candidates continue their studies in philosophy or theology. That explains the relative quiet in the houses since these studies are very demanding.



Paper-cuts and inkblots... Doing Theology at LST at 48

By Brother Eduardo Molina

The Loyola School of Theology (LST) at the Ateneo de Manila University (ADMU) in the Philippines has a reputation of being a demanding and good standard school compared to the other theological school in the country. Whether that reputation is true or not depends on the opinion and experience of each person.

But as a 3rd year STB and MA student in LST and ADMU this year, I could say that it is demanding. As for good standard, I believe LST continues to demand and expect from its students, faculties and staff the best they could give of themselves.

Normally, students have 5 to 6 courses in a semester which is what is humanly possible in order to better appreciate the beauty of each course and to in order not to end up in the nuthouse.

I personally feel the pressure this second semester of my 3rd year. I am registered in The Sacraments of Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick and Marriage, The Gospel of John, Theological Anthropology – Grace, Canon Law II, Discernment and Spiritual Direction, and Comprehensive Exams for Moral Theology this semester. With each professor requiring their “pound of flesh” in course research papers, group or individual reports or presentations, homilies on certain topics or liturgical seasons, midterm or unit written exams, and individual or group final oral exams, it is enough to drive one up the wall.

Probably one accurate indicator of this the fact that during “hell week”, the week prior to final exams, and on final exams week itself, the school is virtually a desolate place; people walking like zombies or sitting heads buried under a pile of books and papers.

But all these sacrifices and difficulties are worth it because amid the “paper cuts and ink blots” it is possible to appreciate the value of academic formation both at present and in the future. It enriches my prayer life and apostolate as well as enlightens difficulties in formation and in common life. Looking into the future, my studies help me reverence the responsibility of stewardship that comes with the gift of knowledge and formation.

Perhaps this is one unique condition of doing theology at 48, or doing religious formation for that matter, age and experience allows one to have a perspective and hopefully, with guidance and perseverance, better assimilation and integration of studies and life.

A new semester was the opportunity for adjustments in the community set up: Brother Ricky Montanez moved out of the novitiate community and reintegrated himself at the Adveniat House while Father Roddy Ratsimiolaka took the reverse road. Roddy will continue courses in English language at a tutorial center until Christmas. Paul Xu, the other young Chinese guest priest of our community has acquired a level of English proficiency that allowed him to start his courses in Spirituality. So he moved to ICLA (Institute for Consecrated Life in Asia) for this purpose.



Glenn Galvez and Ellis Luciano have been accepted as postulants while Jay Litanas has begun his residency program at Pavel House. Entrance to Postulancy has been scheduled for mid-December. (Find their profile on our website: www.assumptionists.ph)

3. Vocation ministry

Vocation ministry is a priority of the community. The weekend of November 7-9, Father Gilles and Ellis Luciano were out in Cebu while Father Bernard and Rodel Cervantes were in Cagayan de Oro for the search-in retreats. They received less people than expected. Many were not available... Vocation ministry has to do with a lot of patience and steadfastness..., not to mention frustrations, too.

The week after, Father Chuvi travelled to Isabela province, some 10 hours by bus north of Manila:

"On November 11, I was invited to preach a retreat to a hundred teachers of various schools of Isabela. The theme of the retreat was similar to the one of the Regional Assembly of Educators: to grow in the Spirit, our inner space as a sacred space for our life and our work. I was asked to talk about meditation. So I choose one of the many methods of meditation, the one created by Basil Pennington, a Cistercian monk from Spencer Abbey in Massachusetts: called the 'Centering Prayer'. It is a simple form of meditation that many people of any walks of life like to practice. My first talk introduced the rules and the second focused more on the inner transformation and charity which are the fruits of centering prayer. This was an opportunity to meet with many teachers and the Association of Catholic Teachers, an important element of the social life in the Philippines.

On November 12, during the teachers' assembly, I was able to meet with some 300 students of the La Salette University for vocation promotion. They were happy to learn about Assumption but felt reluctant to choose religious life since they have first to help their families financially. I guess we have to continue relying on the Holy Spirit to do his part of the job..." (Chuvi)

4. Life at Emmanuel d'Alzon Novitiate in Antipolo

Officially, the novitiate opened on August 14, 2008. Father Richard Brunelle, the Master of Novices, gives an account of his arrival, his discoveries and the daily life at the novitiate:

"It was quite a change for me to come from Africa to the Philippines. Arriving here on July 19, I immediately noticed a big difference between Manila, a city of approximately 12 million people and Arusha, Tanzania, a provincial town of 250,000. It was a new world. First, even though Arusha is as close to the Equator as Manila, the average temperature there is much cooler and the air much cleaner than in Manila. Manila is also a very noisy town with millions of cars, trucks, buses and motorcycles including the ubiquitous tricycles.

Thank God, my superiors here had chosen with my consent Antipolo as the site of our new Filipino novitiate. The novitiate, officially "Emmanuel d'Alzon Assumptionist Novitiate" is located on the campus of Assumption Antipolo, a large secondary school for girls run by the Religious of the Assumption Sisters. The house is on the edge of the campus on a hill close to the Retreat Center also run by the sisters. Antipolo is a small mountain town some 20 kilometres from Manila. Thanks to the elevation, the average temperature is some 5 degrees cooler and there is almost always a breeze, a big relief for me born and raised in the cold climate of the state of Maine, USA.

The house is an excellent setting for a novitiate. It is big: some ten or eleven private bed rooms plus a dormitory for 20 as well as large common rooms. We are only four in the house, Frs. Roddy Ratsimiolaka from Madagascar and myself and two novices, Brothers Joseph Macalangan and Blair Nuyda. Imagine the time it takes us to clean the house every week! But above all, it is quiet, an essential ingredient for novitiate life. Being close to the college campus and especially to the Retreat Center, we all have opportunities for a bit of apostolate there: confessions, masses, singing classes. The novices also do Saturday ministry at a nearby orphanage run by the Missionaries of Charity of Mother Teresa.

A novitiate is meant to be a center for formation to religious life. It is somewhat cut off from the rest of the world: no cell phones, infrequent use of the house phone, 90 minutes of Internet per week, few visits out and few guests received although we heartily welcome those who come for retreats and/or peace and quiet. We have two hours of class each weekday with plenty of reading and prayer. We come together for daily meditation, morning and evening prayer, office of readings and compline and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. We also have weekly community meetings and singing classes, the latter with the Religious of the Assumption Sisters in their convent.



Our class program is complemented by our participation in the inter-novitiate program called "Exodus." Every three weeks or so, we attend 3-to-5-day sessions given by specialists on religious life, vows, psychology, spirituality, etc. The sessions which are all held somewhere in Metro Manila have been excellent, except that the travel time to and from comes to about three hours each day." (Richard Brunelle)

Novice Joseph Macalanggan shares his experience at "Exodus".

"The Exodus Inter-Novitiate program that I attend with Blair is designed to help us achieve holistic growth. We were both surprised that each of us held a position in this Inter-Novitiate program. Blair was elected as the Chairman of the Exodus Novitiate XXII, while I was elected as the Chairman of Education Committee. Our Novice master Father Richard Brunelle, was very faithful to accompany us during our sessions.

The different modules that were given to us had helped us understand better our own needs, and the needs of others. And to fully comprehend the importance of this formation program, we were asked to go for an exposure program in which we can learn how to be one with poor.

I went to a squatter area in Baseco for ten days, and I lived the peasant's way of life, only eating once or twice a day. We were told not to buy any food if our family host did not have food to offer us. If they don't serve food for the breakfast, then we don't take breakfast as well, for we only eat what is there in the table.

I found out that being poor really matters. I, for one, had experienced being discriminated during the rally with the peasants. People look down on us, particularly when we were eating lunch along the side walk where people pass by and look at us with disgust. When we went to a fast food establishment, I was tempted to reprimand the waiter for he had treated us lowly, for we were not properly dressed, for we looked like beggars with our shabby clothes. This was a humbling experience for me. I came to observe in society with much sadness that a person is well respected only because of his external bearings rather than by his inherent human dignity. Now, I can understand what our Lord Jesus Himself said, "Blessed are the poor...for the kingdom of God is theirs", for only Jesus really understood what being poor really meant." (Joseph)

5. International exposures

■ Mexico

On November 14, the community welcomed Father Oswaldo Sanchez from Mexico. He made a presentation of the Assumption in his country, shared with us his experience as formator... and cooked for us delicious Mexican dishes. He announced the arrival of two Mexican postulants in the near future: after a few months of intensive English studies, they will start their novitiate here in the Philippines.



Father Oswaldo in a tricycle (left) and with some kids of Daan Tubo, a neighborhood squatter area (right)



■ East-Timor

From November 12 to 15, Ellis Luciano, a newly- accepted postulant, was chosen to represent the Philippines at an International Youth Conference in Dili, East Timor. The theme of the gathering was: *Youth, Identity and the Building of the Nation*.

“On November 12 - 15, 2008, I had the chance to represent our country in the International Youth Conference, held in Dili, East Timor, with the theme: Youth, Identity, and Nation-Building. It was an enriching experience interacting with young people all over the world (some participants came all the way from Kosovo, Guatemala, and Afghanistan), especially as we discussed different issues concerning the youth of today like national identity, violence, justice and peace, access to education, employment and health care, environment, food, security and globalization.

What made my stay meaningful, aside from the chance of building bridges of communication with my co-participants, was having the opportunity to see some of the social realities of East Timor. Like the Philippines, especially after 1986 EDSA Revolution and the restoration of democracy, East Timor, as a young nation, is very much focused on empowering its citizen towards nation-building with a particular concern on the role of the youth sector which is considered as the future of the nation. To empower young people, the East Timorese government puts emphasis on the importance of education by giving scholarships to deserving and promising students to study abroad including the Philippines. I was glad to meet six students who will come here in the Philippines on December for their studies. I am maintaining my contact with them and I am planning to invite them to visit our community at least once a month. Who knows, this simple gesture might open doors for the Assumptionist in East Timor. Again, like the Philippines, majority of the East Timorese population belongs to the Catholic Church. There is a need for the leaders to study English and go for further studies especially now that the Church in East Timor, like its government, is reaching out to the global community.” (Ellis)



Ellis with Damaris, a participant of the conference from Guatemala, and kids in the market of Dili

■ Internationality

We met with the Little Sisters of the Assumption during the visit of Sr. Micaela de Wilde, LSA General Councilor. They were happy to inform us that they are now in contact with some young women wishing to join the community and work with the poor.



■ Vietnam

The other new postulant, Glenn Galvez, writes about his first day in the community of Saigon. He will tell us more when he returns to Manila in mid-December.



“At first, I thought that this ‘international experience’ was some kind of a joke! I still remember the morning during breakfast, some time in September, when Fr. Gilles, Fr. Bernard and I had a conversation about the possibility of me being sent to an Assumptionist community in Jerusalem, Korea, Vietnam, etc. Upon hearing this, I told them without hesitation that I was available for this...any place and anytime. But still I took this as a joke. Then a few days later, Fr. Bernard approached me and asked me about my program for the second semester. He offered me two options: to study English, or to have an international experience in Vietnam. I decided grab the opportunity for having an international exposure. I felt that this experience will surely widen my knowledge of Assumption and deepen my passion for the mission.

I arrived in Vietnam on November 6 at around 2:00 am local time (Vietnam is one hour time zone away from the Philippines). Bro. John-Baptist Nguyen Ngoc Thang and the postulant, Anthony Nguyen Huu Tai fetched me at the airport. I rode with John-Baptist on his motorcycle while Anthony was carrying my luggage on the other motorcycle. We arrived at the community at around 3:00 am. I could not go to sleep, so I decided to arrange my belongings until I felt sleepy. So I slept late... missing Morning Prayer and breakfast. When I finally woke up, I talked with Anthony who was assigned as the cook for that day. Then I met Romain, a French volunteer, and then Father Pierre Khue, the Superior of the community and the other brothers of the Tran Van Ky community. At midday, I experienced my first prayer with the community. Of course, I could not understand the language and I kept reading in my English breviary. Father Khue welcomed me officially and introduced me to the community, which is composed of three priests, two brothers, and four postulants.

I found it hard to have a conversation with the Vietnamese brothers since their English is not that good. They speak their own language and some French. I did observe though that they were trying their best to communicate with me. So, at every meal I kept quiet, along with the French volunteer, since we had no clue on what they were talking about. I only talked when they asked me some questions. After I answered them, I am back to the silent mode. At lunch, I found their food very simple yet nutritious. It is a little different from that of the Philippines. I offered them my ‘passalubong’ (gift) as a token of my pleasure to be with them, a Filipino way to say: Thank you for receiving me so warmly.

After siesta, we had games like “sepak-takraw” in the Philippines: the rules are quite the same but they use a feather-toy instead of a rattan ball. It was fun playing together even if we could not understand each other. At around 6:00 pm, I had my first Mass with the community. Thank God! I had thought of bringing my breviary and “Living with Christ”, so I can follow the prayers and the readings at Mass. They usually chant most of the prayers (and you know that I cannot be of great help!). Then, we had a simple dinner after which everybody stayed around to help with the cleaning. After dinner, Father Pierre told me the schedule of the community activities. This was my first day in Vietnam.” (Glenn)



■ Thailand

Thomas Lop Vip went to Thailand for some “useful holidays”. He sent us a first glance at his Thai vacations, while kept prevented from coming back due to the closing of the airports (for an undetermined lapse of time) as a means of pressure to solve the political situation in the country:



A floating market near Bangkok (Thailand)

“My discovery of Asia continues. This November, I am discovering Thailand. I spent two weeks in Akha villages, an ethnic minority of the North, not so far from the border with Burma, with a group of international volunteers helping out the local population in various small jobs. I had long dreamt of working in a rice field: there it was! Thailand is much too tourist oriented to my taste, but I did enjoy touring myself, especially marvelling at their beautiful temples with detailed architecture and gold filled ornaments.

You certainly heard about the rallies of protest against the government which paralysed the airports of Bangkok. Well, there I was in the middle of it all as my return flight to Manila was scheduled that very night when the rallies broke out. Finally, after five days of being stranded in Bangkok, I could ride a convoy of buses towards a military airport, escorted by the police mind you...

The Religious of the Assumption of Bangkok welcomed me upon my arrival and a few days towards the end of my stay: they were the perfect bridge between the Philippines and Thailand. I am so grateful for their hospitality.

Apart from excursions in the countryside, various cultural festivals, swimming under the water falls, vigorous Thai massages and service to the population of Akha villages, the most important aspect of my travelling has been to discover how much I missed the Philippines! With a certain distance and detachment, I was able to appreciate the great opportunity that has been given to me to be immersed in a squatter area of Manila. So much so that I will be very happy to return to Daan Tubo and mix with the families that I have come to know and appreciate there..

In short, these were holidays which hit their goal: to rest a little in order to come back re-energized with the desire to enter even deeper in my Filipino experience!”(Thomas)

6. Events

Among the many events that had an impression on the community:

- The visit of Brother Ghislain from Taizé: he came to the Philippines to present the up-coming Pilgrimage of Trust, a youth gathering scheduled for February 2010 in Manila.
- The visit of Mgr. Eugene Nugent, Vatican chargé in Hong Kong: he wanted to know more about our experience of welcoming Chinese priests as guests to our community and other future projects. He saw this initiative as a great service to the Church in China.
- The accidental death of Father Dominguo Moraleda (66), director of the Institute for Consecrated Life in Asia (ICLA): he always could find time to receive us warmly and generously. He gave us wise advice and supported our many projects at the service of the Church in Asia, particularly the Church in China.



■ **Toward Christmass**

As you may know, the Christmas atmosphere is already present in the streets of Manila soon after November 2. The community is also getting ready for Christmas. An Advent recollection was facilitated by Father Richard Brunelle at the Novitiate, on November 30.

Coming soon on our Christmas program are celebrations with our parish, in schools, at the juvenile prison, in Daan Tubo, at the universities and language school where members of the community are studying. Of course, our very own Christmas party will close the festivities.

On Sunday, December 7th, a Marian procession is organized at the cathedral of Intramuros with 90 *carrozas* decorated with flowers, carrying as many statues or venerated images of the Blessed Mother. Nine days before Christmas, people will be invited to the *Aguinaldo Masses* before daybreak, in honour of the Virgin Mary.

The community will hold its Christmas celebration on December 14, the day before the departure of our postulants and candidates for their Christmas holidays with their families. The house will be quiet until the first days of January... except for the kids ringing at our door for a few pennies or candies, and others carolling...

On December 1st, our editor of the *Chronicles*, Father Bernard, has left for America. He will participate in the Council of the Province meeting, a gathering of the Formators and encounters with the brothers. Then he will spend two months in Europe: he will celebrate Christmas with his family and take some holidays before touring friends and benefactors for fund raising in support of our Filipino mission projects and the formation of our seminarians.

If you want to support these initiatives and our programs of formation, send your contribution to our Development Office (see our website www.assumptionists.ph under “Help us to help”)

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7. Press Review

■ **An impeachment complaint against the President dismissed.**

An impeachment complaint against President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, the fourth in four years, was dismissed by her allies in the Philippine Congress on Wednesday November 26, 2008, by a vote of 42 to 8.

■ **Road accidents**, according to the Department of Health, have become the fourth leading cause of deaths in the Philippines.



■ **The Philippines, a new destination for health tourism.**

92,000 tourists from the United Arab Emirates have landed in the Philippines for health care while 60,000 went to Thailand (that is before the recent popular uprising in Bangkok at the end of November 2008).

■ **The Philippines, second best country for call centers, after India.**

The Philippines is the second best country for banks and American or European multinational businesses to process their administration. In 2008, this activity has risen by 35% to 40%, for a net revenue of 7 Billion dollars. It is possible that there will be one million jobs in that sector by 2010.

■ **Another assassination of a Filipino journalist.**

Aristide Padrigao is the 60th journalist to be assassinated in the Philippines since President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo took office in 2001. He was killed by gunmen in Cagayan de Oro in front of the school where he was taking his 7 year old daughter. Two men on a motorcycle were seen leaving the site of the crime. The journalist was researching on illegal activities of prominent local politicians who had threatened to kill him. Six journalists have been killed in 2008, 120 all together since the ousting of Ferdinand Marcos, in 1986.

■ **The novel “Illustrado” by Filipino author Miguel Syjuco won a major Asian literary prize.**

The story is a fictional account of a young Filipino investigating the life of his mentor Chrispin Salvador, a real-life writer and thinker, after the man’s death. It examines the disappearance of Salvador’s manuscript about the corruption behind rich Filipino families.

■ **A few figures**

- Between January 2007 and November 2008, the price of food has risen by 17%
- 90, 3% of Filipino between 16 and 64 use internet, coming right after South Korea (92, 12%). 83, 1% are enrolled in a network like Friendster or Facebook.

December 1st, 2008
Manila - Philippines



*Merry Christmas - Maligayang Pasko
Happy New Year 2009*

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