



Chronicles from Manila n° 10

January - March 2009

Visit our website: www.assumptionists.ph

Summary

This first for the year 2009, this issue of the Chronicles reviews the following: our Christmas celebrations, formation as the focus of the beginning of the year, vocation ministry, university courses given their first marks, and our many interesting visitors. The usual press review comes as a closing.

End of the year celebrations	p'1
A new year	p'4
Press review	p'10

1. End of the year celebrations

The author of the Chronicles returned to Manila after spending two months abroad. Once he was updated with the life of the community, classified various files and answered some pending letters, he resumed his writing of the Chronicles which would hopefully be published on a regular basis.

Entrance into Postulancy of Glenn and Ellis

On Saturday December 12, Glenn Galvez and Ellis Luciano started their Postulancy. The latter describes the celebration in these terms:

"Last December 12, 2008, feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Glenn and I were accepted to the Postulancy program of our congregation. Postulancy is a period for us to deepen our faith in Jesus Christ, to give ourselves ample time to discern our vocation, and an opportunity to clarify our religious motivations. Our acceptance rites began with the celebration of the Holy Eucharist presided by Fr. Gilles Blouin. In the mass, we were given the Assumptionist pin (cross) and the New Testament to guide us in following Jesus, our Divine Master, and help us grow in intimacy with Him. Our acceptance rite was witnessed by our brothers in the community, family and friends. After the Mass, a meal was shared by all who came to celebrate this moment with us. My acceptance to the Postulancy has inspired me to persevere in my vocation. For me it is an opportunity to go deeper not only in my relationship with Jesus Christ but with my brothers in the community as well; this period is also a time for me to know more about our congregation especially its history, charism, spirituality, and our Father Founder, Emmanuel d'Alzon." (Ellis)



During their Postulancy entrance, Brother Alex gives a pin to Ellis; Glenn is reading the daily reading at mass.



As for Glenn, he was just coming back from an exposure in our community in Saigon, Vietnam. We let him describe by himself his apostolate in the orphanage of Cho Lac Quang.

“The orphanage is around 30-45 minutes away from Tran Van Ky where the community lives. I started teaching English there on November 11. At first, I was excited in meeting my pupils, thinking that they were the orphans themselves. But they were rather those who were managing the two orphanage houses, one for the boys and one for the girls. In fact, my students were older than me and I tried to hide my nervousness while teaching them Basic English Lessons. The main problem was to be understood by those who had no knowledge of English; I was helped by those who understood some English so they could translate a few words in Vietnamese. In one month only, they learned basic conversation skills that I hope they will remember if they continue to practice the language. For that reason, I prepared for them some handouts with sentence construction and vocabulary, wishing that they will keep in their heart what they have learned.” (Glenn)

Christmas in community

Christmas ornaments were all over Manila soon after November 2: once the dead remembered, life could fill the streets again. The community was also getting ready for the Christmas celebrations; an Advent recollection for all was preached by Fr. Richard Brunelle at the Novitiate in Antipolo on November 30.

The community had its Christmas celebration on... December 14 (!), since postulants and candidates were leaving for their families on the next day. It was a great moment of deep sharing, each member pointing out a significant event in his life during the last year. Earlier in the day, there was an anticipated celebration of Christmas at the juvenile prison of Molave. Jay Lituañas, one of our candidates, is a regular volunteer in the facility. He and others in the community (Adveniat and Pavel) participated in the event. He reports:



“It's 8:30 in the morning of December 14, 2008. The candidates and the postulants as well got their hands full preparing for an important event. The postulants went to get the food (i.e., a variety of rice noodles cooked with some vegetables and shredded chicken) from Daang Tubo, an informal settlement where some brothers conduct catechism classes. The candidates proceeded early to Molave Youth Rehabilitation Center at the back of Quezon City Hall bringing with them loaves of bread, packs of powdered orange juice, chocolate bars, candies and the mass kit. At a little past 9 in the morning, more than a hundred young people (also known as children-in-conflict with the law) gathered in the multi-purpose hall of Molave Center for the Eucharistic celebration which an Italian Xavieran missionary presided over. The postulants, candidates, brothers and some of the Center's guardians also attended the mass which was in Filipino.

Parlor games were initiated and the youth had a good time participating in them. Some showed off their talents by singing home-grown love songs. The winners were awarded chocolate bars or candies. Thereafter, the group feasted on rice noodles paired with bread and orange juice. There was enough food for everyone including the rest of Molave's staff and those young people who were not allowed to go out of their cells due to some minor violations. The brothers left Molave at half past 11 in the morning. Christmas came early to Molave's youth. The children deeply appreciated the activity with one exclaiming, "Thank you brother. You brought happiness to our hearts by being with us, even for a moment, during this Christmas season!" Thanks too for the generous people who donated for the food, the candies, chocolate bars and the drinks.” (Jay)



After the departure of the postulants and candidates, more Christmas parties were on the program for the religious: with the parish, in the schools of the sisters, at Daan Tubo (our neighbouring squatter area), in the universities and Language Centers where some of our brothers study...

Nine days before Christmas, the tradition here is that there are 9 early morning masses (Aguinaldo Masses) to honour the Blessed Mother. These days are also indicated by children continuously ringing the door bell, singing carols, and asking for candies (or a couple of pennies, perhaps). On Christmas Eve, at 4:00 pm, the French



community of Manila was gathered in the Assumption-San Lorenzo convent chapel for its anticipated Christmas Mass. Many children and visitors from abroad were present during this joyful celebration.

It has been a tradition now that our community joins the Religious of the Assumption, along with the Little Sisters of the Assumption for the First Vespers of Christmas followed by a light dinner. The Midnight Mass (at 9:00 pm really!) is the highlight of the celebration where all religious of the Assumption family renew their religious commitment. After the Mass, a *Noche Buena* is offered, a nice buffet coupled with the Assumptionists' treat of French wine and cheese.

On Christmas Day, the community takes part in the parish solemn celebration of the Mass and then gathers around a fine turkey meal. In the early afternoon, the Filipino brothers leave for their families until after New Year. So, the house goes quiet for a week with only a few people left... On December 26, on the Feast of Saint Stephen, Fr. Chuvi and Fr. Gilles, along with the brothers of the Novitiate, participated in the celebration at the Little Sisters of the Assumption in honour of their founder, Fr. Etienne Pernet. This was held in Malibay, a poor sector of Manila where the sisters live and work.

■ Christmas at Daan Tubo

We have maintained our apostolate in Daan Tubo, a squatter area nearby: Bro. Alex Castro, the postulants and the candidates conduct catechism classes every weekend, Fr. Chuvi also presides three Eucharistic celebrations a month and our French volunteer, Thomas Lop Vip, continues his weekly immersion into various families.



*Dances after the kitchen soup in
Daan Tubo*



*An auscultation during the medical
mission*

Aside from our prudent presence in that community and the dialogue that we would like to deepen with its members, the community has initiated some minor innovations these months. On the occasion of Thomas' birthday, a soup was offered to some 150 children. Then there was a Mass followed by a program of songs and dances. This time it was decided to forego with the gift distribution so as to avoid fostering a dole-out mentality that might result from it. Instead, a medical mission was organized with the help of the parish and the Rotary Club. Because only a few doctors showed up and since there was a limited supply of free medicines, the activity did not turn out to be successful as expected. It was originally intended to benefit a hundred persons but only a small number of families from the Daan Tubo community were able to avail of the initiative. This is a first try; maybe we will be more successful next time.



■ Christmas Holidays for Fr. Bernard

During this time, Fr. Bernard Holzer was celebrating Christmas with his family; the last one was fifteen years. He left Manila on December 1st for Boston (USA) where he found snow (of course), unknown in the last three years of his stay here in the Philippines. He participated in the Council of the Province, the Provincial Council and a meeting of the Formators. From there, he went to Paris for various commitments, flew to Rome before joining his family in Alsace, in Germany and in the Southern part of France.

2. A new year

There was quiet at the beginning of the New Year. However, when classes resumed everybody was back in action.

■ Enlarging the community

On January 14, two Mexican postulants arrived and joined the community at Adveniat: they are coming for their novitiate in the Philippines. They are Jose Cervantes Gonzales (called Pepe), 23 years old, and Gilberto Amador Hernandez, 24 years old as well. Aside from discovering the country and its culture, they will also enhance their knowledge of English until the Holy Week.

This is how Gilberto introduces himself:



“He was born in Omealca, Veracruz, Mexico on October 10, 1985. He is the fourth among the five children of Pablo (+) and Maria de los Angeles. He has 6 nephews and 1 Niece. He is 23 years old. He finished his high school in Universidad Intercontinental in Mexico City. He studied Technical Career in Ciencias de las Comunicaciones. He joined the Assumptionist community in Mexico in 2004. And since then he was involved with different ministries of the congregation, like going to the missions among the indigenous people in his state and teaching catechism to the children, youth, and adults. In his life, he discovered Jesus Christ in his apostolic works and in the people whom he had the opportunity to serve and he sees Jesus Christ present in the Eucharist and in his community, the Augustinians of the Assumption. As of the moment, he is here in the Philippines for his novitiate. He likes the arts and he paints in his free time.” (Gilberto)

Pepe shares his first impressions:



“I arrived in the Philippines at midnight of January 17, 2009. The neighbours were already sleeping when I arrived in the community and in Adveniat House. I started knowing my brothers and integrating myself with them. This had been a period of adjustment and sharing with different persons and cultures. At present, I am studying English because I have to improve my communication skills to start the novitiate in April. The Philippines is a beautiful place. People love to celebrate. For instance, I already witnessed two birthday celebrations of our brothers, one from Adveniat and the other from Pavel House. Also, I celebrated the Chinese New Year with the community and some guests. It is very interesting because I can see how the Chinese culture has influenced Philippine food and traditions. We were with Bro. Alex in Pampanga and there we met his family. It is a nice place. I found there a town named Mexico. The Philippines has different means of transportation. I use the tricycle and the jeepney most of the time in going to school. Sometimes I also take the Light Railway Transit (the metro). When I was processing my documents for my stay here in the Philippines, I was able to visit Intramuros, the historical part of the country. This is a time for me to grow personally, culturally, and spiritually.” (Pepe)



Four days later, on January 18, directly from Colombia via New York and Seoul, Fr. Juan Carlos Giraldo Osorio (39) arrived in the Philippines. He was born 38 years ago in Colombia to a traditional family in the Coffee Region of the country, Manizales. He is the third of the four children of Guillermo and Esneda. After his studies at the Universidad Pedagogica Nacional in Bogota (Colombia), he worked as a teacher in primary and secondary school. He joined the Assumptionist community in Bogota in 2000, and entered the novitiate in Chile. He had his first profession of vows in 2003. He finished his philosophical studies at the Universidad Santo Tomas, and Theology at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (a Jesuit institution). He was ordained a priest on March 29, 2008. As a priest he worked in La Asuncion de Nuestra Senora Parish in Bogota and helped in the Universidad Minuto de Dios. He was assigned in the Philippines to assist in the formation

Here are his first impressions from the Philippines:

“After one month here in the Philippines, I went with Ellis, one of our postulants, to the Province of Isabela. There with four other people; we did a campaign against the cluster bombs. The trip which lasted eight hours opened my knowledge to the geographical and cultural landscape of some places like Bulacan, Nueva Ecija and Nueva Vizcaya. Also the nostalgia was part of the trip, because it reminded me of the Colombian landscape, the variety of colors and the hidden treasures in the way of life of the people. We stayed in the Province of Isabela, specifically in the University of La Salette in Santiago City. I had the opportunity to celebrate mass with the students and teachers of the university.



With some of them, we were able to visit a couple of interesting places, like the Hydroelectric Plant, and the Chapel of Transfiguration. We decided to visit the Banaue-Ifugao region, where the world-famous Rice Terraces are located. On our way there, we passed by the town of Lagawe, where we had our stop in the Parish of Saint Mary Magdalene. When the Parish Priest learned that I was from Colombia, a coffee country, he told me about the coffee projects in his community. After our experience in Banaue, we had the chance to visit the La Salette of Aurora, a school in the northern part of Isabela. There, we celebrated the Eucharist. In the afternoon we participated with the community in the Stations of the Cross. It was a great opportunity, in this Lenten season, to reflect on the passion of Jesus. On Saturday, with a group of teachers, we were gathered in a workshop about peace, dialogue and conflict. The workshop helped us to know our peace attitudes and how we can transform our vital spaces in peaceful places. On Sunday, before going back to Manila, we celebrated mass in Santa Maria Parish, located in Alfonso Lista-Ifugao. There we shared the Gospel of the Transfiguration. All these beautiful experiences have transfigured my heart and have prepared it to be more attentive to the voice of the Lord in this adventure in the mission. Like Peter I said: "Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents", but the Lord has prepared the way to come down from the mountain and return to Adveniat House. (Juan Carlos)

■ Studies and formation

In February, while the students were busy with their studies, two of our postulants, Ellis Luciano and Glenn Galvez went to an immersion in their *Sojourn* formation program. Ellis was sent to the Aeta community in Zambales while Glenn was assigned to a group of poor fishermen in Bantagas. Along with eight other postulants, Glenn lived in a family in Calatagan (Batangas), discovering the rough reality of these fishermen experience: social injustice, land grabbing, poverty and extra-judicial killings. Let him describe his experience, which has marked him significantly, has taught many valuable lessons in life, and has influenced greatly his prayers.

“For ten days, our immersion was peaceful. We experienced the lifestyle of our host family. We learned how to catch fish. Then we got into sharing their problems. Wilfredo “Ka Willy” Gonzales, a local settler in Barangay Bukal, was one of our facilitators. He is an active member of “Haligi ng Batanguenong Anak Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas” (PAMALAKAYA) which deals with the rights and land redistribution of some 2000 hectares belonging to a wealthy family for the benefit of farmers and fishermen of ten villages along the coast. We had a good time with him and learned much from him. I still remember serving his meal on the last night which ended up to be his last supper. On Saturday morning of February 7, around 6:00 am, Ka Willy was driving his truck to fetch us in Barangay Hukay together with Noli de Castro, a village mate who hitched a ride with him. They were both shot dead. When we heard the news about what had happened, we went immediately to the place where the crime happened. All of us were shocked and terrified by the incident. We had mixed emotions of fear, hatred, confusion and pity at what had happened. We did not know who was behind that brutal murder of Ka Willy and Noli Boy because there were many angles to the assassination. According to the information that we gathered, these were the possible reasons why he was shot: he was involved in fighting for the distribution of Ayala lands to the farmers and the fishermen; his house is built on the property that a certain member of the Armed Forces of the Philippines wants for himself, which was contrary to the decision of the Supreme Court in favour of Ka Willy; and finally, he is involved in supporting the rights of marginalized people such as vendors, peasants and farmers.





I began to think: is this the prize for fighting for the rights of the marginalized people? Do I still want to continue my advocacy for the rights of the oppressed? What is that telling me about my desire to become a religious? Should I continue on my journey? Why is this happening? These were the questions I had after my exposure. After a serious meditation, a time of prayer and dialogue with someone, I began to face these questions courageously. In this particular instance, I see persons who can only think of their own interest, thirsty for power, fame and wealth, and full of greed. As a resolution, I would like want to continue my advocacy for the rights of the oppressed.

I want to continue with my vocation to religious life; it will be a powerful means to be a voice for them and to do my best to bring the gospel values to those who oppress them. When I become a priest someday, I could be the voice of the marginalized people that would hopefully melt the hearts of these rich people so as to become more compassionate of the plight of our less fortunate brothers and sisters. I draw inspiration from Jesus Christ who was crucified and was put to death because of His witness to the truth and His love for us all. I remember the motto of my school in Ateneo de Cagayan: "Veritas Liberabit Vos" (the truth will set you free). The truth is painful to accept most of the time. I am convinced that there is life after death and that the justice and truth that seem elusive in this life will find their full realization in the next. I put everything in God's hand. May God have mercy on us all." (Glenn)



■ Asian New Year

On January 26, the community celebrated the Asian New Year. A Mass was celebrated by the two Chinese guest priests; four Chinese sisters were also in attendance. They had helped Fr. Paul prepare a typical and delicious Chinese meal. They were all given the traditional good luck red envelopes.

■ Vocation Ministry

Before Christmas, Fr. Gilles went to Cagayan de Oro, the great island in the South of the Philippines archipelago, for a visit to the families of our candidates and postulants who come from the area: Glenn, Rowell, Jay, Christopher and Eugene. On January 25, six contacts from Metro Manila gathered at Adveniat House for our first encounter of 2009: Brian, Roy, Rex and Darwin, along with two Chinese, Paul Lee and Paul Shu. It ended up with the noon meal. The residents of Pavel House took part in an early procession of the Santo Niño in our parish and then went out on an excursion and picnic at the Manila Zoo. At the end of February, Fr. Gilles spent a week visiting our contacts in the Visayas (the islands of the center of the archipelago), namely in the provinces of Cebu, Iloilo and Antique.

■ Welcoming as a mission



Since we came to Adveniat House, the community has taken the mission of welcoming small groups of religious looking for a quiet place and environment-friendly space in the polluted capital; there are also parish related groups or university student associations that made use of our facilities. Others like our garden and they organized parties there. During the Christmas holidays, some children of the poor neighbourhood made use of our swimming pool. From time to time, some people ask to spend a week-long spiritual retreat or simply to rest in our house. Thus, Sister Alisi, a Little Sister of the Assumption, came for a week prior to her departure for France where she is having a formation as preparation for her final profession.



A significant group of young Christian leaders used our facilities on three separate occasions. Bro. Alex Castro, involved in the campus ministry at Far Eastern University (FEU), a secular and private university, reports about these gatherings.

“Three significant CYA (Christ's Youth in Action - a inter university Catholic youth organization of nationwide scope) gatherings were held at Adveniat last January and February 2009. The first two gatherings were focused on their annual leadership sessions for their CYA University student leaders. About 120 youth leaders from 5 big universities in Metro Manila participated in the leadership sessions. The sessions were focused on the theme "The Love of God impels us", with topics and workshops on how they could better evangelize their fellow students. The third gathering was what they called "a different Valentine's party". This fun-filled gathering of praise, sharing, games, and other group interactions was attended by about 200 CYA members from 10 big universities around Metro Manila. What I saw as something significant about these gatherings is that we become known little by little by different groups specifically from the youth groups, which could serve as openings to future ministry and apostolate with them either on campus ministry and/or chaplaincy work in universities.” (Sœur Alisi)

Family reunion



Fr. Gilles received family members during the month of February: for two weeks, his younger brother Rock and his two sons Alexandre and Charles, for a few months his other brother François, on a sabbatical from his school work. Just imagine François leaving Québec at minus 30 and landing in Manila at plus 30 degrees, a 60 degrees difference easier to take this way... Together with Gilles, they were able to tour the island of Bohol, the rice terraces of Banaue (classified as a world treasure), the volcano of Tahal in Tagaytay and many corners of Manila, poor and rich alike. During his stay with us, Rock was celebrating his 50th birthday: a surprise garden party was organized in our garden and a local band played popular songs from his teen years to everybody's delight. As for François, he proves to be a Jack-of-all-trail that we will have a hard time to see go.

During that period, Fr. Bernard was continuing his visit around Europe visiting various Assumptionist communities and updating them about our mission in the Philippines and in Asia. He also met with numerous friends and organizations in quest of financial support for the activities of our mission.

« Asian Mission » for a priest from Alsace

Fr. Bernard Holzer is an Assumptionist priest born in Alsace (Eastern France). He is presently the local Superior of a newly founded community in the Philippines. His own project and that of his Assumptionist community is, in the long run, to help the Catholic Church in China.

It has been three years that Bernard Holzer is in Manila. While travelling through Europe this winter, this former General Secretary of the CCFD (Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development) will be speaking tonight in Strasbourg about his mission in the Philippines.

It is during the 12 years that Bernard Holzer was General Counsellor of his congregation in Rome, that the Assumptionists have decided to launch a new mission in Asia. A first community was opened in South Korea some 15 years ago and more recently it was in the Philippines, where the Religious of the Assumption are well established for over a century, and at the same time in Vietnam. So the new foundation in Manila was opened with two other Assumptionist priests and three Filipino brothers who had started their formation in the USA.



The “Asian Roma”

“When we came to see Cardinal Gaudencio Rozales, he told us that he expected three things from us: formation, a ministry with the poor and a support to the larger Church in Asia. Formation is the uttermost activity of the Church in Manila since it is like the mother-Church for all of Asia. Indeed, the Pontifical University of Santo Tomas run by the Dominicans will celebrate its 450th foundation anniversary.

Now today, this new foundation can count on six priests of various nationalities, three Filipino brothers, two novices and four postulants; there are also in the community two Chinese priests and a French volunteer. They are dreaming about an “Asian House” with 22 bedrooms in order to help for the formation of Chinese Christian leaders. This dream has a cost: 250,000 euros! “When I come back to Europe, like any other missionary, I come as a beggar!” says Bernard Holzer, smiling. (1)

The Assumption community has not forgotten the other mission that the Cardinal had entrusted to them: after a typhoon, recently, they helped rebuild 75 houses that had been swept away. “We have a ministry also towards street children, teenagers in a juvenile prison and in a squatter area nearby”. Jacques Fortier

On Friday January 23, Bernard Holzer will give a talk at the Bernanos Center in Strasbourg (30 Marechal-Juin) at 8:00 pm: “Missionary in Asia: an opportunity, a discovery and a challenge”.

(1) Procure missionnaire, 79 Denfert-Rochereau Avenue 75014 Paris (with the mention Asia Project) Tax deduction receipt upon request.

He was back in Manila on February 10 for only two days, since he had to leave for Vietnam where he attended the 3rd Commission on Asia meeting.

Visit of our Provincial Superior

Right after his meeting in Vietnam, our Provincial, Fr. Marcel Poirier, came to spend a week in Manila visiting our communities. He had a tight schedule, meeting with each individual religious, novices, postulants and candidates. He met separately with the Formators and the Superiors. Through his visits he gains a better perspective of the mission here in the Philippines, which help him in taking significant actions with his Council for the good of our mission in this country.

Chinese input

At the beginning of March, the community welcomed two priests from the largest Catholic parish of Begjin; they were coming on vacations in order to discover the Philippines, its culture and religious inheritance. During their stay with us, we were able to receive Bishop Paul Leopoldo Jaucian, of the Diocese of Abra, who is in charge of the Chinese Catholic community in the Philippines. He presided Mass in English and Chinese, with four Chinese priests and a Chinese sister, friend of our community in attendance. He was very enthusiastic about our Asian House project and pledged his support. In order to be able to welcome more candidates to religious life, we have built six additional bedrooms in the former garage at the back of our house. In a way, the Asian House is already off the ground...



Chinese party and Eucharist



“Little Asian House”

The same week, Bro. Didier Remiot from Paris visited with his successor as Asia-Bayard manager, Bruno François Leitao. He will supervise the development of Bayard in the Philippines.



■ **On the Road to Easter**

The Lenten season, a time of preparation for Easter, is not only for repentance but also a time of final exams at the universities. We choose in community two means of preparing ourselves for Easter: first, we have replaced the traditional Friday night Happy Hour by a sharing on the Gospel of the next Sunday inspired by the commentaries of Saint Augustine; second, our Saturday night movie was sacrificed to parlour games and other community building activities. In a sense, it was a decision to spend more time with God and with the brothers.

■ **Graduation for Bro. Alex Castro... and holidays for all**

Bro. Alex Castro was the first to open the line of the end of the year great success: he completed his baccalaureate degree in Theology with a “cum laude” mention. According to a formal tradition, this took place on Saturday March 21 at Santo Tomas University and was followed by a joyful dinner in our garden. His extended family travelled all the way from Pampanga, bringing with them local delicacies.

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”)

For Europe

In euros: Assumption, 79 Avenue Denfert-Rochereau 75014 PARIS France

For North America

In Canadian dollars: Montmartre Canadien - 1679, Chemin Saint-Louis - QUEBEC G1S 1G5 - Canada.

In American dollars: Assumption Guild - 330 Market Street - BRIGHTON, MA 02135 - USA

Please send your gift with the order “Procure Missionnaire de l’Assomption – Philippines” (Paris), “Montmartre Canadien – Philippines” (Quebec) or “Assumption Guild – Philippines” (Brighton, USA).

You can ask for a tax exemption/deductible receipt for your gift.

For the Philippines

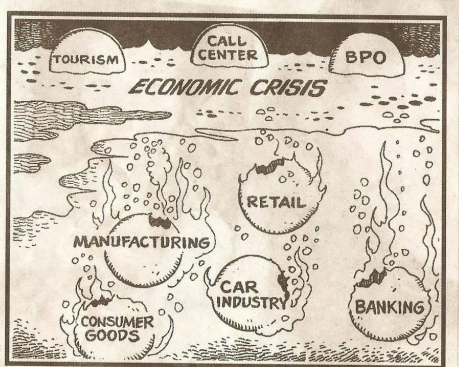
In Pesos, Augustinians of the Assumption 686-100-197-9 Bank of the Philippine Islands - Katipunan Branch - Loyola Heights - QUEZON CITY - Philippines



3. Press Review

■ Economic and social situation

The Philippine economy, in some ways protected from the contagion of the global crisis because it is not yet fully integrated into the world economy. It is expected to bear the full brunt of the crisis only later this year. The news from the export front, however, is downright chilling. Exports last January fell a disorienting 41 percent. This is the second straight 40-percent year-to-year drop; December 2008 exports were down 40.4 percent from December 2007. The global economic slowdown brought worse news, the National Statistics Office said. Electronics, which account for over half of the country's exports, fell 48.4 percent versus a year ago - to its lowest level in 11 years.



Philippines Daily Inquirer. March 17, 2009.

- First effects of the crisis

The number of drug users sharply dropped last year when companies began to downsize and personal funds dried up as the global economic crisis hit home, officials of the Dangerous Drugs Board said on March 19 : “The number of drug users has drop significantly, and so has the number of buyers”.

- Tourism in progress

3.139.422 tourists visited the Philippines in 2008. The tourism industry boasts of providing 3.25 million jobs. That means 9,7% of the country's employees.

- Health for all?

On March 19, the St. Luke Medical Center unveiled its latest acquisition, à Philips Brilliance 256-slice CT scanner, the world's most advanced CT scanner for cardiac patients. In the whole of Southeast Asia, only St. Luke's and the Bangkok Hospital in Thailand have the scanner.

- No to nuke

Balanga Bishop Socrates Villegas has called on the residents of Bataan and neighbouring provinces to block a bill that seeks to reopen the Bataan Power Plant during a Mass at the St. Joseph Cathedral in Balanga. The power plant was built during the administration of the late strongman Ferdinand Marcos but was later mothballed because of safety concerns and corruption issues.

■ Political situation

- Conjugal dictatorship

In a reflection for the March 19 Feast of St. Joseph, patron Saint of the Diocese of Balanga (Bataan), Bishop Socrates Villegas said corruption in the Arroyo administration has reached “*an alarming state*” that it prompted comparison to the Marcos regime.

“Thirty years ago we coined the term “conjugal dictatorship, referring to the martial law President (Ferdinand Marcos) and his wife (Imelda Marcos). He noted that being “family-based” was “the singular trademark” of graft and corruption in the Philippines. “The shadow of corruption perennially haunts the President and her husband.... We have deteriorated. We have turned from bad to worse. The glaring proof that corruption has reached an alarming state in our country is that families are no longer just corruptible, but have become blatantly corrupt and corrupting”.



- Radioman killed in Mindanao and another attacked

Two masked men shot dead on February 24 a radioman while he was on his way to his daily talk show. Ernie Rollin, 52, is the second radio broadcaster murdered this year in the Philippines, the 63rd Filipino journalist killed since President Macapagal-Arroyo took office in January 2001. The killing may be related to Rollin's morning talk show, which the victim had hosted for the past eight years and which discussed corruption and crime.

Less than two weeks after, another journalist, Nilo Labares, was attacked in Northern Mindanao. He was chief reporter of Radio Mindanao Network's CX-CC. The doctors had to remove one of his kidneys, which a bullet damaged. He had been attacking the operators of video karera and illegal cockfighting in the city.

- Bad news for the peace process

Beginning of March, Philippine communist rebels blamed government forces for the killing of a guerilla leader's daughter, saying her death made a resumption of peace talks impossible. The body of Revelyn Pitao, 20, was found in an irrigation canal in the Southern Philippines with three wounds to her chest on March 5, a day after she was abducted in Davao City.

Philippine marines clashed Monday March 16 with Abu Sayyaf militants holding three Red Cross workers on Southern Jolo Island, possibly wounding a key rebel commander.

■ **International Relations**

- China urged to stick to accord on islands

China protested a new Philippine law asserting sovereignty over parts of the Spratly Islands and Scarborough Shoal. China claims it "has indisputable sovereignty" over the territory and so it considers the Philippine declaration as "illegal and invalid".

- In Latin America, Brazil had become the second trading partner of the Philippines.

March 30, 2009
Manila - Philippines

Addresses of our two communities

Adveniat House
17, C. Salvdor Street
Loyola Heights
1108 QUEZON CITY
Philippines

Emmanuel d'Alzon Assumptionist Noviciate
Assumption Antipolo
Sumulong Highway
1870 ANTIPOLO
Philippines

www.assumptionists.ph

