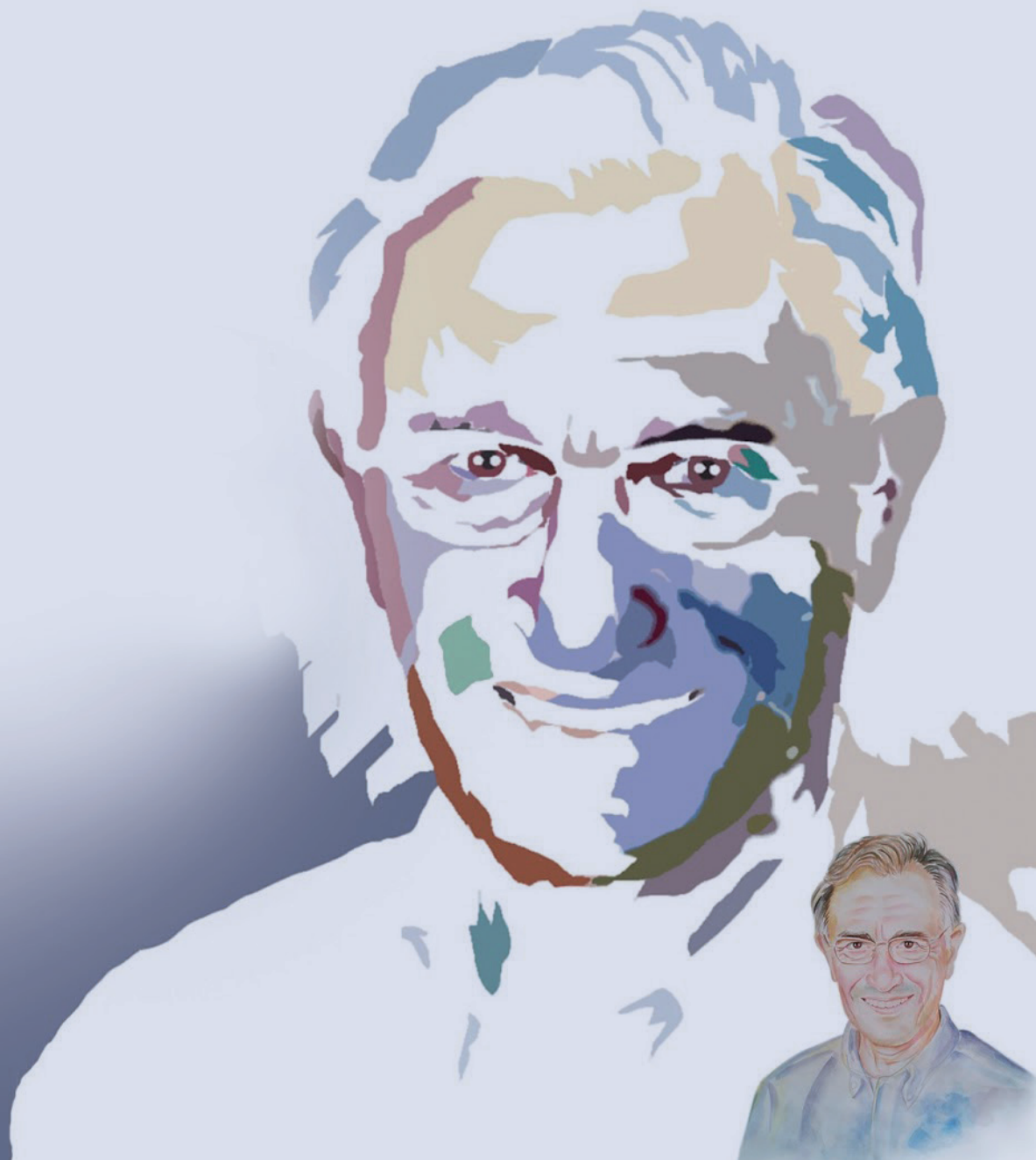


Alberto Rossa, CMF

SERVANT OF THE WORD



Editor's Note



St. Antony Mary Claret, the Founding Father of the Claretian Missionaries after whom we are named, said our work was to “proclaim the Gospel through all possible means.” Here, we are celebrating the life of a Missionary who, for over 60 years, has dedicated his life to just that—and 50 of those years as a priest.

We, the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, more popularly known as Claretians, are servants of the Word as our special charism in the Church, which aptly describes Father Alberto Santiago Rossa, who has spent all his life spreading the Word of God to millions of people.

For many years, I used to tell Father Alberto that he should write his autobiography. His answer would usually be, “Yes, I am writing my journal twice a day without fail.” Those journals contain stories, photos and details of his everyday life and events relating to his ministry and the Claretian community. Reading them would be no easy job, though, because now they consist of thousands of pages. But his Sacerdotal Golden Jubilee has given us an excellent occasion to produce a concise summary of the life and mission of “Largo,” or the “Tall One,” as his Spanish confreres call him.

Since July 2009, I have been fortunate to be with Father Alberto in the same community in Macau and Hong Kong. For young Missionaries, new to the mission like me from that time, he has been a true source of wisdom and inspiration. Since the first day I met him, he has continued to amaze me and has been an unforgettable character to anyone who has met him.

Our community house in Macau is on the sixth floor. Father Alberto would bring our visitors to the lift as they said goodbye. But when the visitors reached the ground floor and as the lift door opened, they would be surprised to see Father Alberto waiting for them and saying goodbye again. He would run down the stairs and beat the lift to the ground floor, just to see the smile on the faces of our visitors.

When the diocese of Hong Kong assigned Claretian Missionaries to Epiphany parish in Mui Wo in 2015, Father Alberto moved from Macau to Hong Kong. From the initial days of our work in the parish, he had a clear vision of the project ahead: the parish was small, parishioners were few, but that shouldn't restrict our missionary outreach.

He was instrumental in initiating Bible study sessions and making them available online through blogs, webpages and YouTube channels. In addition, in the past six years as an assistant parish priest, he has spent thousands of hours translating the Bible classes and commentaries of the Italian biblical scholar Father Fernando Armellini into Spanish and English. All these commentaries are now available also in traditional and simplified Chinese.

He spent well over 15 hours at his desk every day translating and recording the voiceovers for the commentaries on the Sunday liturgy. The feedback, whether positive or negative, on this tedious work, had been very minimal, and I thought he was wasting his time. It was frustrating. But he had two arguments for carrying on with this project. First, "I do it for myself, and I benefit a lot from this," he would repeat. At 76, after 50 years of life as a priest, he is still learning the Bible! The second argument was that the work was not meant for today. Maybe future generations will benefit from it. His YouTube channel now has over a thousand videos, and one can listen to the commentaries in Italian, English, Spanish, and Chinese.

It is the kind of hard work and dedication we can expect from a Missionary priest whose only possessions are a few clothes and a laptop. Pope Francis has been decrying the throw-away culture of the modern world. Perhaps he hasn't learned about Father Alberto! If only his clothes could speak, they would be telling stories of not less than two decades of wear and tear with him.

Although he has little understanding of the Chinese language, the contributions of Father Alberto to the Chinese-speaking faithful can be said to be tremendous. It was his initiative to identify and coordinate qualified people with knowledge of the Bible and fluency in the Chinese language for the *Daily Gospel* project – the yearly booklet with daily Gospel readings and reflections in traditional and simplified Chinese. Today, fourteen years later, the Chinese Daily Gospel continue to be in tens of thousands of copies.

A new translation of the Bible into modern Chinese has been the dream project of Father Alberto. The first fruit of this, the New Testament with commentaries and *Lectio Divina*, was published in 2014. The books of the Old Testament are in the final stage of

preparation. I am all the more convinced of Father Alberto's belief that his work will benefit coming generations.

Alberto Santiago Rossa was ordained a priest in Cordoba, Argentina, on 15 August 1971, the Solemnity of the Assumption of Our Lady. The 50 years of his priestly life are a testimony to the "great things the Mighty One has done" (cf. Lk 1:49) in and through the life of his chosen one. The story of his priestly ministry in this region is also the history of the printing and publishing ministry of the Claretians in the Philippines and East Asia.

The Claretian Publications and the Pastoral Bible Foundation, two wings of the publishing ministry of the Claretians, were his initiatives, begun with the objective of making quality religious, theological and biblical literature from around the world available to the readers in Asia at affordable prices. In 2006, Fr. Rossa began the Claretian mission in Macau and subsequently established Claretian Publications there.

The Prophet Elisha prayed for "a double portion of the spirit" (2 King 2:9) of his master Elijah. Were I to make a prayer to the Lord, I would pray for even half the portion of the spirit of Alberto. His equanimity, religious austerity, determination, selfless availability and a tremendous sense of humor are what makes him so endearing.

This book that you hold reads like the script for a Hollywood (or Bollywood or K-drama) thriller, thanks to the painstaking efforts of Father **José M. Ruíz Márquez**, a close friend and companion of Father Alberto, who has helped him in the ministry of translation and the publishing of Bibles in Spanish and Chavacano (a language in the Philippines).

Father José M. Ruíz Márquez, CMF

In the good old days, children were accepted into seminaries at a very early age. Father José Ruiz Márquez started his missionary vocation at the age of 12 in Spain. At the end of his regular studies, he was sent to Rome to continue his specialization. It was the time of the Second Vatican Council, an extraordinary opportunity for young priests studying in Rome.

Soon after ordination, he was sent to Equatorial Guinea, a place very dear to the Congregation. As a Spanish enclave in Africa, it was one of the first places our Missionaries went to after the foundation of the Congregation in 1849. Unfortunately, life in Equatorial Guinea was not easy. Soon after, when the civil war broke, thousands

of people were killed, and the Missionaries were expelled. Father José accompanied many laypeople who were persecuted—good Christian leaders in jail awaiting execution. They spent their last days with him as he consoled and prayed with them until the moment of their execution.

Finally, Father José and his companions were expelled. Together with Father Domingo Moraleda, he was sent to England, where they studied English before being assigned to the Philippines in 1974. The Philippines was under martial law since 1972, and a bloody Muslim insurgency had broken out in the south of the country, where several Claretian communities were.

A few years after his arrival, Father José was elected provincial superior of the Philippine Province. Those were tough years, which saw the burning of the Claretian hospital in Lamitan and the kidnapping of a famous Claretian doctor, José Torres, to care for the wounded rebels. Nonetheless, Father José also saw through the translation of the New Testament into Chavacano, launching it in January 1981.

In 1984 he and Father Manuel Tardío were asked to start a new mission of South Korea. He learned Korean and spent ten years in that mission until a new generation of Claretians and local vocations came. There followed another stint in the Philippines for a while, a period in French-speaking Congo, and then back to the Philippines as provincial superior again.

Anybody who has ever gotten in touch with him can attest to his humility. He never talks about himself but does his work quietly and with humility. As in the case of Father Alberto himself, perhaps it is for future generations to appreciate the invaluable contributions of this Missionary.

Father José co-founded ICLA (Institute of Consecrated Life in Asia) in Manila with Father Domingo Moraleda. He has personally mentored many students, especially those from China and other Asian countries, who had great difficulty with English. He spent hours and days trying to fix and correct their theses and being a spiritual father to them.

Very few people truly have an encyclopaedic mind; Father José is one of them. Ever since being a student in Rome, he has had difficulty sleeping, so he would spend several hours each night reading. Thus today, you can ask him about any country in the world, and he can name all of them, their capitals, salient points, and political leadership. Ask him about history or any battle of the Second World War, and he can present the details and nuances.

For the last 25 years, he has worked with a Congregation of religious sisters, the Franciscan Sisters of St. Elizabeth, who were very few. With his guidance and support, they have flourished, attracting hundreds of vocations. They affectionally call him the “co-founder.”

When the project of a new Pastoral Bible in Spanish started, Father José wrote almost all the commentaries of the New Testament of the *La Biblia de Nuestro Pueblo*. He has also taught several theological subjects.

His generosity and scrupulosity with money are proverbial. It is nearly impossible for him to have money in his pocket because it disappears whenever a needy person arrives. He lives an exceptionally frugal life, and all his possessions fit in a small suitcase. When he asks for some help or some money, it is to give away to sick people in hospital or other needs. A close friend of Father José describes him thus, “He is very compassionate with others but very strict with himself.”

One cannot sift through the pages of this book without gratefully acknowledging all the contributions of numerous Claretians and friends of the Claretians. They have spent their “time, treasure and talents” (an oft-repeated phrase from Father Alberto) as an expression of their love and gratitude to Father Alberto.

Brother Desiderio Ching did the copy editing of the text and has helped both Father Jijo Kandamkulathy and me prepare this book. Father Jay Coching, the director of Claretian Publications, Manila, and his staff members, did the beautiful layout of the text.

This book is simultaneously published in English and traditional Chinese. Teresa Mak Lai Ying did the translation of the text from English to Chinese. Lai Kwok Wing from Cheung Chau and Annie Lam from the Holy Spirit Study Centre helped proofread and correct language.

Father Jose Cherukara, cmf
Our Lady of Fatima Parish
Hong Kong

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Message

Alberto,
 On five continents you have stood
 imposing magnificent intellect,
 of God's plans an architect
 awakening letters with a snap.

The printing press is your flourished altar today
 that shines beyond your project,
 of Claret and his mission, beloved son,
 in your works that heartbeat persists.

Fifty are not years, they are loves
 that you have sown following your mission,
 today we want to honor you
 and learn from your life the lesson.

Letters are the sword you wield,
 you deserve a bastion among the great.

~Victor



Message

B E T O 1 1 1 0 1 1
 (=59=Revelación)

Despreciao por pocos,preciado por muchos, no es loco.
 No mira costados, ni mira p'atrás, pecados.
 Al lado lo siente, y va p'adelante, de frente.
 Pelotas de vida, las puede atajar, perdidas.
 Revienta las redes, mandado a patear, él puede.
 Y está en un juego, no es juego, lo sabe, en serio.
 El juego bendice, bendice la vida. Bendice.
 En todos repara. Presente a la vez, no para.
 Su pluma compara, su ejemplo prepara. Es clara.
 Quien pueda acercarse, muy cerca a su paz, bañarse.
 Si quiere mis manos, aquí las encuentra, hermano.

~Mario 11/10/11
 11estrofas
 101 palabras
 1poesía



**PARA ALBERTO ROSSA,
AUDAZ Y ARRAIGADO
EN SUS BODAS DE ORO SACERDOTALES**

AUDAZ Y ARRAIGADO

Cuerpo grande, siempre en ebullición.
Se silencia y después habla.
Se serena y después se moviliza.
Profecía inquieta,
que nace de la quietud orante.
El día siempre comienza “antes”
para beber de la Fuente,
para escuchar y adorar la Palabra
y celebrarla en una capilla prohibida,
en una iglesia aislada,
en territorio peligroso,
con comunidades gozosas
y ávidas del Encuentro.

Alberto es audaz.
Nada le arredra.
Las dificultades son la puerta del riesgo.
Conoce los caminos aéreos del mundo
y se desplaza allá donde el Espíritu lo lleva.
Sin miedos, como portador
de una noticia esencial,
o de un proyecto soñado.

La Palabra de Dios es su pasión,
para alimentar a pueblos diversos,
para proclamarla en lenguas extrañas
para globalizarla y llevarla diariamente
a todos los rincones del mundo.

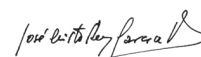
Y el Espíritu lo conduce
y le hace rebasar fronteras peligrosas,
que él desafía con la espada de su sonrisa
y su capacidad de entusiasmo.

Es siempre “método apreciativo”.
Es siempre “relato” sorprendido
de un Evangelio para todos los tiempos.
La crítica no le sirve, sino la conversación.
Su altura no le impide
ponerse a la altura de cualquiera.

No es protocolario, sino popular.
Lleva adelante la revolución del encanto.
Su audacia queda simbolizada
al lanzarse al vacío desde la Macau Tower
en vuelo de sonrisa y grito ... de ángel
apocalíptico.

Cincuenta años han pasado
desde que fue investido
con el sagrado presbiterado.
Presbítero misionero, inclasificable.
Presbítero de la Palabra.
Presbítero itinerante y volador.
Presbítero que ha encontrado
en la China soñada y en su medicina tradicional
la prolongación
de su ya impresionante estatura... de su edad de oro.

Muchas felicidades, Alberto,
de tu hermano misionero
que comparte tus sueños
y agradece tu incansable hospitalidad.
Ad multos annos!


José Cristo Rey García Paredes, cmf
Madrid, septiembre 2021

AUDACIOUS AND ROOTED

Huge body, always on fire.
It is silent and then speaks.
It is serene and then it mobilizes.
Restless prophecy,
born of prayerful stillness.

The day always begins “before”
to quench its thirst from the Source,
to listen to and adore the Word
and to celebrate it in a forbidden chapel,
in an insular church,
in dangerous territory,
with joyful communities
anxious for the Encounter.

Alberto is audacious.
Nothing daunts him.
Difficulties are the gateway to risk.
He knows the airways of the world
and moves wherever the Spirit leads him.
Without fear, as the bearer
of essential news, of a dream project.

The Word of God
has been his passion,
to nourish many peoples,
to proclaim it in foreign languages
to globalise it and to bring it daily
to every corner of the world.

And the Spirit leads him
and makes him go beyond dangerous
frontiers,
which he challenges
with the sword of his smile
and his ability to be enthusiastic.

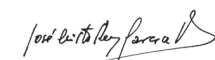
It is always “appreciative method”.
It is always a surprising “story”
of a Gospel for all seasons.
Criticism is of no use to him, but conversation.
His stature does not prevent him
to put himself on the same level as anyone else.

He is not ceremonial, but rather popular.
He leads the revolution of charm.
His audacity is symbolised
when he leaps into the void
from the Macau Tower
in a flight of smiles and screams
of an apocalyptic angel.

Fifty years have gone by
since he was invested
with the sacred priesthood.
Missionary priest, Unclassifiable.
Presbyter of the Word.
Itinerant and flying presbyter.

A priest who has found
in the China of his dreams
and in its traditional medicine
the extension of his already impressive stature...
of his golden age.

Very best wishes, Alberto,
from your missionary brother
who shares your dreams
and thanks, you for your untiring hospitality.
Ad multos annos!


José Cristo Rey García Paredes, cmf
Madrid, September 2021



Message

Dear Fr. Alberto Rossa,

We have not been in touch for a long time! I hope, everything is going well with you.

This is very special year for you as you celebrate two major milestones in life:

1. Working as a priest for 50 years
2. Publication of Christian materials in the Philippines for 40 years

You have been working hard for such a long time to spread the Word of God and serve the spiritual life of the people around the world. I am not a Christian, but so many years of working in this area by watching, hearing and contacting people, I understood there is a huge need among the people, for the Word of God.

Congratulations!

For most people, working in one area for 40 years in his/her life is quite long and yet you are still working hard as before. Overcoming all your difficult experiences of the early days with your smart and hard work, I am certain that you have achieved the results that you have aspired for: working procedures were standardized and formalised and more and more Christian reading materials reached readers around the world. Congratulations!

Amity Printing company started in 1986, about 5 years after you began the publication. I was the first contact at Amity when you were looking for the opportunity to print your Bibles outside the Philippines between 1993–1995.

I was so impressed by your personality of kindness, humour and also the working attitude towards the products by emphasizing the importance of the printing quality. During a visit to Amity after receiving the initial batches of the Bibles, you appreciated the quality of printing done by Amity and said that you already sold all your printing facilities in the Philippines. Since then, you had decided to print all your Bibles, Diaries,

hymn books and so on at Amity. This was a great gift you had given us. Your trust greatly encouraged Amity to do overseas business with confidence. Although we lacked the experience in doing overseas business in those days, you were one of the first overseas publishers to print Bibles at Amity. The cooperation between our two parties grew smooth and steady over the years and the yearly turnover too got bigger. Amity grew quickly in doing overseas business since the start of printing Bibles for you. For many years, you were among Amity's top 3-5 overseas publishers; maybe you continue to be, as far as yearly turnover is concerned.

Amity has already printed more than two hundred million Bibles for the world and became one of the well-known Bible printers in the world. Working as Amity's chief overseas businessman and top management person, I can attest that without your support at the beginning stages of doing export business, Amity's achievements of today would have been delayed by a few years. Thank you very much for what you have done!

We both belong to the Year of the Rooster according to Chinese tradition, but I am one round younger to you. t, yet you still work hard on your labour of love. Even though I retired, you continue the over 20-years relationship with Amity and I am sure it will last longer. It is not just our working relationship is deep and strong, but our personal friendship is also built deep and strong. Divine de Leon, your staff, has even became one of the members of our big family.

Above all, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you for what you have done and achieved. Thank you for your contributions to Amity and your support to me.

Take care of yourself!

Your friend,

Chunnong Li

Former General Manager of Amity Printing Company, Nanjing



Message

Che Alberto,

Fue en Bogotá en los años 60 cuando nos conocimos más de cerca. Él era alumno, y yo uno de los maestros en el Instituto de Pastoral del CELAM. Era por los años 60.

Poco después, Teo, Alberto y yo, estuvimos, durante más de 3 meses en las Filipinas y juntos visitamos más de diez países del continente asiático.

Volvimos a encontrarnos otras veces: en USA, en América Latina, en Europa y nuevamente en Asia (en el sur de China y en Hong Kong). Siempre por pocos meses. Intercambiamos cartas y sueños de transformación personal y eclesial.

Me apasionaba su paciencia para construir poco a poco, pero sin desistir, sus metas, grandes como su persona.

Cómo Francisco Javier, el misionero del siglo XVI ha promovido el conocimiento de la Biblia, buscando a grandes traductores para publicar Biblias que, en dos mil años de cristianismo, llegaban, por primera vez, a los confines de la tierra escritas en lenguas entonces poco conocidas.

Me transformaba ver su tranquilidad para retomar una y otra vez sus planes. Me tocaba en lo profundo ver su fidelidad de amigo, que me buscaba, con una sonrisa amplia, más allá del Atlántico y del Pacífico, para hablarme de nuevos planes.

Me inspiraba su ser un hombre de diálogo con Dios, intenso, sencillo, constante – tempranito o al caer el día. A veces, ya entrada la noche, en un asiento de avión atravesando el mundo en algún lugar del mapa. Humano como cualquiera. Ya sea con miedo, en una tempestad de los cielos, o sonriendo cuando el tren de aterrizaje

tocaba el asfalto de la llegada. Sus viajes eran de tercera clase. Muy raramente y siempre de sorpresa viajó en primera clase.

Humilde. Muy poca gente puede siquiera imaginar lo que ha hecho por Asia, particularmente en Filipinas, o por los presbíteros jóvenes de China. Estuvo en varios encuentros con diferentes papas, de diferentes calibres.

Me sorprendió haciendo un libro que plasma, para quien quiera conocerla, los 50 años de historia de mi equipo misionero itinerante actuando en todo el mundo.

Me sentía impresionado ver cómo Alberto quería a su familia y, al tiempo, era capaz de vivir prácticamente al otro lado del mundo lejos de todos y fiel a su vocación misionera.

Bien, basta de revelar mis memorias.

Aunque a veces pasaran años y años hasta encontrarnos de nuevo, Che Alberto ha sido, como Teo, el amigo de mi vida y de una misión eclesial ya cincuentenaria.

De existir, los ángeles serían altos como él y con su persistencia y fuerza de voluntad, y creo que estarían muy presentes en la vida de Alberto, para aprender cómo ser feliz, cómo perseverar, cómo ser amigo fiel. Amén.

Fr. Jose Marins

Che Alberto,

*W*e got to know each other more closely in Bogota. He, the student. And I, one of the teachers at the CELAM Pastoral Institute. The 1960s.

Shortly after, Teo, Alberto and I were in the Philippines for more than 3 months, and also visiting together more than ten countries in Asia.

We met again at other times in the USA, in Latin America, in Europe. Again in Asia, in southern China and Hong Kong. Always for a few months. We exchanged letters and dreams of personal and ecclesial transformation.

I am amazed at his patience to build his goals little by little, without giving up, great as he is tall.

He shared knowledge of the Bible like Francis, the missionary of the 16th century. He called on great translators to publish Bibles that for the first time in two thousand years of Christianity reached the ends of the earth, written in languages, which before then had been little known.

I am transformed at seeing his tranquility in beginning again his plans not only once but a number of times. I am deeply touched by his faithfulness as a friend, who at times would look for me beyond, across the Atlantic and the Pacific, with a wide smile to talk to me about new plans.

I am inspired by the man of dialogue with God, intense, simple, constant, temperate, or at the end of the day, at times a little night inside, seated on a plane, crossing the globe somewhere in the world. Human like anyone. Either in fear of a storm in the sky, or smiling as the landing gear touches the tarmac. His trips were economy. Very rarely did he get a surprise place in first class.

Humble. Very few people can even imagine what he has done in Asia, particularly in the Philippines, or for the young priests of China. He was in various encounters with different classes of people.

I am surprised at his publishing a book to keep the history of my itinerant missionary team and the 50 years of my work all over the world.

I am impressed to see how Alberto loves his family while he has lived practically absent from them, as he lives on the other side of the world, faithful to his missionary vocation.

Well, enough of my remembrances.

Although at times, it took us years and years to meet, Che Alberto has been like Teo, the friend of my life and already of fifty years of mission in the Church. Were there tall angels like him, with his determination and will power, I think they would be very much in Alberto's life, learning how to be happy, how to persevere, how to be faithful and a friend. Amen.

Fr. Jose Marins



Message

Dear Fr. Alberto Rossa,

Congratulations on your 50th anniversary of priesthood.

When I met you in January 1994 you became an inspiration of passion for the Word of God. A passion that was well balanced as it encompasses study, prayer, proclamation, and commitment. Throughout your missionary life you have been an inspiration for many, and a model for all. Thanks to you, many lay people were able to join in this endeavour of making the Word of God our daily bread, bread that needs to be baked, to be broken, served, eaten, and digested.

Sure, we will remember you for this commitment to the Word of God, but even more we should rejoice for your ability to look further in the horizon of salvation history and to find new continents where we could develop our everlasting mission: bringing the Gospel to the world so we can become light and salt of this earth given as gift and opportunity for all, sisters and brothers in God's creation.

May the Lord bless you with many fruitful years ahead and keep you sensitive to the many calls of the incarnated Gospel still awaiting to be answered.

Francisco Carin Garcia, cmf
East Asia Delegation Superior



Message

Dear Fr. Alberto Rossa,

It is indeed a great hour to take part in this initiative to celebrate the gift of priesthood with which Fr. Alberto Rossa has been endowed 50 years ago.

To celebrate the Golden Jubilee is an opportunity to look back and see not only the years of constant dedication of a faithful priest but also to discover how God's promise is fulfilled: "Fear not, for I am your God. I will give you strength, I will bring you help, I will uphold you with the right hand of my justice" (Is 41:10).

Looking at his worldwide experience and his ability to put together talents and resources for evangelization and the Church, undoubtedly, we can confirm who the source of that strength and inspiration is.

Saint John Paul II in his homily addressed to all priests at St Peter's square for the great jubilee year 2000 (18 May 2000), which coincided with his 80th birthday, said to all the clergy of the world: "The ministerial priesthood! We all share in it ... today we want to offer God a unanimous thanksgiving for his extraordinary gift. A gift for all times and for people of every race and culture ... A gift that never ceases to amaze those who receive it".

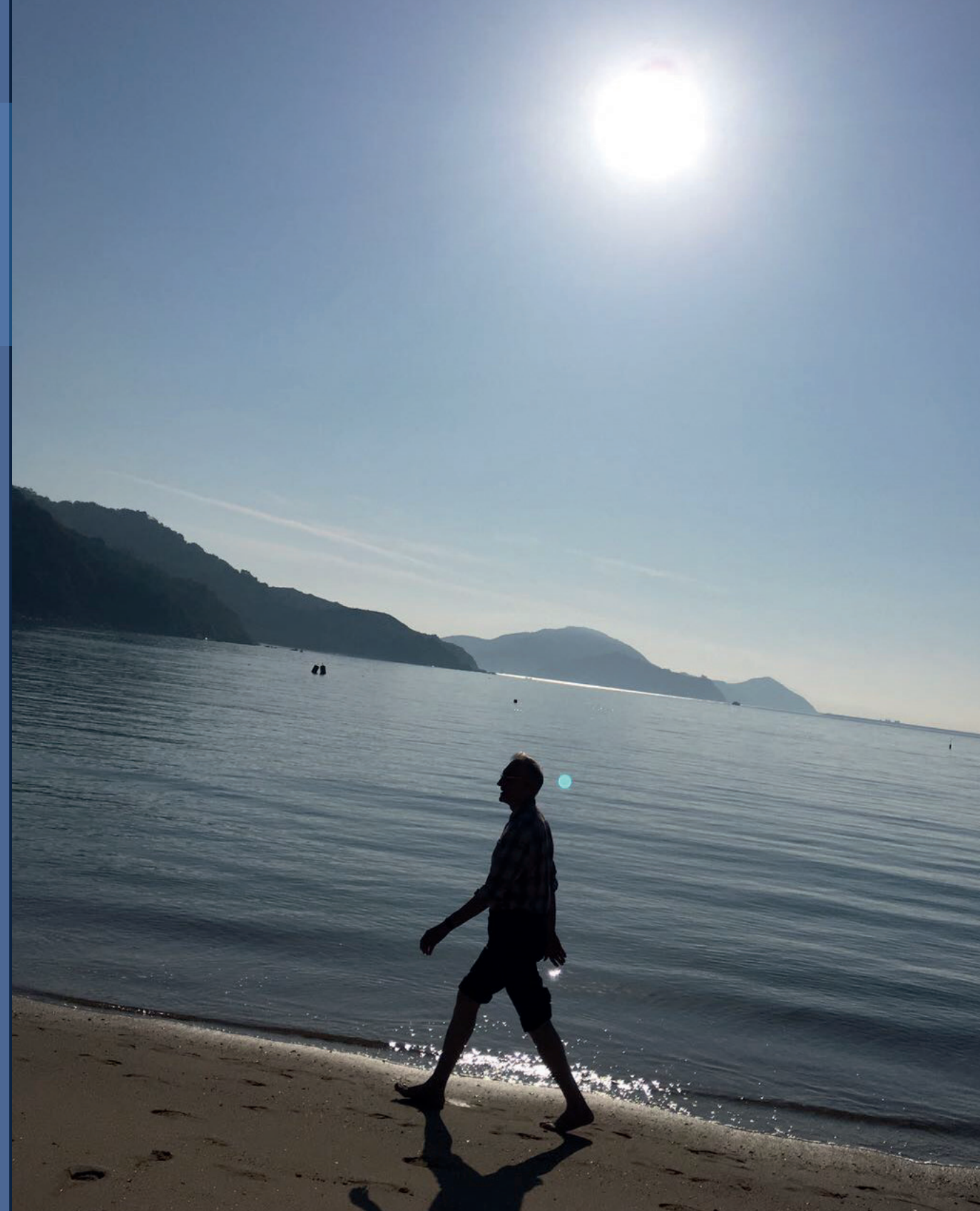
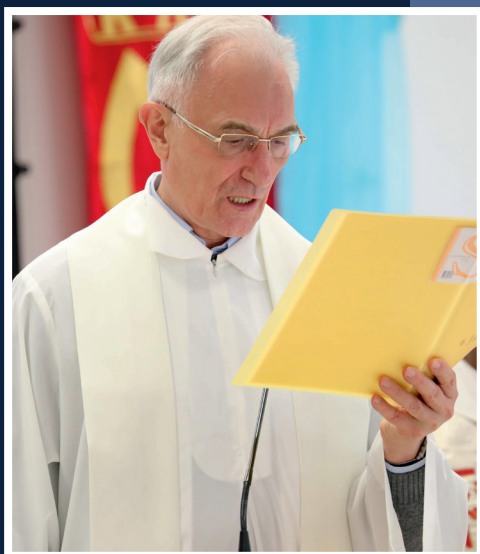
May God keep blessing Fr. Rossa's priestly ministry and transform it into a shower of blessings for the Church.

Msgr. Javier Herrera Corona
Holy See Study Mission
Hong Kong

Alberto Rossa, CMF

SERVANT OF THE WORD

Alberto Rossa, also known as “El Largo,” is a complex subject since he is a multifaceted person who reinvented himself over the years. There are as many “Largos” as there are countries where he has lived and exercised his missionary activity... and they are not few.





1 Itinerary of Alberto's encounters with Claret through the years... in his own words

1951: How Claret became Largo's "family saint." "It was the year 1951. My six-month-old brother had swallowed a small metal cross with eight tips, a wick holder for the oil lamp used at night. The doctors had given up hope on him. They gave him back to my mother to die at home because there was no way a baby could excrete that metal without cutting its intestines. My mother, feeling desolate, embarked on a journey back to the village. A woman approached her on the train when she saw her crying. My mother told her the terrible drama. The woman comforted her and gave her a picture with a relic as she said, 'Pray to this saint with devotion, and you will see that everything will be well.' My mother, a woman of deep faith, made a novena to this new saint. A few days later, my brother passed the metal without any problem. The doctors could not explain how it happened. My brother, Victor, is now 71 years old and lives in Argentina."

1957: Alberto enters the Claretian Seminary. "A few years later, a bashful missionary, Santiago Valles, came to town and asked me if I wanted to go to the seminary. I was 11 years old. He spoke with my parents, and my mother related to him what had happened to my little brother. Yes, the newly canonized saint was Anthony Mary Claret, and the missionary was a Claretian, a very timid newly ordained priest who was doing his first mission. My life in the seminary was a happy experience. We went through many hardships, even hunger, but we were happy."

1978: In the Philippines. "While learning the job of publications, I remembered all the editorial work of Father Claret with the poor means of the 19th century, especially the "Bible with little hands." The obstacles were great, but as written in one of the first books I

published, 'If you know where you are going, the world will stop and let you pass by.' I have always been enlightened by the intuition of Father Claret: 'Use all possible means for evangelization.' Publications was a new ministry for me in which I had no experience; I learned by doing!"

1988: In the Philippines. "When we had published 160 titles, we looked at Father Claret again, remembering that with the poor means of his time, he had also come to publish a similar number of books and pamphlets. But we kept going, and we already have more than a thousand titles published."

1989: In the Philippines. "And then came the publication of the Bible, and again Father Claret served as an inspiration and model for me. That 'Bible with the little hands in the margins of

the pages' encouraged me to bring the Word of God to ordinary people. We had published the Bible in 12 languages and are currently completing a new translation into modern Chinese with comments and a guide to Lectio Divina for each chapter of the Bible.

2006 to 2021: In Macau and Hong Kong. "In 2006, my new assignment brought me to Macau for work also focused on publications but directed especially to Mainland China. I asked myself many times: 'What would Claret have done in this immense frontier?' The Definition of a Missionary, that great Manifesto that Father Claret gave us in his autobiography, was the main inspiration that catapulted me into action. What Claret would have done, I thought, was to look for assistants to help carry out together this new mission, and with God's help, I found them.

"Over the years, a group of highly selected people who felt the same passion for this ministry joined me. They are a group of lay people inspired by the Claretian charism who have dedicated their lives to this work and are consecrated for the mission. A saying from Confucius comes to mind: 'Find the work you love, and that will be the last day of your life in which you work.' These collaborators live for the mission. Also, over the years, some co-workers discovered their missionary vocation, and today they are Claretian Missionaries."

A foreigner publishing books in mainland China? "It was something unheard of for a foreigner to publish

books in China; however, a voice in my ear reminded me: 'Nothing daunts him.' What was done in the Philippines—to foster a new model of being Church through publications, we now do in China—with all the necessary permissions, of course. An experience beyond all expectations was the contact with a printing press in China, where for 20 years we have been printing our books, especially the Bibles that we send to different countries.

2017 February. "There was an act of recognition in Macau for the work done. The event was attended by several leaders of Amity Press (a company with 600 employees with only 3% Christians). It is the largest Bible printing company in the world. This is what Mr. Li, the former director said: 'If I have done something, it has been through the influence of Christians, people like you and others who contribute their energy, time and money for the missionary work. Although I am not yet a Christian, it gives me great joy to see the Bibles coming from the printing press because I know that people are waiting for them and they will bring peace to their hearts which is good for a harmonious society.'

"These days mark the 60th anniversary of that encounter with a young Claretian priest who asked me if I wanted to be a missionary. The evangelizing dream and the missionary zeal of Father Claret have accompanied me in all the stages of my life and God's plans, even as my little brother was miraculously healed through the intercession of that newly canonized saint."



Argentina, USA, Argentina.
**He escapes alive by the skin
of his teeth from the Military Junta.**

2

The first profile of Alberto is the "Largo Americano" because of the continent where he was born (Cordoba, Argentina), where he became a Claretian, had his first years of formation, and continued his theological studies in the United States (Washington DC). As soon as he finished his theological studies (1971), he returned to Argentina, where he received the ordained ministry on August 15, 1971.

In the USA. At the end of 1967, after his second year of theology, he wanted to learn English, and with another Claretian traveled to Washington DC. They were welcomed by the Claretians in the United States to study English for a few months. When their superiors noticed the great effort they were making in learning the language, they offered them a scholarship to stay in the US and finish their theological studies.

Those were challenging and fruitful years. At the academic level, they had eminent theologians and biblical scholars as professors in the prestigious Washington Catholic University. At a personal level, it was a time of a great variety of experiences as only the USA could offer in the late 60s to young students. It was also a time of personal and religious maturity.

Some illustrative anecdotes: After classes, Alberto used to watch the university soccer team train in the campus stadium until, one day, the coach noticed his presence and asked him if he knew how to play soccer. He said, "Yes, of course, who doesn't play in Argentina?" (He had been a goalkeeper in the team of the Claretian Seminary in Córdoba). After a few minutes of practice under the coach's observation, he was hired, soon to become the university soccer team's official goalkeeper.

Those sports activities brought Alberto a lot of human growth as well as diversion. After a couple of years, he was named "the best goalkeeper" and therefore selected to play in the "All-American Universities Soccer Team" (a team composed of the best soccer players of all the country's universities). He became an instant sports celebrity with photos in newspapers, trips around the US, banquets, glory, triumphs, etc. He was offered



scholarships by prestigious universities (excelling in sports is the surest way to get free entry to the top tertiary education centers).

In other words, it was a time of vocational crisis and discernment. Alberto regularly kept his Provincial Superior in Argentina, Fr. Alfredo Espósito, informed of all his comings and goings... until one day he received a letter from him: "Alberto, do you want to be a missionary or a footballer?" At the end of his studies, he returned home.

His life was heading towards new, uncharted horizons. After his student experience in the "Pax Americana" of the giant of the North, Alberto returned to the chaotic Argentina of the 70s.

Argentina was going through a turbulent period of political and economic instability under the last presidential mandate of General Perón. Upon his death on July 1, 1974, he was succeeded as president by his wife María Estela Martínez de Perón until March 24, 1976, when she was overthrown by a military coup d'état led by General Jorge Rafael Videla. The latter assumed power on March 29, 1976.

María Estela de Perón was a weak, inexperienced president at the mercy of corrupt and inept advisors. At the end of 1974, Argentina entered a spiral of violence, initiating a process of repression and militarization of the country to end the armed struggle by revolutionary minorities. General Videla's military coup d'état brought the repression to the extreme.

In his native Córdoba, he was fully integrated into the "Tambo" team with the Claretians Joaquín Cano and Aldo Drewniak, his companions and friends, in a pioneering work among the young university students of Córdoba in line with the new ecclesiology of Vatican II brought and adapted to Latin America by the Assembly of Medellín in 1968. They lived in a house lent by some nuns, and from there, they organized courses, retreats, pilgrimages, workshops of ongoing formation for university students. Thousands of young people attended these highly original retreats.

It was an innovative, fascinating pastoral work, with many nightly youth meetings where the national situation was discussed and analyzed, action plans were proposed, university protests... Where the Word of God was read to illuminate the path to follow amid the chaos. It was there that Alberto started a "Mass for university students," following the example of what he had experienced in Washington. They were novel, creative, joyful celebrations, well prepared for and by the young people.

Those were happy years that El Largo remembers with nostalgia, especially those developing Basic Ecclesial Communities composed of students where they tried to fix the world between sips to their "bombillas of mate" (a traditional South American caffeine-rich infusion drink). But it all came to a brutal end when General Videla's military junta seized power.

Under the Military Junta. After a few weeks of taking power, the military turned the whole of Argentina into a police



Year 1971: dining room of the small house in Tambo Nuevo Street, during the visit of the Provincial. From the right in the background: Fr. Joaquin Cano, Fr. Donald Reece, Fr. Alberto's fellow student in the USA (today he is Bishop of Antigua in the British Caribbean), Fr. Alfredo Espósito (Claretian Provincial of Argentina, today Bishop emeritus of Zárate Campana), Fr. Alberto Rossa... and the others are some of the university students of the first ones in Tambo.

state. Suddenly the pastoral ministry of Alberto and his companions with the young university students became a high-risk endeavor. Soon came the stalking by the military police, followed by the blacklisting of those in Cordoba to become "desaparecidos," as they euphemistically called those imprisoned, tortured, and then killed, mostly young men and women, by the fascist regime of the generals. Several young people in the "Tambo" group ended up on the blacklist and disappeared forever.

Alberto in the police blacklist. Despite the circumstances, Alberto continued the celebration of the nightly Mass, now with suspicious intruders (secret police) who recorded the homilies.

One night (the Masses began at 10 pm), at the end of the celebration, a military man dressed as a civilian appeared in the sacristy, and ordered Alberto to tell him who composed the subversive song that they had sung after communion. "Look, Sir," Alberto told him, "it is an ancient

hymn, in fact, two thousand years old and it was composed by a woman, the Virgin Mary... The song is the Magnificat, and you can find it in the Gospel of Luke."

The worsening situation indicated the need for prudence, so this youth ministry had to be put on hold. And the "Tambo priests," as they were called (because the little house where they lived was on Tambo Nuevo Street), had to reduce their activities, and when they left the house, they did so with some "bodyguards"—the strongest young people of the Tambo group.

Suddenly, one day Father General asked Alberto if he would accept to go to the Philippines for five years since there was a need for personnel who knew English. The real reason behind this unexpected assignment was to make Largo "disappear" from Argentina before the military could make him "disappear" from the earth. A secret friend with contacts with the police told him that his name was already on the blacklist.

The Philippines. Mindanao. The rural area of Zamboanga.

3

Since 1972, the Philippines was immersed in one of the most tragic periods of its recent history, the Martial Law imposed by Dictator Ferdinand Marcos that lasted until 1986 and left a series of human rights violations and thousands of "desaparecidos" (activists and protesters killed, among them some priests) in the style of the Argentine Military Junta.

Alberto arrived in Manila in February 1978, and as soon as one resident Claretian saw this new fellow almost two meters tall entering the house, he greeted him with a "Hello, Largo," and the nickname "Largo" (Tall) has stayed with him until now.

His first assignment in the Philippines was the island of Mindanao, precisely the dangerous frontier mission where most of the Claretians in the Philippines





worked, a vast area more than 130 km long that stretched along the west coast of the Zamboanga Peninsula with a population of approximately 150,000 Catholics mixed with a substantial Muslim minority distributed in hundreds of small population centers, called barrios or chapels distributed in both the coastal and mountainous areas.

A large part of the big island of the South (97,530 square kilometers) and other adjacent islands like Jolo and Basilan were at that time the scene of an open war against the central Philippine government by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), which sought the independence of the third part of Mindanao with the creation of a Muslim-like republic. It was a long and bloody guerrilla war that would leave nearly 80,000 dead and hundreds of thousands of refugees, and that later resurfaced more lethally and radically Islamic in other

provinces of Mindanao under the name of the "Moro Islamic National Liberation Front" that finally ended with a peace treaty in 2018 between the central government and the creation of a broad zone of autonomy that would include the provinces with the majority Muslim population.

Although somewhat distant from the epicenter of the insurrection, the rural area where Alberto joined was very insecure due to the constant skirmishes and ambushes carried out, especially on the roads, by the insurgents against military and civilian vehicles, in addition to kidnappings and attacks on isolated villages. Many barrios or villages with Christian communities periodically visited by the Claretians were located in conflict zones. The only way to reach these mountainous areas was by all-terrain motorcycles to negotiate winding roads, creeks, or escape quickly at the slightest sign of danger or possible ambushes.

Largo and his adventures

4

Alberto immediately adapted himself to his new mission field. The adventure of facing challenges of all kinds is in Largo's genetic code. The idea of grabbing a motorcycle, hitting the throttle, and riding off up the mountain, crossing streams and ravines, with a pirate bandana covering his head and face against the dust, to visit Christian communities was irresistible to him.

As irresistible was his desire to parachute when he was a student in Argentina, invited by a parachute officer friend (he still does not forgive his formator, Fr. Gustavo Alonso, for forbidding him to jump from the sky).

Or when in 1995 he was on a tour of several English-speaking African countries on behalf of the General Government and took the risk in a free afternoon to go on a borrowed car into the African jungle of

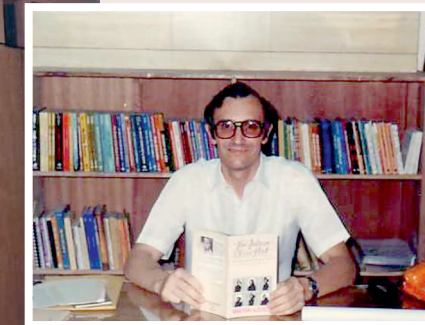




Malawi, carrying only a sketch of an address on a piece of paper, in search of a famous center of African religious art located several hours away from the capital Lilongwe and through unknown forest roads.

Or like volunteering to travel with the crew of a Boeing 747 from Manila to Taipei in the middle of a Category 3 typhoon, leaving behind at the airport his fearful fellow passengers waiting for the hurricane to pass, so they could catch another flight. Typhoon or no typhoon, the crew had to take the plane to Taiwan, and before leaving, they asked if any passengers wanted to travel with them. And sure enough, Largo was waiting for the invitation. Later, he would comment on the adrenaline rush he felt crossing the biggest air turbulence of his life while contemplating from his window seat the big 747 transformed into a giant bird, furiously flapping its wings in the middle of the storm.

Or when he arrived in Macau and saw the 338-meter-high tower from where the bungee jumping crazies jump into the void with a bungee cord tied to their ankles. But the jump was expensive, and he had to put up with it until Providence came to his aid. Some well-known Argentine friends from Cordoba (some of them from the Tambo youth group of yesteryears) passed by Macau on a tourist tour, and of course met Largo and paid him for the jump... and off he went head down from the Macau Tower, in his late sixties, almost breaking a record for being the second oldest person to jump from the highest bungee jumping tower in the world.



A broken leg. Manila. Largo became a publisher. First printing press. "Bible Diary."

5

*M*anila. The missionary adventure in Mindanao, animating the Basic Christian Communities as a member of the team of eight Claretians, young "bikers," who were in charge of that vast and dangerous mission frontier, did not last long for Largo. A motorcycle accident and a broken leg drastically changed the course of his life. And so it was that he arrived in Manila to mend his leg, undaunted as if nothing had happened... and this is not a rhetorical phrase because being undaunted is one of his most striking characteristics.

He came looking for another job opportunity, and he found it by "recycling" himself into a proofreader for a translation

of the New Testament into Chabacano, the lingua franca of many of our Christian communities in the South. The motorcycle rides through the mountains of Zamboanga were exchanged for the trips to the Pauline printing press at the other end of Metro Manila. Those were pre-digital times, and the typesetting, proofreading, and printing of books were still done by hand, with patience and perseverance.

The rural area where Alberto spent his first months in the Philippines was not entirely alien to the written word. Apart from the translation of the New Testament (published in 1982) and liturgical books in the local language, 2,000 copies of a 6-sheet pamphlet as guide for the weekly meetings

of the Basic Ecclesial Communities were printed every week in two languages, using a typewriter and an old, manual mimeograph machine.

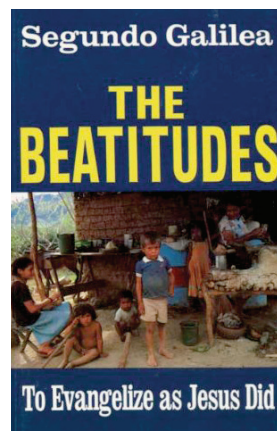
Publisher. Largo entered the world of publications at the right time (only a few years after the closing of Vatican II), and in the right place, Manila, the capital of the Philippines, the only country in Asia with the biggest Catholic population in Asia (85%), and therefore the natural place from which to disseminate in the Asian continent the spirit and practice of Vatican II which were already unstoppably flourishing in Latin America. Largo also came with the right baggage, with a direct, personal experience of this new “Spring of the Church” taking place in Latin America.

In fact, in January 1977, Alberto had the opportunity to take a pastoral renewal course at the CELAM (Latin American Episcopal Conference) institute in Medellin, Colombia, together with other 100 priests and nuns. It was an extraordinary experience to get to know first-hand the professors, the “fathers and mothers” of the renewal of the Latin American Church brought about by Vatican II, and who were revolutionizing the fields of the biblical, theological, pastoral research to forge a new model of being Church inspired by the Council. The friendship Alberto made with those pioneers (bishops, men and women theologians, laypeople), which still endures today, became the “golden mine” of contacts for a publisher-to-be.

In fact, Alberto will establish a bridge between Latin American and

Asian Churches. Soon, the contacts with Latin American theologians during the Medellin course and other encounters were the inspiration for Alberto to organize conferences and seminars in several cities of the Philippines and other countries of Asia, inviting influential theologians from Latin América to share their experiences, among them the President of CLAR (Latin American Conference of Religious), Father José Marins, and his team, Father Segundo Galilea, etc. It was a big success; large numbers of participants were always present in the encounters...and most of them asked for the conferences and sharing in writing. Thus, Claretian Publications was born.

First book. It was in the Pauline Press in Makati (Metro Manila) where Alberto made his debut as a publisher (or a “publican” as he calls himself) with a book written by one of the pioneers of liberation theology in Latin America, his friend Fr. Segundo Galilea, entitled “The Beatitudes: To Evangelize as Jesus Did.” It was the first book published by Largo... in someone else’s printing press. Here’s an anecdote from that time: When Alberto went to ask the Provincial (Fr. Domingo Moraleda) for permission to dedicate some time to prepare material for publications, he told him: “With two conditions: you are now working in the parish, and that is your obligation. What you do with your free time is up to you. And,



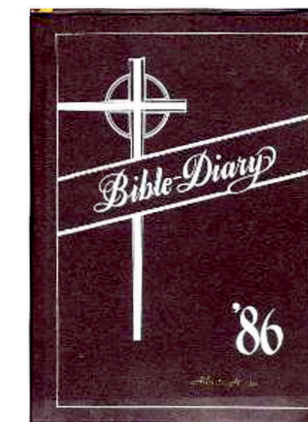
secondly, never ask me money because we don’t have.”

The brother in charge of the Pauline Printing Press very kindly read the first manuscript, of which Alberto wanted 2,000 copies, to be paid later after the books were sold. The good brother told him: “I will print it for you, and you pay me for it when you can.” But the story was repeated almost monthly until the “Pastoral Exchange Series” had published about seven titles. Then, the wise brother told him: “You want fast, good service, and you bring a manuscript every two or three weeks, and besides, you are always late in paying me. I think it’s about time that you set up your own printing press.”

The first printing press. And so it was that on October 24, 1984, a small printing press was inaugurated with the blessing of Cardinal Jaime Sin, Archbishop of Manila, and the Mayor of Quezon City, Ms. Adelina Rodriguez. A Chinese businessman who sold used printing presses came to know of Largo’s predicament and gave him several old printing machines payable in installments in three years without interest. El Largo, a collector of opportunities, did not think twice, bought them, and installed his new “working tools” in a place he borrowed from the parish. With the sale of books, he was able, not without effort, to meet the payments.

The “Bible Diary,” the first book out of his printing press. It was a “bull-eye hitting book,” an epoch-making bestseller, the first of its kind ever to be published in the world of Catholic publishing houses, no more, no less.

Everything started one night in June 1985. “One night, at about 9:00 pm, I was watching the news on TV in our house in Quezon City (Mayumi St.) when Fr. Moraleda, the Provincial Superior at that time, came to the room from a parish meeting, slamming the door... He was excited as he said: ‘Largo, the people at the Parish Council want a book with the daily Gospel reading, a little explanation, and a space to write.’ I immediately saw the book in my mind and started preparing it. I took the commentaries of the gospels of 1986 from a book by Fr. Segundo Galilea I had published before. The Gospel text... I simply cut them off from an old missal. In November 1985, the first copies of Bible Diary rolled out of our small press located in the basement of the church.” The rest is history. In 1998 he started the “Diario Bíblico” in Spanish. In 1999 the smaller version, “Daily Gospel,” came out in different languages. At present, over a million copies of the Bible Diary in about 27 languages are printed every year. The digital publication of the Bible Diaries in several languages began a few years ago. Today, it is still the flagship publication of all the publishing houses of the Congregation and their reliable source of annual income. There is no need to say the Bible Diary has been wildly imitated worldwide with various titles but always with the same essential content.



6 Claretian Publications in the context of the Philippine Church of the 1970s and the early 1980s.

At that time, the Church in the Philippines was seething with enthusiasm for the Basic Ecclesial Communities, the only effective ecclesial response to the political-social reality of the country: dictatorship, violence, corruption, trampled human rights, imprisonment, and assassinations of Christian leaders, including local and foreign priests.



The Church of Mindanao took the lead in this renewal movement of Philippine Catholicism by adopting the ecclesial vision of Vatican II through a theology and praxis of liberation. In 1971, bishops, priests, and lay leaders of dioceses of Mindanao met for the first time in the epoch-making "Mindanao and Sulu Pastoral Conference." The liberating ecclesial movement spread to the whole country, crystallizing in the great assembly of all the Bishops of the Archipelago in the PCP II (Pastoral Council of the Philippines II) in 1991, an emulation of the famous Assemblies of Medellin and Puebla.

This was the ecclesial context and historical juncture in which the tiny publishing house of Largo, already baptized as "Claretian Publications," began to grow in such a way as to become within a few years the leader of all the Catholic publishing houses in the Philippines, becoming the point of reference for priests, religious men, and women, committed laity, seminaries, theological faculties, due of its advanced editorial line, the presentations of the books and, not the least, the highly affordable prices. This undisputed primacy lasted for almost two decades.

7 Alberto establishes an "Editorial Bridge" between Latin America and the Philippines.

The brilliant idea of Largo was to establish an "editorial bridge" between Latin America and the Philippines and through the Philippines with the Catholic minorities of other Asian countries, becoming, in fact, a sort of ambassador in Asia of that significant part of Latin American Catholicism that was revolutionizing the Universal Church.

Latin American Bishops and Vatican II.

Unlike other continents, it was Latin America where the new ecclesial vision of the Second Vatican Council took the deepest roots, giving as a result unexpected and

spectacular fruits, thus inaugurating the so-called "Springtime of the Church" in our times, that reached all corners of the Catholic world like an unstoppable hurricane of a new Pentecost.

The participation in the Second Vatican Council became for many Latin American Council Fathers their "road to Damascus," a conversion that was ratified and sealed on November 16, 1965, in the famous "Pact of the Catacombs," a few weeks before the official conclusion of Vatican II. This prophetic event took place in the Catacombs of Domitilla where a large group of bishops, among them 40 Latin Americans, drafted and signed a document in which, united in communion and ecclesial hope, they made a public confession of their deficiencies as Fathers of the Church and of the process of conversion they experienced as Council Fathers. They, therefore, made a signed commitment to make the decisions of



DOCUMENTS OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL



Constitutions

- **Dei Verbum**
[Arabic, Byelorussian, Chinese, Czech, English, French, German, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, Swahili]
- **Lumen Gentium**
[Arabic, Byelorussian, Chinese, Czech, English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, Swahili]
- **Sacrosanctum Concilium**
[Arabic, Byelorussian, Chinese, Czech, English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, Swahili]
- **Gaudium et Spes**
[Arabic, Byelorussian, Chinese, Czech, English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, Swahili]

Declarations

- **Gravissimum Educationis**
[Arabic, Byelorussian, Chinese, Czech, English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, Swahili]
- **Nostra Aetate**
[Arabic, Byelorussian, Chinese, Czech, English, French, German, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, Swahili]
- **Dignitatis Humanae**
[Arabic, Byelorussian, Chinese, Czech, English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, Swahili]

Decrees

- **Ad Gentes**
[Byelorussian, Chinese, Czech, English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, Swahili]
- **Presbyterorum Ordinis**
[Byelorussian, Chinese, Czech, English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, Swahili]
- **Apostolicam Actuositatem**
[Arabic, Byelorussian, Chinese, Czech, English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, Swahili]
- **Optatum Totius**
[Byelorussian, Chinese, Czech, English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, Swahili]
- **Perfectae Caritatis**
[Byelorussian, Chinese, Czech, English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, Swahili]
- **Christus Dominus**
[Byelorussian, Chinese, Czech, English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, Swahili]
- **Unitatis Redintegratio**
[Byelorussian, Chinese, Czech, English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, Swahili]
- **Orientalium Ecclesiarum**
[Byelorussian, Chinese, Czech, English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, Swahili]
- **Inter Mirifica**
[Byelorussian, Chinese, Czech, English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, Swahili]

Vatican II a reality in their particular churches.

The document consists of a short introduction and 13 formal commitments; here are three of them: Commitment no. 1 reads as follows: "We will endeavor to live according to the ordinary way of our population, as regards housing, food, means of locomotion, and all that follows from there." No. 5: "We reject to be called, by word or in writing, by names and titles that mean grandeur and power (Eminence, Excellency, Monsignor...). We prefer to be called by the evangelical name of Father." No. 8: "We will give all that is necessary of our time, reflection, heart, etc., to the apostolic and pastoral service of persons and groups of workers economically weak and underdeveloped, without neglecting

other persons and groups of the diocese. We will support the lay people, religious, deacons, or presbyters whom the Lord would call to evangelize the poor and the workers, willing to share with them life and work." This explosive document is still challenging today's Church.

Assembly of Medellin 1968. The first fruit of the "Pact of the Catacombs" was the celebration of the Great Assembly of Latin American and Caribbean Bishops held in Medellin (Colombia) from August 24 to September 6, 1968, barely two years after the end of the Council, which marked a before and after in the Latin American Church. If the Council "made" Medellin, Medellin brought the Council to the people of Latin America by giving a new and original expression to all the pre-conciliar movements that, since the beginning of the 20th century, had been following one after the other, proposing and asking for a profound renewal in liturgy, pastoral care, theology, laity, social commitment, etc. Among them was the "Movement for a Better World" (MMM) of Father Lombardi.

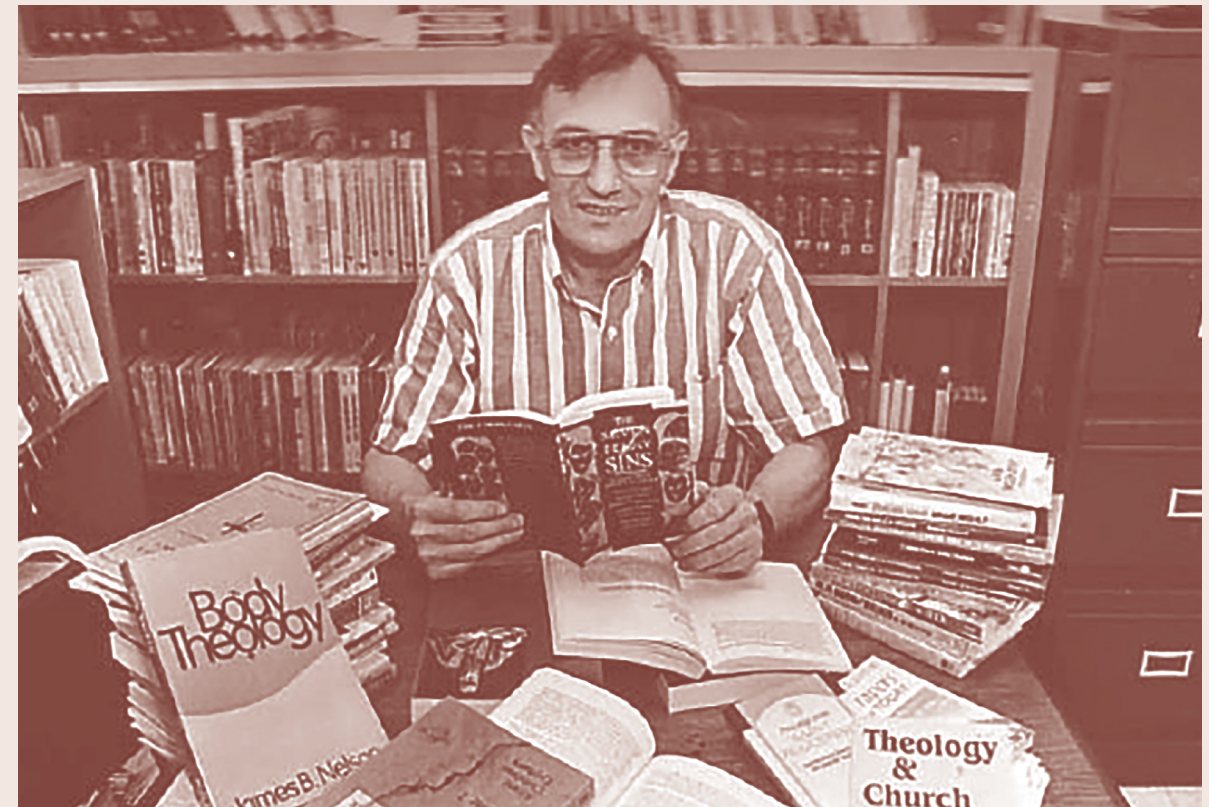
This Italian Jesuit, a true precursor of Vatican II, had already spoken to Pope Pius XII about the need for a Council. He then gave spiritual retreats to more than a thousand Council Fathers, and six months before his death (1979), in an audience with Pope John Paul II, he asked him to convene a new Council: "The Council of the Kingdom," with representatives of all the religions of the earth to respond to the expectations of humanity at the end of this century.

Liberation Theology, Basic Ecclesial Communities and Claretian Publications of Manila.

8

Liberation Theology. Since the Assembly of Medellin, two events gave the starting signal to the ecclesial renewal in Latin America with repercussions already in all the universal Church: The birth of the "Theology of Liberation" as a result of a conference entitled "Towards a Theology

of Liberation" given in a meeting of priests and laity by the Peruvian priest, Gustavo Gutiérrez, today a Dominican religious of 92 years old. The talk was published in 1969 in a booklet with the same title. Later, in 1974, it appeared in a more systematized form in his book, "Liberation Theology: Perspectives," a work translated



Fr. José Marins and his 50 years of friendship with Alberto.



BEC Anniversary in Brazil

into 20 languages and now on its 14th edition.

Gustavo Gutiérrez wanted to respond to an ecclesial concern echoed by the Medellín Assembly inspired by the Second Vatican Council. In the words of the author: "Among us, the great pastoral question, and consequently also theological, is how to tell the poor, on whom life conditions are imposed that express the negation of love, that God loves them. This is the same as asking how to find a language about God amid the pain and oppression in which the poor of Latin America live."

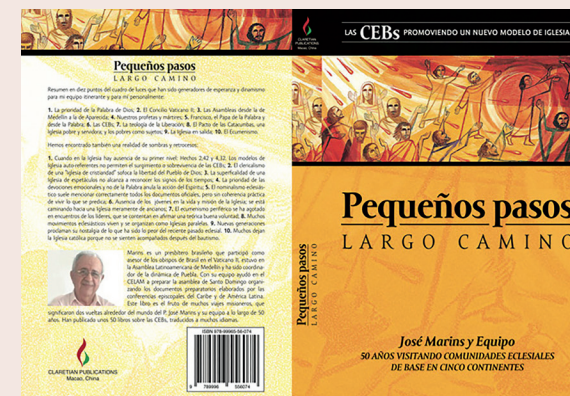
Basic Ecclesial Communities. Simultaneously with liberation theology, another ecclesial event that burst forth with unstoppable vigor in most Latin American countries was the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs). Born in Brazil in 1958 and proposed by

the Brazilian bishops at the Medellín Assembly, the project was adopted, updated by the renewed ecclesiology of Vatican II, and launched to the Latin American Catholic world by the bishops gathered in Medellín as a "new model of being Church" that articulates what is read in the Bible with what is lived every day. BECs are, at the same time, an old and new ecclesial reality that needs to be updated to become the closest expression today of the Christian communities described in the Acts of the Apostles. The BECs are not just another movement within the Church, but are the local Church in its initial cell where the baptized meet and live an authentic experience of community, faith, worship, and charity. Where the word of God and the cry of the people, especially the neediest, are heard.

of liberation theology has its reference in Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez, the BECs have it in the life-long friend of Alberto, the Brazilian priest, Fr. Jose Marins, who for 50 years together with an itinerant team of men and women of different nationalities, languages, and cultures, have visited the five continents encouraging, introducing and helping in the creation of BECs in many local Churches in more than 40 countries.

In 1981, Alberto invited and accompanied Fr. Marins' team in their visits and courses in the Philippines and ten other Asian countries. At 88 years of age, Fr. Marins is still going wherever he is called to share his experiences.

In 2018, on the occasion of the team's 50 years of itinerancy around the world



as ambassadors of the BECs, Alberto has edited and published a book of 348 pages, printed in China, about Marins and his team with the title, "Small Steps, Long Journey—BECs Promoting a New Model of Being Church: Marins and His Team, Fifty Years Visiting Basic Ecclesial Communities in 5 Continents."

10

Latin America, “world reference” of the new biblical and theology research after Vatican II.

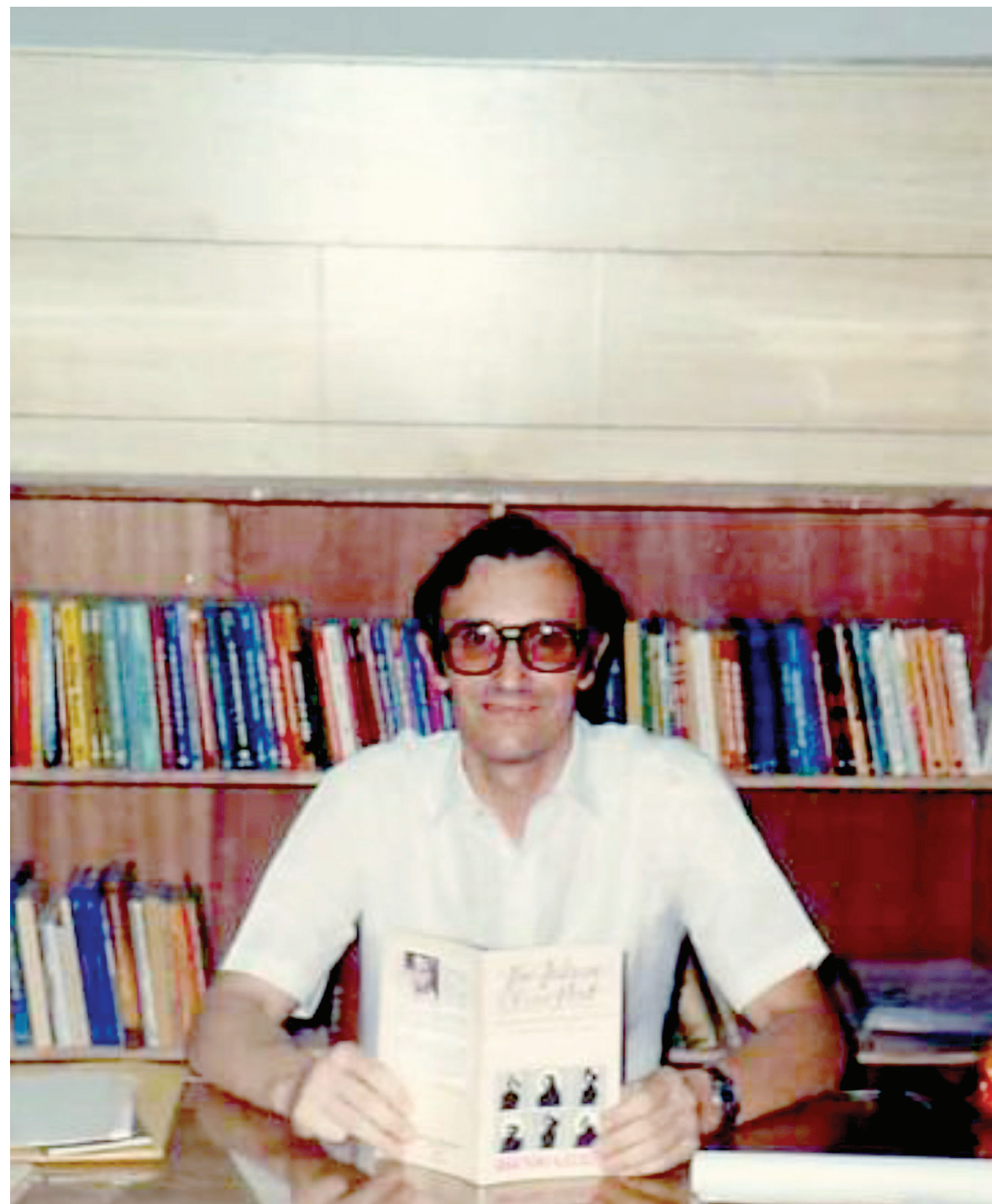
Since the epoch-making event of the publication of G. Gutierrez’s book, “Theology of Liberation,” followed by many similar interdisciplinary publications, and the launching of the BECs, the place of international reference and the center of gravity of theological research and publications passed definitively from Central Europe to Latin America. A plethora of Latin American theologians, and later on from other third world countries, took the lead in the interest for and production of a new theology reflection that responded to the “signs of the times,” a phrase coined by the Council.

This is where Alberto Rossa comes in at the helm of Claretian Publications of Manila. He had personally met some of the Conciliar Fathers on his publishing tours in Latin America, contacted theologians whose books were translated into English and published in the Philippines while opening the doors of Claretian Publications



to authors from the Philippines and other countries who shared the same ecclesial vision.

But Largo, coming to the Philippines, brought in his personal baggage another experience from Latin America: the danger, persecutions, and murder that bishops, priests, religious and laypersons exposed themselves to by bringing the liberation of Christ to the people, especially to the poor.





First stock of books

11 Alberto and the New Ecclesial Spring in Latin America. In the eye of the storm.

of the Church,” portraying the lives and testimonies of about 200 victims (bishops, priests, religious men and women, and laypersons).

As mentioned above, with the arrival of the Military Junta in Argentina, fierce persecution, a schizophrenic witch-hunt began against all those who worked among, with or for the poor and social justice, men or women, militants of left-wing parties, or people without any political affiliation such as priests, religious, committed laypersons. Quite many of these committed persons began to “disappear,” living behind no traces because some were thrown to the sea from helicopters or entered the Escuela Mecánica de la Armada, the sadly famous ESMA, clandestine detention, torture, and extermination center from which they never returned. Many among the 30,000 victims of Argentina’s Military Junta were committed Christians.

A year before Alberto left Argentina by order of his Provincial Superior, Fr. Gustavo Alonso, Bishop Enrique Angelelli, a friend of the “Tambo” priests, and who has now been beatified, was assassinated on August 4, 1976, as he came from celebrating the Eucharist in homage to two of his priests murdered two months earlier in the same place where he fell, “Punta de Los Llanos.”

Like most Latin American seminarians and young priests of those years, Alberto had passionately lived the Council and its spectacular repercussion in most Latin American countries, especially after the Assembly of Medellin. But also, they personally experienced the vicious persecution that followed almost immediately the spread of liberation theology and Basic Ecclesial Communities, perpetrated by many Latin American dictatorial regimes that saw only in these ecclesial realities a new surge of communism.

There were in Latin America hundreds and hundreds of martyrs who gave their lives for their courageous evangelical commitment for the poor, among them, some friends and co-workers of the “Tambo” community.

In testimony to these martyrs, Alberto published in Manila the book “The Cry



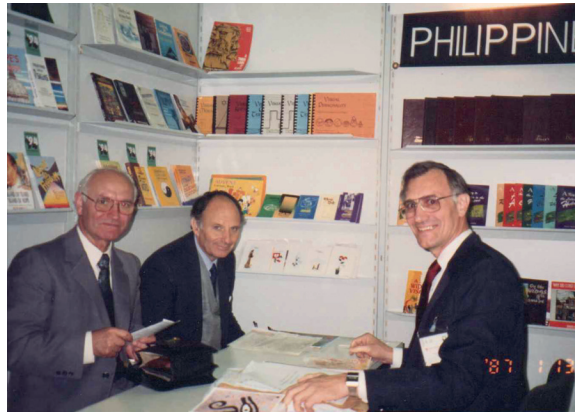
12 Growing volume of published titles. Tireless traveler. Becomes an Italian citizen.

Growth of the Publications. With these experiences, Alberto arrived in the Philippines from Argentina and found himself in a similar context: martial law, violence, military police, and missing persons. His tool to fight these evils was the Publications, his horizon the Philippines and Asia in brotherhood with Latin America.

It was a time of frenetic activity. Claretian Publications of Manila published more than 60 titles a year, not only of Latin American authors translated into English but also of other authors from the Philippines, India, Sri Lanka, Korea, Japan. The Claretian

Publications was known for its clear editorial line: a new and liberating model of being Church in line with Vatican II.

Not everybody was happy, like some conservative groups close to Cardinal Jaime Sin of Manila, who accused Alberto of publishing subversive materials. Alberto himself went to see the Cardinal and asked him, “Of what book are you accusing me of?” It turned out to be one book that Largo had not published. Taking advantage of the situation, he told the Cardinal: “Dear Cardinal, we publish books on ‘liberation theology,’ not ‘liberation ideology,’” and “you are surrounded by a cordon sanitaire



that does not give you good information," which of course led to more problems. Cardinal Sin called the Provincial Superior, Fr. Moraleda, and asked him to remove Alberto from Manila. The reply from the superior was: "Dear Cardinal, it will be easier to get you out of Manila than to get Alberto out." And all the matter ended there. The Cardinal, aside from being a good friend of both Alberto and Moraleda, was a man with a good sense of humor.

Tireless traveler. The continuous increase in his editorial activity made Alberto, out of necessity, a tireless traveler. Every year he used to spend 3 to 4 months outside the Philippines, looking for markets for his books, especially in the United States (where he later established a branch of Claretian Communication in Los Angeles), making contacts with Latin American bishops and theologians, buying and selling copyrights, and attending the most important book fairs in the world.

Speaking of international fairs, the Frankfurt International Book Fair, the largest and most important in the world, deserves

a separate chapter. He went to Frankfurt every year for thirty years without missing the said October event, with his own small space where he exhibited his publications, always accompanied by a collaborator who stayed at the stand while he went around the immense installations, making contacts, selling and buying editorial rights. Few people in the publishing world have been to the Frankfurt Fair as many times as Largo.

Where did he get the money for so many trips? It is said that the Provincial at the time once told him: "Largo, travel wherever you want, but come back to the Philippines with at least \$1 more than the cost of the trip," which Alberto followed... and more than fulfilled it.

Among his first destination outside the Philippines was Hong Kong, located less than two hours by plane from Manila, where he found every technical gadget he needed for the Publications and many contacts and friends. Until one day, the Falkland Islands war broke out, and his Argentine passport closed the doors of the great colony of the United Kingdom in Asia. He did not think twice. He went to the Italian Embassy in Manila and asked for an Italian passport on the basis that his grandparents were from Piamonte (Italy)... and after submitting the necessary documents, he got one of the best passports in the world for traveling, which he still has—the Italian passport. The formalities were quick, and after becoming a brand-new Italian citizen, he just received a piece of friendly advice from the ambassador: "Don't come back here anymore unless you speak Italian to me."

13 "Hunter of contacts and collector of opportunities." The "providential failure" of the great mechanical printing press opened the doors to China and the digital world.

During this continuous traveling, he developed a sixth sense that turned him into an avid "hunter of contacts and collector of opportunities." He has always known how to find the right people to open whatever door in the publishing or business world, or to look for help and advice regarding large or small projects always related to the mission of disseminating the written word of God by all means. He used to say: "In business, you don't get what you deserve; you get what you negotiate," adding, "and not what you negotiate but what you re-negotiate."

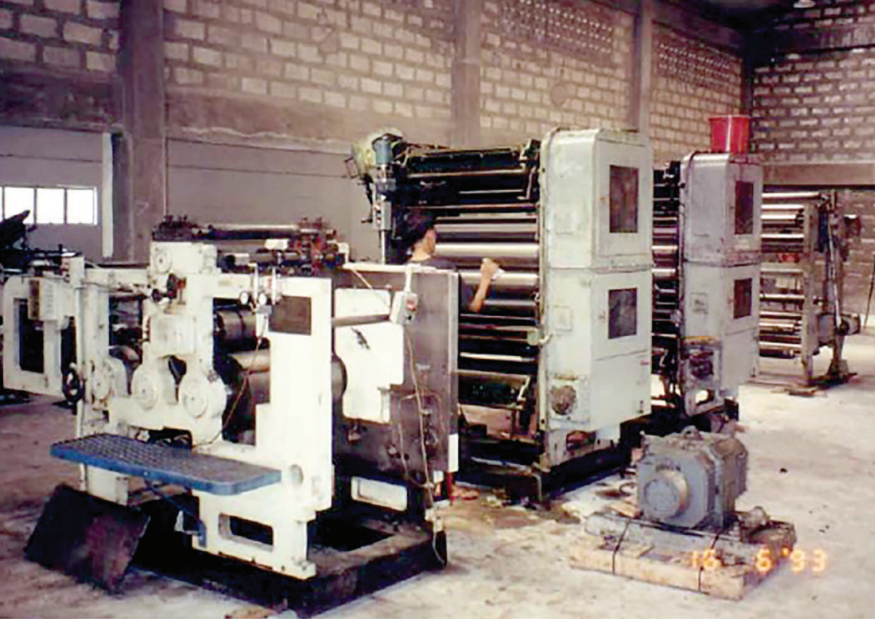
The list of contacts would be endless: from bishops, nuncios, managers of publishing houses, heads of international Catholic aid agencies, theologians, biblical scholars to "real estate agents" such as those who advised him to buy three apartments in the old part of the city as soon as he arrived in Macau, as well as two spacious and modern apartments on the 22nd floor of a newly constructed building in the city of Zhuhai (mainland China) located on an arm of the Pearl River Delta, right in front of Macau, less than 100 meters away, where small passenger boats cross in both directions every 20 minutes.

Who speaks of contacts speaks of opportunities, and Largo is a consummate

"collector" of these, small and big ones. Just three examples: When a community for the Claretian Publications was formed in Manila in the mid-1990s on the 5th floor of a school building, they had premium bread every single day of the week. Secret? Every Friday evening at sunset, Largo would show up with big bags at the entrance of the service door of some 5-star hotels in Manila to buy a respectable quantity of bread of all shapes, sizes, and nationalities that had not been consumed that day by the wealthy patrons of those luxury establishments... and which were sold almost clandestinely at a low price to clever people like Largo. A refrigerated chest to keep them for the whole week did the rest.

Another memorable opportunity was books, the famous "remainders," that is, copies of different titles and subjects, especially theology, Bible, and culture in general, thousands of them, coming from large publishing houses from the United States that needed to clear their warehouses





at that time. The opportunity was unique. Everything was ready: a nearby plot of land was bought, a building was constructed with a large central hall with room for all the machinery, offices, and other facilities. Soon vast rolls of

of unsold merchandise. They came to Manila in large containers, and when they arrived, and the word spread, people from all over the city would come. The prices were very affordable for Filipino pockets because Largo received the books from the publishers for free or at a bargain price. He only had to pay for the shipping expenses.

Many libraries of seminaries, theological faculties, religious houses were nourished in those years at low prices by the "remainders" of Largo. A particular case was the arrival of 450,000 books from Herder, a large American publishing house, due to Alberto's friendship with Ms. Herder.

But the mother of all opportunities was an enormous professional offset printing press that he obtained in the United States at a low price, with the number of machines necessary to perform the complete process of web printing, binding, and production of books quickly and with the capacity to print thousands of copies. It was what Claretian Publications needed

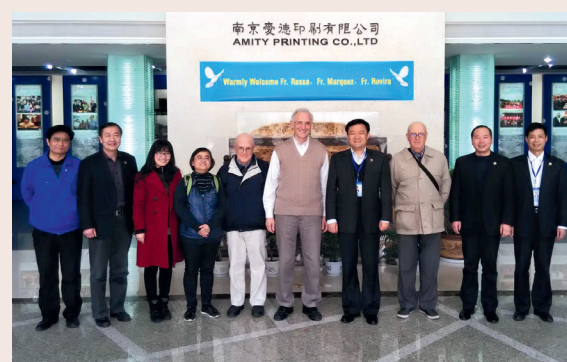
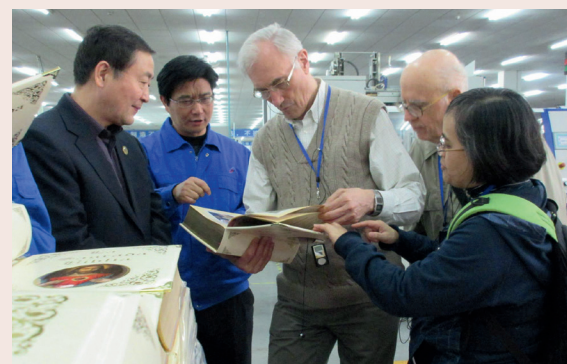
paper and other paraphernalia arrived. The employees were also ready, with the printing engineer at the head.

Finally, the containers arrived. It was probably the last time that mechanical printing machinery of that size would cross the Pacific bound for the Philippines, as the digital era was already knocking at the door. Well, the whole project resulted in a resounding failure for a variety of reasons, from the economic crisis affecting the Philippines in 1997, with electricity cuts that lasted from 4 to 5 hours almost daily and lack of water, down to the "capricious behavior" of the vast printing machine itself, that was always in need of recalibration.

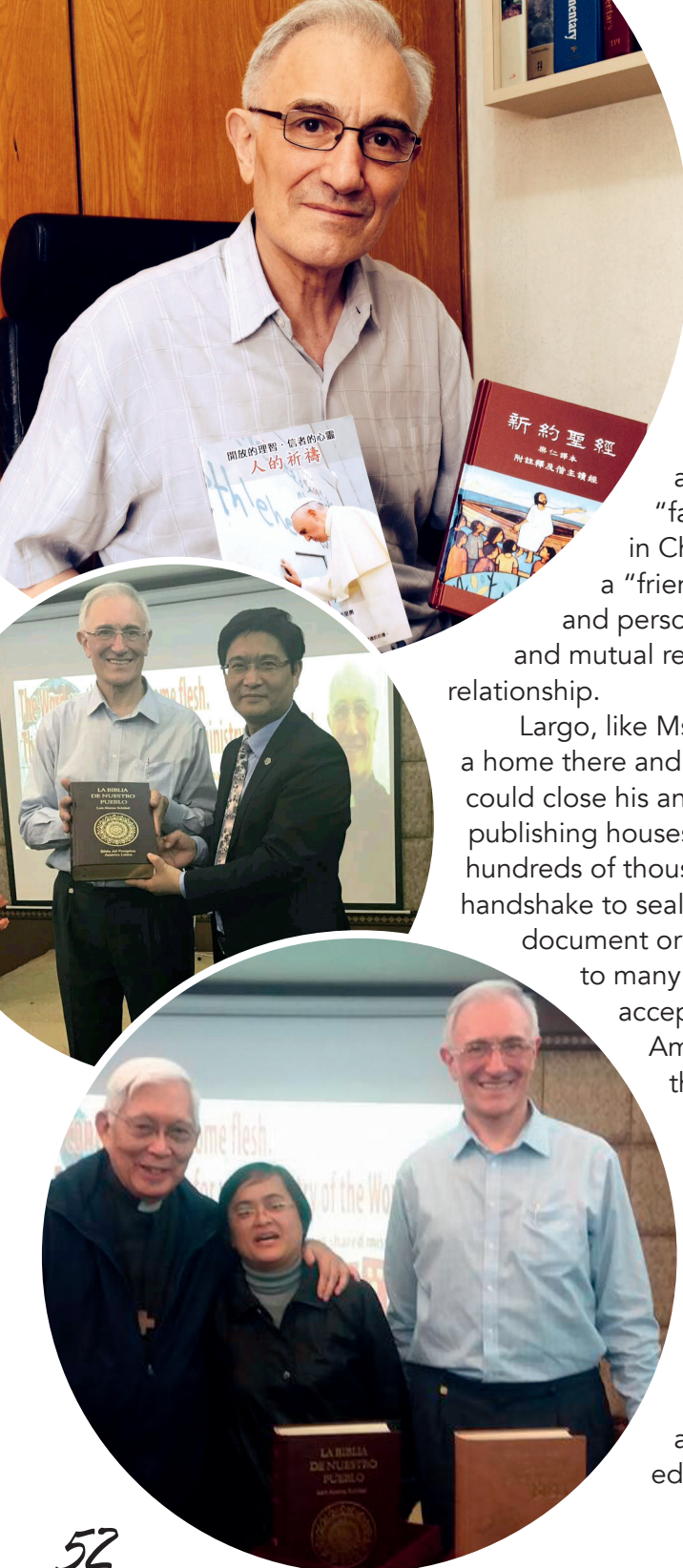
But the whole mess turned to be a providential disaster that marked a before and after not only for the Claretian Publications of Manila but for almost all the publishing houses of the Congregation. The land, the buildings, the machines, the stock of ink and paper were sold... and the slate was wiped clean.



Amity International Printing Company.



The solution was in China, in its former capital Nanjing, at Amity Printing Company, with more than 600 employees, high-tech facilities, prices among the most affordable in the world, and unbeatable printing and finishing quality. It is dedicated almost exclusively to printing Bibles for the entire planet, reaching 100 million copies in 2012, a job that took them 25 years. In just seven more years, another 100 million were printed; 85 million were distributed in China, in the national language and 11 other ethnic minority languages, in addition to Braille. The remaining 115 million went to all corners of the world in a diversity of languages. This world record of 200 million Bibles was celebrated in 2019 in style, as only the Chinese know how to do...and among the guests of honor: El Largo.



Alberto Rossa's relationship with Amity Press, which also includes his most faithful, competent collaborator and irreplaceable right hand for almost 30 years, Ms. Divine de Leon (Filipino by origin, a resident in Nanjing at present, and now with a Chinese nationality) deserves a separate chapter.

Largo's encounter with Amity Press took place more than 20 years ago. He entered as an ordinary customer, soon upgraded to "favorite" customer until he became (infrequent in China and less so in the business world) simply a "friend." A beautiful friendship with the managers and personnel of Amity developed out of appreciation and mutual respect beyond the customer-supplier relationship.

Largo, like Ms. Divine, enters Amity Press as if they got a home there and are received as such. If he wanted to, he could close his annual contracts on behalf of several religious publishing houses and other friendly publications, valued at hundreds of thousands of dollars if not millions, with just a handshake to seal the verbal agreement without any written document or contract. Alberto referred Amity International to many publishing houses worldwide without accepting any financial advantage for the favor.

Amity has told us that Alberto opened for them the doors to the world.

Just one example of this friendship. On the occasion of Ms. Divine's 25 years working with Alberto and 20 years of contact with Amity, a special celebration was prepared in Macau. The company's directors wanted to offer him an exceptional commemorative detail: special machines of the immense press were put to work just to print two unique copies of the Bible, one in English and another in Spanish, a remarkable piece of editorial art, just for Alberto.

15 Bernard Hurault.

Few people will have left a mark on Alberto Rossa's life as Bernard Hurault did. This French diocesan presbyter, missionary in Chile, an irate non-conformist, tenacious, hard worker, ascetic with the appearance of a beggar and secretly a mystic, will go down in history as the author of the "Biblia Pastoral Latino Americana," published in 1972, which has become a true best-seller with more than 160 million copies sold in hundreds of editions, and translated into more than 12 languages, including Chinese.

It all began in one of the suburbs of Santiago de Chile where the recently arrived French missionary realized the endemic ignorance of the written Word of God on the part of the plain and simple Catholic people he served, and who were subjected to continuous raids by Protestant fundamentalist preachers, who all came with their Bibles under their arms.

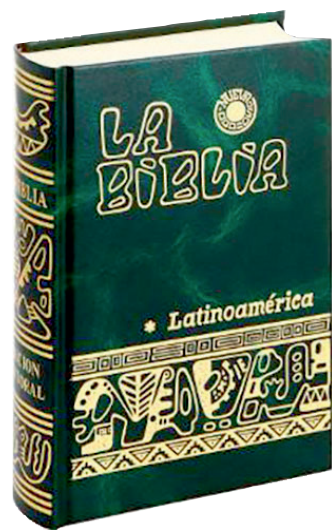
And so, he decided to make a Catholic Bible for his people. With a solid biblical formation, knowing Greek from his seminary days, and thanks to his proverbial tenacity and willpower, his goal was to make his own translation from the original biblical languages into a Spanish that



would stick closely to the biblical text and at the same time as close as possible to the language of the simple and half-illiterate people. In the words of Bishop Angelelli: "With one ear on the Gospel and the other on the people, you can never go wrong."

As an aid to understanding the Word of God, he composed introductions to the biblical books and extensive footnotes that reflected his homilies and catechetical explanations, illuminating the most difficult biblical passages, all in a pastoral tone close to the people and following the line of ecclesial renewal of the Council introduced in Latin America by the Assembly of Medellin.

It was a work that took him years of effort from 1960 to 1972. When his "Biblia Pastoral Latino Americana" was published, it soon became the most popular Catholic Bible in Latin America, the one that best embodied the spirit of Medellin in its extensive commentaries to the biblical



text, so much so that some conservative ecclesiastical circles considered it suspicious and even subversive, to the point of being banned, for example, in Argentina by the Military Junta.

Like many Catholics, one day, Alberto got his hands on this new "Latin American Bible" and, according to his words, "It was like reading the Bible for the first time." It was immediately distributed among the university students of Cordoba and used in the nightly Eucharistic celebrations of the Tambo group.

When the police raids started in Argentina, a student went at night to see Alberto and gave him a package lined with plastic and told him to hide it for a while because he suspected the police was after him and was afraid they would search his house. It was a copy of the recently published Latin American Bible. This young man told Alberto: "If they find me with this Bible in my hand, they will kill me."

Over the years and after overcoming many obstacles, the Latin American Bible continues to bring the Word of God to millions of people of different languages and cultures. Who would have thought that the author of that Bible, Father Bernardo, would be the one to change the course of the life of Alberto years later when he met him in Manila!

As time passed, Bernardo became popular, not only in Chile but in all of Latin America... and a rich man as well due to the royalties he received, which he dedicated exclusively to the Word of God, without a penny for himself.



16

Bernardo in the Philippines. The perfect team.

At the age of 60, and following an inspiration of the Spirit, he decided to go to Asia to bring the Word of God also to that continent of Christian minority. He was willing to settle down in any Asian country except the Philippines, the only nation on the continent with a Catholic majority, which, according to Bernardo, did not need him.

In 1986 he visited Vietnam, Cambodia, South Korea, and finally Japan. There he met Fr. Adolfo Nicolás, the Superior of the Jesuits in Japan who would later become the Superior General of the Jesuits, who happened to be a good friend of Alberto. The Jesuit told Bernardo, "Your place is the

Philippines. In Manila, there is Fr. Alberto who perhaps can help you as he has a publishing house."

Bernardo flew to Manila and found lodging in a poor area of Quezon City, and there he began to wait for God's orders, for that was Bernardo's faith. Every day he used to spend a couple of hours praying in the chapel of the Claretian community. One afternoon, as Bernardo was leaving the chapel, Alberto recognized him: "Bernardo, what are you doing here? Why did you come to the Philippines?"

"I don't know yet," he answered. After a few minutes of conversation, Alberto said: "Maybe God has led you here so that we do the Pastoral Bible in English." The rest



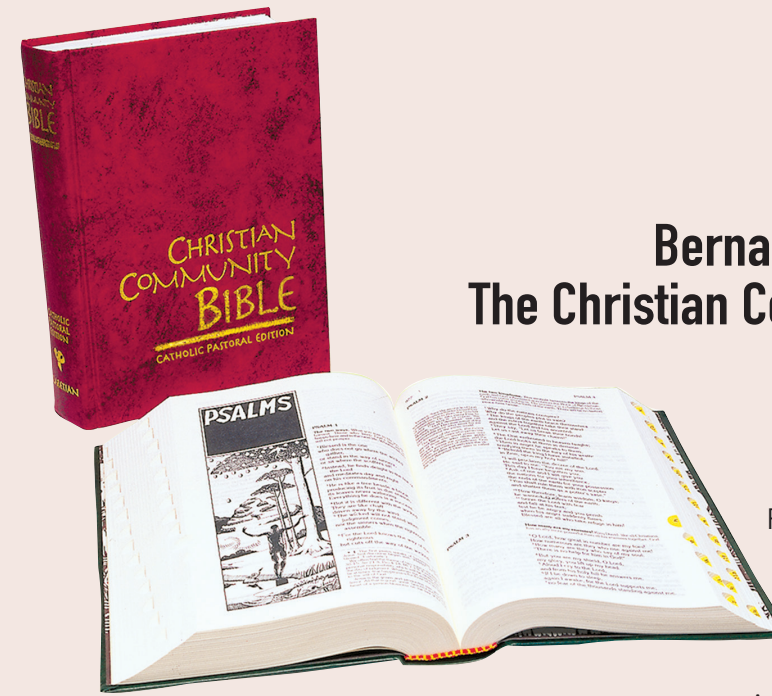
Fr. Alberto Rossa with Fr. Louis Hurault and Radegonde, Fr. Bernardo's brother and sister, respectively.

is history. That very day Bernardo became a member of Largo's community to such an extent that, years later, Wikipedia listed him as a "French Claretian priest."

Bernardo and Largo formed the perfect team united in a first common objective: the diffusion of the Latin American Bible in Asia. It was a collaboration rooted in a solid friendship that lasted until Bernardo's death in Chile on December 14, 2004, in the guest house of the Carmelite nuns where he used to stay when visiting Chile. As a posthumous tribute to his friend, Alberto Rossa edited and published a book in Spanish dedicated to Bernardo and his work: "La Palabra de Dios no está encadenada" (The Word of God is not chained). This man with a passion for the Word of God was probably the person who definitively marked the future direction of Largo as a person and as a publisher, an influence that can be summed up in two words: "The Bible and

China." Since then, the Bible became the main focus of his work as a publisher, with other publishing projects taking a back seat when he founded the Pastoral Bible Foundation (PBF) in 1999... and China was waiting on the horizon.

His friendship with Bernardo extended to Louis, Bernardo's brother, also a diocesan priest and the leader of a group of French lay people who were as passionate about the Bible as he was. Largo visited this priest, a simple and charming Scripture scholar, several times in his humble apartment in Paris. He lived with another priest, a former Bible teacher in Africa. The flat, located on the 5th floor of an old and worn building, was on the outskirts of Paris in one of the many "banlieues" (suburbs inhabited mainly by poor immigrants) surrounding France's capital. The Bible and the memory of Bernardo sealed the friendship between Louis and Largo forever.



Bernardo, Alberto and The Christian Community Bible.

17

Philippines, he carried out a thorough revision of the "Biblia Pastoral Latino Americana," adapting it from Chilean Spanish with its idioms into standard Latin American Spanish.

According to the latest advances in exegetical studies, changes were made in the biblical texts, and all the notes and introductions were conscientiously edited. It was a work that lasted five years in which many changes were made in the texts and commentaries.

Eighteen months after the "Bernardo-Largo" team was formed, in 1988, the Latin American Bible was translated into English and published under the title "Christian Community Bible," which is now on its 64th edition with over a million copies printed. Shortly after that, it was translated into the three main local languages of the Philippines: Tagalog, Cebuano, and Ilongo, and then into other Asian languages, such as Bahasa Indonesia, Korean, Vietnamese, Burmese. All the translations were printed in China at Amity Press.

Bernardo divided his time between Latin America and the Philippines, where he spent 3 to 4 months every year working with Claretian Publications on the new editions of the Bible. In Manila, with the help of some Spanish Claretians from the



18

The story of the Chinese logo of the Pastoral Bible Foundation (PBF) . . . in Alberto's own words.

“It was March 1999. A freezing day in Beijing. I was with Fr. Tomas Langarica, SVD, on a tour in the capital. We had gone to Mass at the South Cathedral in the morning and later walked around the famous Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City. We had lunch at a well-known restaurant for its local delicacy, Peking duck. It was an enjoyable day. Since it was cold, we decided to mingle with the people in a local market downtown.

“We were probably the only two foreigners in that place, moving freely in a friendly atmosphere among hundreds of people around us. We later noticed that a girl, about 20 years old, was following us. She approached us and asked if she could practise some English with us. She was a university art student and that she had a small studio nearby where some of her paintings were displayed. I told her that she could walk and talk with us, but we were not interested in going to an art studio.

“After a few minutes, my companion went on his way, and we agreed to meet after an hour. I said goodbye to the young woman and went to an internet cafe to check my mail. I remember that the connection was relatively slow, and it took me almost a whole hour to finish my work. When I was ready to leave, I noticed that the young woman was behind me again, which I did not like. I told her that our English practice was over. She insisted that at least I could take a look at her studio.

After meeting my companion at the designated place, upon the girl's insistence to visit her studio as we continued our way back to the hotel, we agreed to go with her just a couple of minutes away. Once again, I told her that we were not going to buy anything. I remembered, at that point, that what I needed was a logo. As we walked, I explained that we had just started a new company and needed a logo for that company. She said she could try to design



one. The problem started when I tried to explain what the new company was about: Pastoral Bible Foundation. It would be impossible to tell what went through her mind during those few minutes as I tried to explain the meaning of those 'strange' words to her. She probably had never been in personal contact with a Christian before, or maybe she had never heard the word 'Bible' before!

“We arrived at the studio. A square room, not too big, with artwork hanging on the four walls. At that moment, she couldn't be politer and friendlier. The paintings on the walls were indeed remarkable. And she began to work. Slowly we could see different strokes on the paper. She shyly glanced at us to see our reaction to the work she was doing. After a long and painful hour, she gave up, not satisfied with her creation. But she said, 'My professor is not too far away. I will call him up.' I tried to stop her. We were already feeling uncomfortable with all the efforts she had made and did not want to cause any problems for her or her mentor. But she insisted, and away she went, leaving us alone in the studio. Soon after, she came back in the company of a very dignified-looking man. It was the professor. Our embarrassment became even greater than before. Again, I apologized and told

him that we did not intend in any way to disturb him. He was polite and persistent, saying, 'I understand. There is no problem at all. Allow me to try to do something for you.' He asked me to explain in detail the logo that I needed. I said, 'Something attractive and unique, where we could see the initials PBF and also with some meaning in Chinese.'

“The professor started to handle the brush skillfully. It was expectedly better than his student's. At times, it seemed that he was almost there, satisfied with his creation. But he also stopped and apologized, saying that it was challenging to create a logo within a few minutes, just as the university had courses only for that. But he did not want to give up. We told him that it was all right with us, that it was already late, and the experience of being with them for a couple of hours was enough for us to appreciate the gentleness, skills, and dedication of the professor and his art student. He insisted. He wanted us to come back the following day. When we mentioned that we were leaving China early morning the next day, he asked for the name of our hotel... 'I will work tonight, and tomorrow before you go to the airport, I will be there.'

“Once again, I said it was unnecessary, but he would not take no for an answer. I realized that this man was serious and wanted to try and that I should also ask for the cost. When I asked about the price, he said: 'If you like what I do, then you give me what you think is fair; if you don't like it, you don't need to pay for anything.' I was

confused, hesitant, happy, apprehensive, surprised, and with a feeling of guilt for asking something almost impossible. I also took pity on the student who was there, silent. I also remembered that I had not bought any gifts for the community, so I looked again at the artworks on display before leaving the studio. Finally, I selected a set of four drawings, beautifully done, full of colors and details, depicting a well-known Chinese folktale. When I asked for the price, she immediately mentioned an amount. It was not expensive at all. I gladly paid for the four art pieces. And the young lady left.

The professor, then, told me, 'You selected very well. The four paintings that you chose were the best among her works. She had to redo that several times and the ones that you selected were the paintings that enabled her to finish university and graduate.' I felt embarrassed. 'But I paid her very little,' I said. The professor answered, 'No. You were asked to pay the price, and you did just that.' We left the professor at his work in the studio, and we went happily back to the hotel, wondering what would happen the following morning and pondering over the many experiences of the day, especially during the last couple of hours.

"Early morning the next day, and before checking out of the hotel, we met the professor who was waiting for us in the lobby. He showed us the result of a whole night's work.

"He explained to us that he tried to integrate everything we told him: 'The two

characters are ancient Chinese characters and very seldom used in modern times,' he started saying, 'very few Chinese would know their meaning. If we take the characters separately, the first one means ear and the second one means a thousand...' 'So a thousand ears... not bad at all,' I thought. Then he continued, 'In Chinese, you cannot separate the two characters; the first one always goes with the other character. So if we read the two characters together, we get a completely different meaning. In this case, it means a pathway in an immense rice field.' 'That is even more meaningful,' I thought.

"'But those two characters also have a hidden meaning,' he further said and continued, 'In ancient times, when somebody died in the village, the relatives would take the remains to be buried at the foot of the mountain and had to pass through this narrow pathway. So, in time, these characters also came to mean "the way to the beyond."' I told the teacher, 'We are Christians, and we can also see the symbol of our faith, the cross, and the resurrection. We also see the P, B, and F. A perfect logo! Exactly what we wanted.'

"At that point, I had to ask him for the price, 'Professor, I like the logo very much. How much do I owe you?' It was at that time that he looked intently at me and said: 'Last night before you left our studio, you bought some artwork from my student. You did not know that she needed exactly that amount of money to get her diploma from the university and start working. You owe me nothing!'"

Catholic translations of the Bible into Chinese, a long and tortuous history. Summary taken from different published sources. 19



Jean Basset bible

In 1615, Rome permitted the missionaries working in China to translate the Bible into the Chinese language, not using the vernacular but rather the "erudite language proper to the literati" to present the Chinese version of the Bible with the same dignity as the Chinese classics. An important translator worth mentioning for this period was Jean Basset (1662-1707) of the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris (MEP), who translated the New Testament from the Latin Vulgata into classical Chinese (or wenli 文理).

Basset's translation influenced later Bible editions, among them the first-

ever complete Catholic Bible, the Sigao Shengjing 思高聖經, translated under the leadership of an Italian Franciscan friar, Blessed Gabriele Maria Allegra, OFM (1907-1976), and published in 1968 by the Hong Kong-based Studium Biblicum Franciscanum.

A kind of liberation from the almost compulsory translation of the Bible in the classical Chinese language of the literati came after the famous "May Fourth Movement of 1919," which affected Chinese literature by the new status acquired by the vernacular language. Fr. Joseph Hsiao Ching-shan (Xiao Jingshan, 蕭靜山, 1855-1924) SJ, translated the New Testament from the Vulgata into Mandarin. Xiao's translation was first published in 1922, a few years after the May 4 Movement of 1919, which raised baihua 白話, or vernacular language status. The Union Version (Heheben 和合本) in Mandarin, the most widespread Protestant translation, was published more or less at that time.

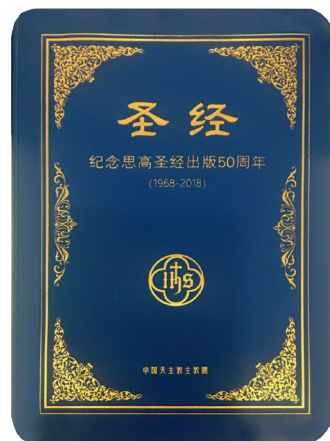
In 1924, at the First Plenary Council of Shanghai, Chinese Catholic Church leaders noted that there was no complete translation of the Old Testament available in Chinese for Catholics. It was decided to

form a translation committee and use the national language (guoyu 國語) to translate the Bible; however, this plan never materialized due to a lack of qualified people knowledgeable about biblical languages.

The first complete Catholic Bible

After three decades of work, the Sigao Shengjing was published as separate books in 1961 and in one volume in 1968. Father Allegra committed himself to this enterprise in 1930 when he realized that Catholics had not yet translated the entire Bible into Chinese, unlike the Protestants. However, while published in Hong Kong, the Sigao Bible was not authorized for printing in mainland China for over two decades.

The Sigao translation is appreciated for its elegant style, accuracy, and fidelity to the original texts. Despite its emphasis on formal renderings—sometimes to the detriment of fluency and understanding—



Sigao Shengjing 思高圣经

after the more recent publication of other translations, at the time of its fiftieth anniversary (1968-2018), the Sigao Bible continues to be the most popular and reputable edition among Chinese Catholics. It is the Bible several generations of Catholics grew up and prayed with and, no less important, had memorized, thus becoming “the” Bible of Chinese Catholics.

Post-Sigao translations

The Today’s Chinese Version (in Chinese Xiandai Zhongwen Yiben 现代中文译本) is an inter-confessional, Protestant-Catholic edition published at the beginning of the 1980s. Based on its English-equivalent version, it is published in two separate editions that differ in the terms used for “God” and “Holy Spirit” (respectively Shangdi or Shen and Shengling in the Protestant edition; Tianzhu and Shengshen 圣神 in the Catholic edition). Meaningfully, both editions adopt the term dao used by the Protestants in place of the traditional Catholic term shengyan for logos.

At the beginning of the 1980s, Aloysius Jin Luxian 金魯賢 (1916-2013), who would soon become bishop of Shanghai, started a new translation of the New Testament and the Psalms, which took about two decades to complete with the assistance of some educated Catholics. The textual basis was La Bible de Jérusalem (Yelusaleng Shengjing 耶路撒冷圣经).

When he started, Chinese Catholics still used the New Testament edition by



Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian 金魯賢 (1916-2013)

Father Xiao Jingshan because the Sigao Bible was authorized in mainland China only in the 1990s, just two years before Bishop Jin’s edition was published in one volume. However, even after the Sigao Bible became available in China, Bishop Jin launched a significant revision process of his translation that was completed in 2004. In 1991, he reportedly said that “the Bible is for today’s people and therefore it needs new translations to keep up with the current use of the language and be read more smoothly.” The Chinese Jerusalem Bible is characterized by a fluent style, expressions typical of Shanghai (generally less appreciated by people from northern parts of China), and more “Chinese” features, some of which distance it from the Sigao translation (such as the choice of the term dao for logos).

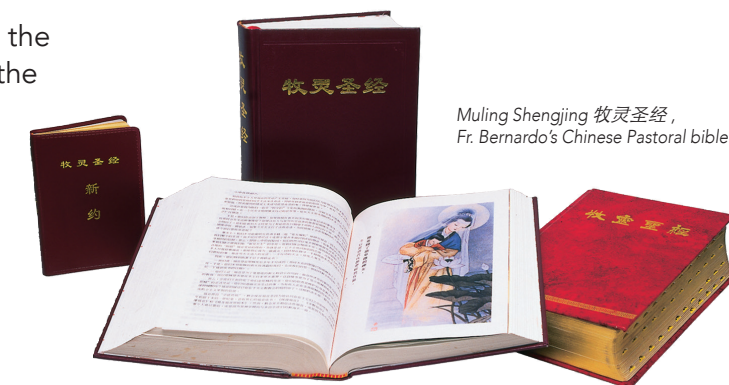
The lack of a missal in Chinese according to the post-Vatican II liturgy (adopted in mainland China from Hong Kong or Taiwan at the beginning of the 1990s) was also another reason behind Bishop Jin’s move to engage in

the translation work. In those years, he indicated that he would use his translation for the liturgy as some terms from China might be different from those used outside the mainland. Bishop Jin’s translation is widespread in Shanghai and neighboring dioceses

Bernardo’s Pastoral Bible (Muling Shengjing 牧灵圣经)

It was published at the end of the 1990s in Hong Kong and then in mainland China. The translation work was coordinated by Fr. Bernard Hurault (1924-2004), with a group of Chinese translators, based on his experience in making the popular Biblia Latino Americana, which aimed at a simple and straightforward translation combined with pastoral explanatory annotations. Based on editions in Western languages, the Pastoral Bible attracted some criticisms: the theological and biblical formation of the translators was questioned, and inaccuracies were found in the translation and commentaries.

Despite this, the Pastoral Bible gained some popularity among the Catholic



Muling Shengjing 牧灵圣经, Fr. Bernardo’s Chinese Pastoral bible



Alberto and his “Diaries.”

grassroots, and several editions with thousands of copies were distributed; then, it faded away.

Note from the narrator.

Even accepting to a certain extent some of these criticisms, Bernardo’s Bible was doomed from the very beginning. The translation indeed needed some corrections, and in the opinion of some reputable Chinese biblical scholars, it could be revised and come out with an updated edition.

Was Bernardo’s Bible a waste of time after all? Absolutely not.

Aside from touching the hearts of thousands of grassroots Chinese Catholics both in and out of mainland China, the Muling Shengjing put to the fore with more urgency than ever the real need for a new Chinese translation

of the whole Bible (the second one in the Catholic history of China) and, most importantly, a translation to be done, for the first time, exclusively by Chinese biblical scholars. In other words, Bernardo’s Bible acted as a precursor, as a reminder of something that needed to come.

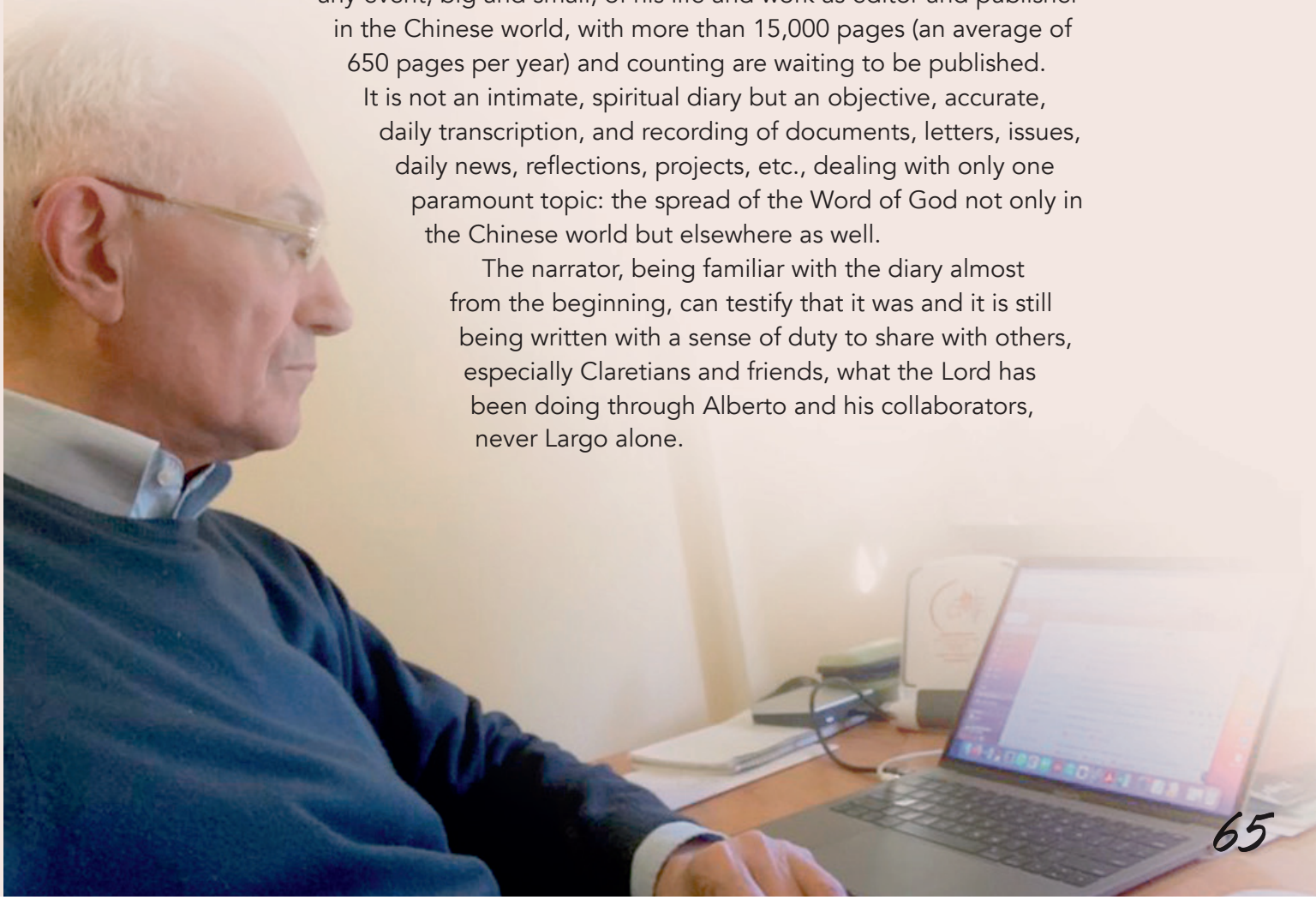
The implications, nevertheless, of such a pending work were simply overwhelming from whatever angle it could have been considered at that time. What was needed at that point was for someone to come forward and grasp the bull by the horns, as the Spanish proverb goes. This someone needed to be a “free editor.” He needed to be a good animator and an excellent detached organizer with experience in publishing biblical translations—a person used to teamwork and able to produce the considerable financial resources such a vast work would require.

Why all these requirements? Simply to make the envisioned team of Chinese Catholic scholar translators free to produce a full Chinese translation of the Bible. And it is where Alberto Rossa enters the scene.

From now on, the narrator of this story gives the voice to Alberto himself, or better said, to his diaries. In fact, from 2006, that is, from his move from Manila to Macau and then to Hong Kong where he now lives and works, he has faithfully kept a daily diary, recording any event, big and small, of his life and work as editor and publisher in the Chinese world, with more than 15,000 pages (an average of 650 pages per year) and counting are waiting to be published.

It is not an intimate, spiritual diary but an objective, accurate, daily transcription, and recording of documents, letters, issues, daily news, reflections, projects, etc., dealing with only one paramount topic: the spread of the Word of God not only in the Chinese world but elsewhere as well.

The narrator, being familiar with the diary almost from the beginning, can testify that it was and it is still being written with a sense of duty to share with others, especially Claretians and friends, what the Lord has been doing through Alberto and his collaborators, never Largo alone.





The occasion for a final decision was the Provincial Chapter of the Philippines (January 7 to 12, 2006). Fr. Rosendo Urrabazo, the Vicar General of the Congregation, was the delegate to preside the Chapter. During the section's breaks, I shared with him the prospect of starting a new mission in/for China as soon as possible. This was a transitional moment in the history of the Philippine Province. New native Claretians were now the majority and ready to take up government positions and other vital ministries.

especially, with the government authorities in Beijing and offered myself to pioneer the ministry by going to Macau as the first step. The project was approved in the Chapter resolutions and, almost immediately, the new Provincial Government assigned me to Macau. During the last Mass at the Chapter's closing, the new Provincial already gave me the farewell.

I was asked to present the "China project" to the Chapter. I shared my experiences with Amity Press and,

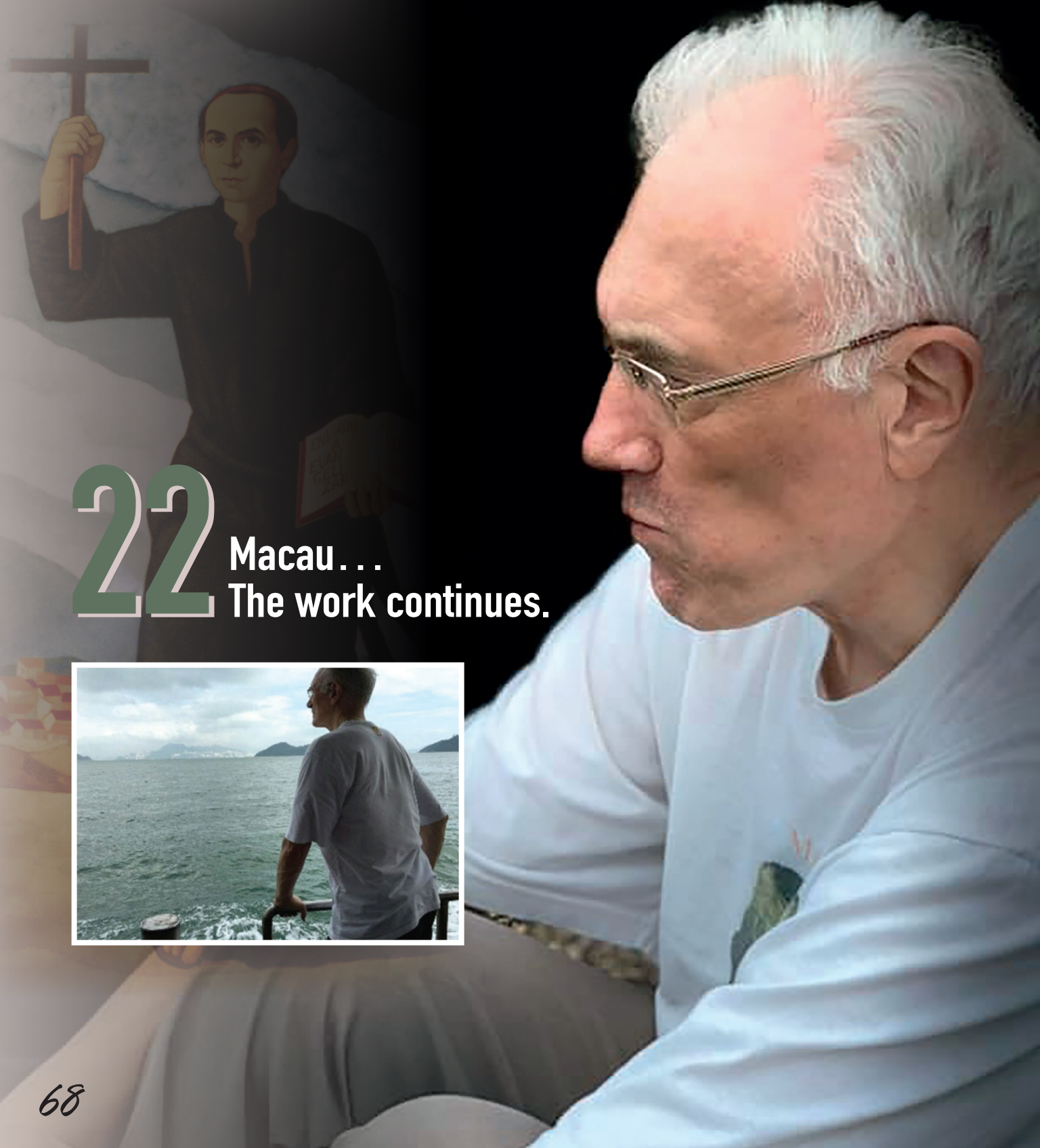
As soon as the meeting was over, I took a suitcase with my few personal belongings and left the place where I had been working for the last 27 years. It was January 17, 2006. I stopped in Hong Kong for a long conversation about China with the nuncio, Msgr. Eugene Nugent, and the same afternoon I disembarked in Macau.

21 Farewell, Manila! Welcome, Macau!

I had spent 27 years in the Philippines and understood that it was time to move on, leaving the ministry of publications in the hands of local Claretians. It was time to move on... as I had already talked with my Spanish companions in the Philippines. For everything, there is a time... and the time for us, foreign missionaries, was now. Those who wanted to remain in the country forever, so be it. The others should move on and return for new assignments either to

their Provinces of origin or to another place while we could still serve. I was ready to go where assigned, hopefully continuing the ministry that I had mastered through the years. The ministry of publications cannot be considered just as another assignment. The Claretian personnel assigned to this ministry should understand that it is for the long haul; contacts with other publishers take time to develop and maintain. One option that was still looming on the horizon was China.





22 Macau... The work continues.



Arriving in Macau in early January 2006, my focus was clear. Why Macau? Because it was a friendlier place to contact China compared with Hong Kong, where there was an open opposition headed by the cardinal of the diocese against the "Patriotic Church authorities" in the Mainland, thus jeopardizing any possible dialogue and, as a consequence, the refusal by the Chinese Government to grant a visa to visit mainland China to those members of the Hong Kong clergy suspected to be in connection with the cardinal. It was a time of dialogue and, therefore, any radical position was out of place.

The bishop of Macau received me very warmly, and mutual trust and friendship started between us, extended later on to the other Claretians assigned to the territory. Already established, the Bible project took the central stage. Two of my main collaborators in Manila accepted the invitation to join me in Macau, and, with the help of the diocese, we obtained the residence visa for them. We were ready for action. Our vision was: "Claretian Missionaries, without borders, in shared mission, for the evangelization of China and the rest of the world." We started a monthly newsletter, the "Macau Bulletin," with news of our ministry, especially in China.

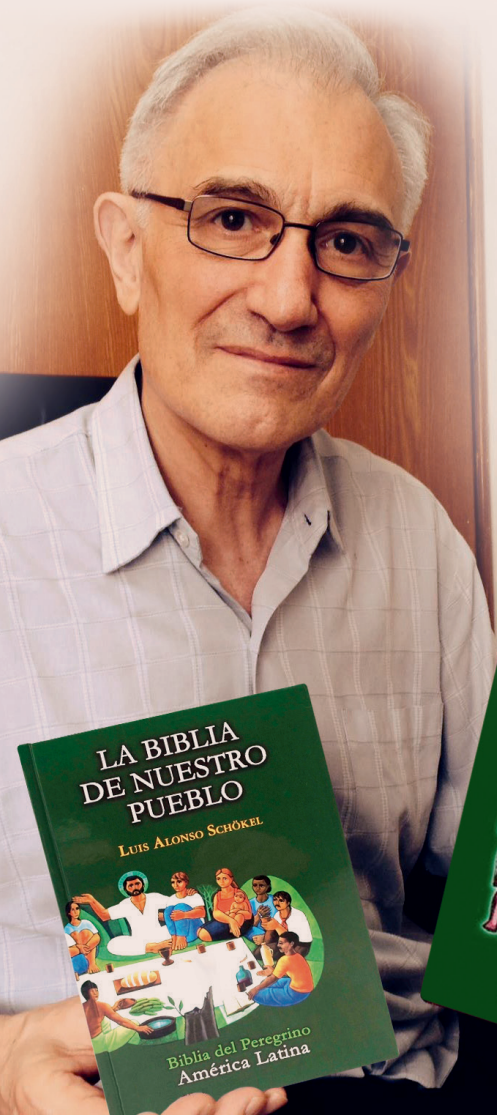
During those first months, I was very busy following up on the first edition of the Spanish Bible and other projects. I even took a month of Chinese language studies at the Sports University in Beijing. Soon, we also learned that due to the negative influence of the people of Hong Kong, many dioceses in China were not willing to accept the Chinese Pastoral Bible.

We started by forming a team to revise the Chinese translation with two good friends from the SVD, the Superior Provincial, and another professor of anthropology. We engaged some professors of the Fujen University in Taiwan to check the most important passages of the Bible for theological accuracy, a work that they did with great love.



23

Macau, the “Biblia de Nuestro Pueblo” (The Bible of Our People)



From the first moment of arrival in Macao, January 17, 2006, the editorial work increased. It was necessary to keep up with all the work that PBF had in hand, especially launching the new “La Biblia de Nuestro Pueblo” (The Bible of Our People). The editions of this Bible multiplied in the first few years. One skeptical collaborator for the first edition used to repeat in disbelief: “One of these days the Bible may come out.” And it did, and it came out in force. Episcopal Conferences of Latin America began ordering it, and to our satisfaction, it was very well accepted. A biblical scholar from Colombia wrote to us: “The bishops are delighted, the biblical scholars are in admiration and the simple people very grateful.” The work did not end with the first edition; we continued to make touch-ups until the current 36th edition. More than one million two hundred thousand copies are so far printed and distributed.



24

The story behind the “Biblia de Nuestro Pueblo.”

It is something worth to be put into writing. The idea was born in Manila in 2002 in a conversation between Alberto and Bernardo. The issue was the possibility of printing Bernardo’s “Biblia Pastoral Latino Americana” in China, explanatory notes included, to be distributed in Latin America at low cost so that even the poor could afford it. It was printed only in Spain, and the price per copy was too expensive for ordinary people. If printed in Amity Printing Press, on the other hand, a copy could be sold for half the Spanish price, and the quality of the Chinese printing was as good as Spanish one.

The editorial rights of the Biblia Pastoral, nevertheless, belonged to the Society of Saint Paul, and therefore the permit for it to be printed in China had to be given by them, particularly by Fr. Francisco Anta, the president of Sobocain (Sociedad Bíblica Católica Internacional/ International Catholic Bible Society). To the disappointment of Bernardo and Alberto, the request was turned down.



End of the issue? Not at all. When the request to print in China was refused, Alberto said to Bernardo: “Francisco Anta is forcing us to make a new Bible.” Looking at him in disbelief, Bernardo replied: “Let us go for it. I can help by writing new commentaries,” but Bernardo died soon after. This was how unexpected the beginning of the “Biblia de Nuestro Pueblo” was.

In reality, the project was better said than done. In the first place, Latin America had never been Alberto’s “editorial territory,” and his hands were full in Asia. But in

the balance, the willingness of putting an affordable Bible, similar to the Biblia Pastoral, in the hands of the poor, ordinary people, weighted more than anything else. The project, on the other hand, appeared more and more attractive and challenging. The years dedicated by Alberto and his team to the “Christian Community Bible” had equipped them with abundant experience, and, on top of that, a Bible in which new ideas, new updated and more comprehensive explanatory notes could be incorporated.

The first thing to do was to look for the best Spanish Bible translation around. Among many existing translations, Alberto chose the one made by the famous biblical scholar, Spanish Jesuit Luis Alonso Schökel, considered at that time as the best translation of the Bible in a European language. In the opinion of one expert, “Alonso Schökel has the most beautiful translation of the Old Testament in Spanish.” It was published by Ediciones Mensajero in 1993 under the title “Biblia del Peregrino,” also as a “study bible” with a body of rather technical notes done by Schökel himself.

Ediciones Mensajero and Claretian Publication reached an agreement to co-publish a new version of the “Biblia del Peregrino” with an edition for Spain (Mensajero). The Jesuits would take care of the biblical text. The rest: the Latino-Americanization of the complete text, introductions to each of the books of the Bible, explanatory notes, layout and printing was the responsibility of Claretian

Publications. The new title, suggested by the late Bishop Casaldáliga was “La Biblia de Nuestro Pueblo.”

The second decision taken by Alberto and his team was that Claretians with biblical studies and background should write the commentaries and notes, which constituted the most original and vital part of the project. Citing from the Introduction: “A new element of the Bible are the commentaries at the foot of every page. Unlike other commentaries addressed to specialized readers or that explain only some important passages of the text, our commentaries were done taking into consideration the majority of the people and with the concrete intention to bring the reader to the understanding of each chapter in its totality, the context in which it was written, the narrative thread and the message that the different biblical authors want to transmit.” The commentaries, organized by blocks of meaning, are either short or extended according to the difficulty of the biblical text. Even though they are addressed to the majority of the people, when the understanding of the biblical text requires, specialized commentaries are offered for the readers with specific biblical cultural backgrounds.

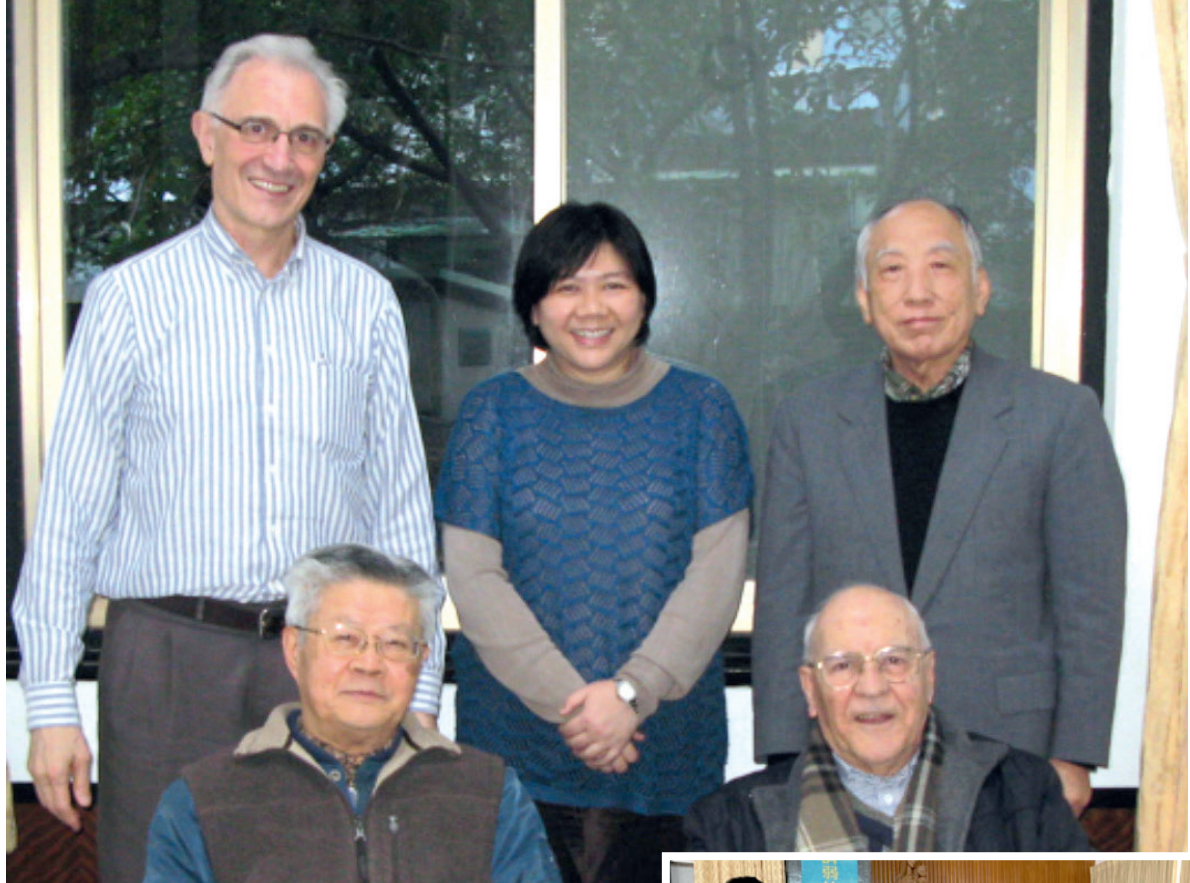
Another novelty is the numerous illustrations (drawings, paintings, vignettes, engravings) specially done for “La Biblia de Nuestro Pueblo” by the internationally recognized, especially in Latin America, Claretian painter Maximino Cerezo Barredo, a good friend of Alberto Rossa. “La Biblia de Nuestro Pueblo” has 2,400 pages.

2014: The “Claret Bible” in Chinese with new commentaries and notes comes out.



A project that took much of my effort, time, and money during the last 12 years is the new version of the Chinese Bible. It took a little time to make that momentum decision and allow Bernardo’s Muling Bible to fade away. In 1998 Fr. Bernardo and his collaborators were finally able to complete the Pastoral Bible in Chinese in traditional characters. It was the fruit of an enormous

effort. To get the nihil obstat, we had to wait for 18 months from the Diocese of Hong Kong. They were not happy that a couple of foreign missionaries who could not speak the language come with a new Chinese Bible complete with extensive commentaries. Meanwhile, while well received by the people, the edition of the Chinese Bible in traditional characters was never welcomed and accepted by a group



of influential people in Hong Kong who tried to discredit it.

We finally understood that no matter what we did, the ominous propaganda would follow. And that is when we decided to start a completely new translation of the Chinese Bible, with a new team, with contemporary commentaries. I gathered some names, some biblical scholars to help us... not an easy task. Providence came to our help with two dedicated laypersons who accepted to work full-time for this project: Winnie Wong as the coordinator for the traditional characters, and Teresa Li for the simplified one used in Mainland China. Both of them have a background in biblical studies. Winnie is taking Master of



Theology at Fujen University in Taipei, and Teresa studied Chinese literature before graduating from ICLA. They have been involved in the project for the last 12 years, becoming the main editors.

When the time came to inform the good bishop of Hong Kong about the new plan of a new translation and asked for the

appointment of a biblical scholar of his choice for the nihil obstat, he was very reluctant. He assured me that he would not be able to find anybody to do that. When I then mentioned the possibility of asking Fr. Mark Fang, SJ in Taiwan, suddenly he was quite open and told me, "If Fr. Mark accepts the job, checks the translation and accepts it, we will have no problem."

I flew to Taiwan to meet Fr. Mark Fang. It was not easy to convince the old Jesuit professor and Bible scholar. After all, I a foreigner was still behind the project of a new Chinese translation and, of course, he had understandable reservations until I offered him a gift—the newly published Spanish "La Biblia de Nuestro Pueblo." Immediately, he recognized his Bible professor at Rome, Fr. Luis A. Schökel, and his joy was uncontainable. He greatly admired his teacher and said that the Spanish Bible was the best gift we could have ever given him... and he agreed to review our translation.

The Bible has been translated into modern languages with many different translations accepted by the Church. In English, we have about 30 other translations with imprimatur, but in Chinese, there is only one "Catholic Bible," and many people have learned by heart many passages from it. Thus, making it quite difficult to present them with and convince them to read another translation. The Sigao Bible uses high Chinese language difficult to understand for today's Chinese people and does not have any commentaries or explanations.

We started with the New Testament. As we went along, and after a book got the imprimatur, we would publish it. The first book was the Gospel according to Luke. The corrections submitted by Fr. Mark Fang were, at times, written in Greek. The imprimatur came from the archbishop of Taipei. Then followed the other books of the New Testament. We did the same in the Mainland.

One particular situation we encountered was that when the translation done outside China in traditional characters was converted to simplified characters, the contents remained the same, but the editors in the Mainland would not accept the translation. They told me: "It smells of Hong Kong." And the same situation when a manuscript originated from the Mainland, it would not be accepted in Hong Kong. There are idiomatic expressions, theological concepts, grammar nuances that are different. The result was that we had to come out with two different editions, not only because of the characters but also because of the translation itself.

With much labor, we finished the New Testament in 2014 and published it in both translations: simplified for the Mainland and traditional for outside China. One day Fr. Jose, my companion, received a phone call from the auxiliary bishop of Hong Kong... he wondered what he or we did wrong... But the bishop told him that the now Cardinal John Tong publicly expressed his admiration for the Claretian New Testament, saying that it was the best translation that Hong Kong ever had.

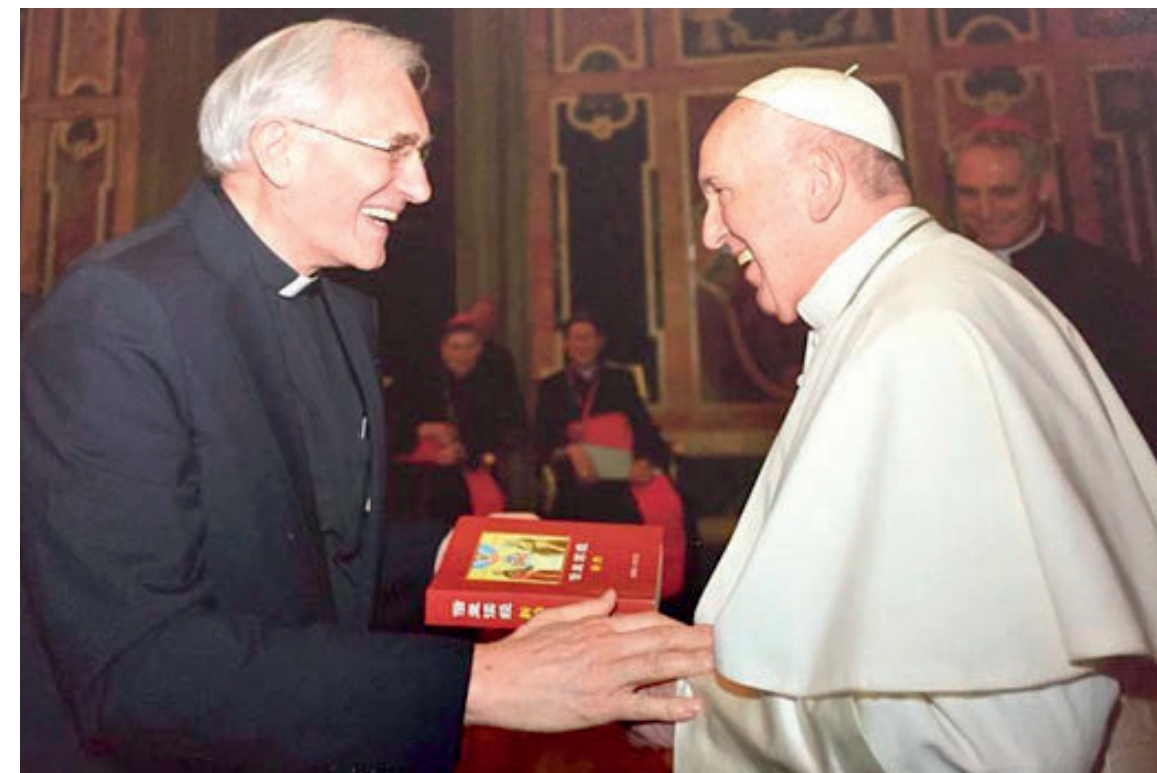
26

Pope Francis and the New Testament of the “Claret Chinese Bible Translation”



In 2015 the Claretian Publishing Group had a meeting in Rome. We were more than 20 people. We floated the idea of attending a papal Mass at Santa Marta, but it was not possible. One day, Fr. Jijo, almost crying, told me that he would not go back to Macau unless I get him to meet the Pope! I told him that he was out of his mind... but I also wrote an email to the Argentinean secretary of the Pope and told him that we brought the newly published New Testament in Chinese, that we wanted to personally give to the Pope after the Mass at Santa Marta... Could two of us attend? To our surprise, the answer came right away: “This is not normal, but as an exception, you can come tomorrow for the Mass at Santa Marta.” Jijo will forever be thankful because the experience of meeting Pope Francis personally was the best gift for the 25th anniversary of his profession.

And in April 2019, we had another meeting in Rome, convened by the Catholic Biblical Federation. Participants came from all over the



world. A number of Claretians took part in that meeting as well. On the last day, Fr. Henry and I had tickets to go to Sri Lanka for a Bible seminar for ASCLA West, but a terrorist attack happened in Colombo a couple of days earlier, and the airport was closed, so we could not travel. It was a blessing in disguise: the group organizers told us that the Pope would receive us and address the group on the last day. The President of the Catholic Biblical Federation was Cardinal Chito Tagle, a good friend in Manila. We were informed that perhaps the Pope would have time to greet each one personally just for a couple of seconds.

I told Chito that I had a New Testament in Chinese (this time the 1,400-page edition of the New Testament in simplified Chinese) and that, by any means, I had to give it to the Pope. He said he would help. But it was not needed as Pope Francis greeted each one of us. When my turn came, I broke the protocol rules... looked him in the eyes and in Argentinean Spanish asked him, while presenting a copy of the New Testament in Chinese: “¿Me la firmás? (Could you please sign it?)” He smiled and said: “A vos te firmo cualquier cosa menos un cheque (For you I sign anything except a check).” And we both laughed to the surprise of the people around who had no idea what was going on.

27 What about the Chinese translation of the Old Testament?

After years of hard work and heavy expenses to complete the New Testament, the translation of the Old Testament seemed an impossible dream. I had a meeting in the seminary of Hebei in Mainland China with the team of Chinese biblical scholars involved in the New Testament. Almost unanimously, they said that the translation of the Old Testament was too much and would take too much time and be too expensive. One Chinese sister who recently arrived after graduating from the Biblicum in Rome offered herself to translate the book of Exodus...in two years.

Some alternatives were proposed; one of them was to use the Sigao translation of the Old Testament. We even tried to get an agreement with the Franciscan in-charge of the Sigao Bible.

They agreed to let us use their translation with our notes and commentaries on condition that we would not touch the text and only for one edition. We thought about it, but we eventually abandoned the idea. Finally, the only alternative left was to do a complete translation ourselves.

And for that, we needed a sure guide. The health of Fr. Mark Fang had deteriorated—he is already very old. Again, Providence placed a Chinese bible scholar on our way; we offered him a full-time job, and in September 2020, he started working for us. His job is to read the last proofs. The draft translation of the complete Old Testament with notes and commentaries and with Lectio is finished, the revision work still goes on, but we can see the light at the end of the tunnel.



The best friend and cooperater of Alberto becomes a Claretian.

28

Sid Ching had been part of the Bible team since the first days when we first met Fr. Bernardo in 1986, and we decided to prepare the English version of the Spanish Pastoral Bible. And Sid became part of the core group of translators. When the English Bible project was finished in 1988, Sid accepted the great challenge of being the main translator and editor of the Tagalog version, a task that took him several years. After that, he needed a break, and the opportunity came when a friend invited him to go to Macau. There he started teaching English and, at the same time, getting a master's degree in education, and later, another master's in the USA in teaching English as a second language. His experience as an English teacher in Macau energized his students in a way that neither the students nor the faculty ever imagined. Sid was an excellent though unconventional teacher. He demanded a lot from his students... but they learned English well, a debt of gratitude to the teacher that lasts for years.

Some years went by, and then I again needed help to train some translators of the Bible in some Asian countries. I asked Sid if he could come back and work for

PBF for the Bible ministry. He accepted. In 2004 I asked him to go to Myanmar to train a group of translators for the Burmese edition of the Pastoral Bible. He went and felt sick after a few days; he had to return urgently to Macau and went directly to the hospital with the help of a good doctor friend who took care of him. He learned that he had a severe heart problem and needed an urgent operation. I asked him to come to Manila as soon as the doctors would allow him to travel. He was worried about the expenses... there was no time to think about that; I told him, "PBF will cover all your hospital expenses." He came, and the operation at the Heart Center was successful.

One anecdote of this event. The night before the operation, I visited him at the hospital and told him: "Sid, you have been working on and off with me for the last 20 years, why don't you become a Claretian?" His answer was: "And you're asking me this the night before my heart operation, and I don't even know if I will come out alive from it!"

What happened next is another marvelous experience. Knowing that Sid had been operated in the Philippines and that the heart operation was costly, his former students in Macau, by then young professionals, got together and said that it was not fair that the Bible ministry should pay for the expenses.... They said: "We have to help our teacher," and they gathered the amount needed to cover the cost of the operation from their own pockets. I learned about that the day Sid

was returning to Macau. Before going to the airport, he came to my room to say thanks and goodbye and placed USD 10,000 in cash on my desk. I asked Sid if he had robbed a bank... it was then that he told me the story.

Once again, back to December 2005. Sid had gone back to Macau, and soon after applied to join the congregation, and was accepted. For his novitiate, he was asked to go to Japan under Fr. Marcelino Fonts.



29

Brother Sid Ching's "unique" first profession as Claretian in Beijing.



September 6, 2006

Morning. Today is a historic day. Early in the morning, after breakfast, eight of us went by taxi to the Beijing National Seminary of the Patriotic Chinese Catholic Church: Fr. Josep Abella, Marcelino Fonts, Francisco Carín, Rene Manubag, Desiderio Ching, Daniel Ortiz, Fr. Huang Yu-Tao and myself.

The trip took about an hour. Still, we arrived there on time to meet the rector and other priests, take a look at the beautiful compound, and be directed to a lovely furnished and new waiting room where, after a few minutes, Mr. Liu Bai Nian arrived. Together with him were his secretary, a priest who had spent two years with El Prado in France, the rector of the seminary Fr. John, who spoke English very fluently, and the vice-rector. Later on, Bishop Ma also came.

The meeting lasted for an hour. Mr. Liu presented the people accompanying him, and Fr. Abella presented the rest of us. Then Mr. Liu started to talk and Paco was the translator. He explained the reason for the seminary, the place that the seminary has and will have as the main center of studies for seminarians, young priests and sisters. A new wing is being built for the sisters. Mr. Liu explained the present situation of China concerning the faith and said that there are still 1.1 billion people in China who do not believe, and that presents a big challenge for the Church. He said that China needs the help of missionaries. Regarding the relationship with the Vatican, he said that the problem is not religious but political. He also mentioned that several cardinals have visited the seminary and have given talks to the seminarians and priests.

We were also told that they have permission to bring 20 professors, and

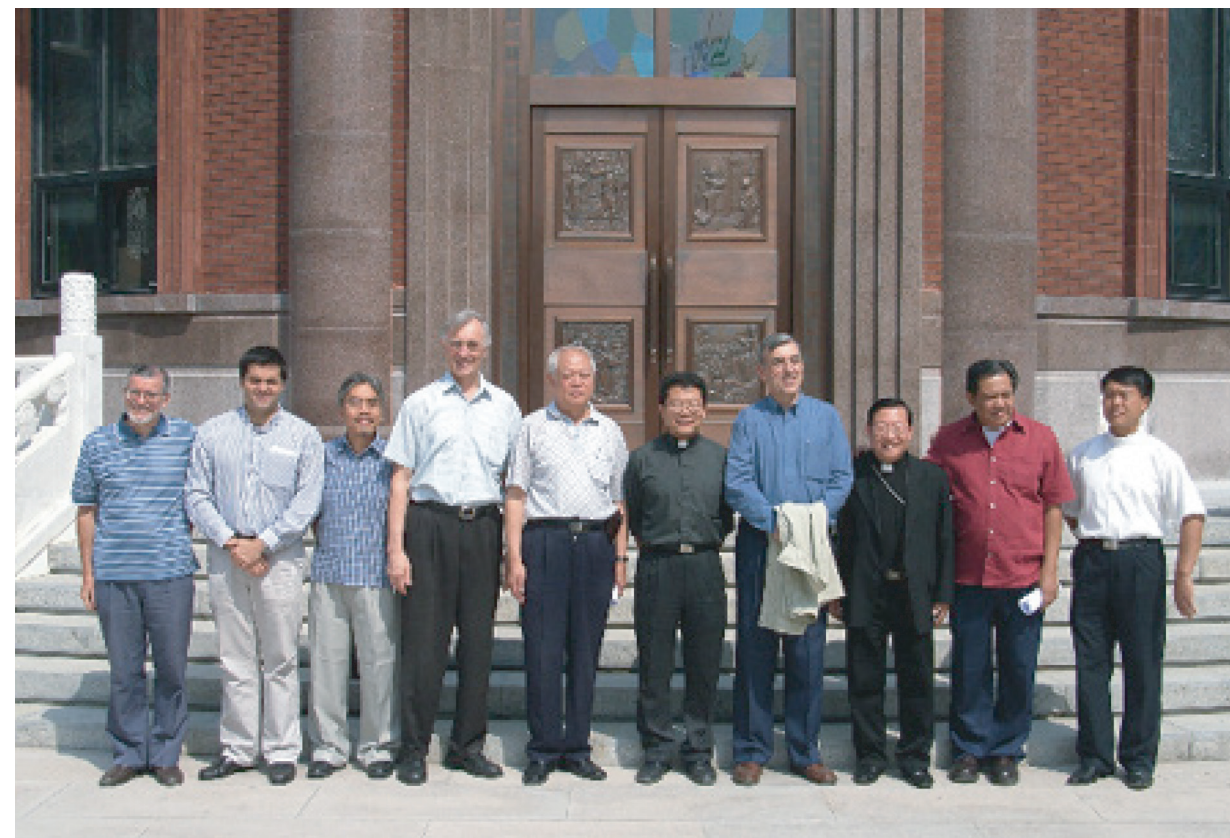
they have agreed to get ten from China and ten from abroad. We mentioned that Paco and Sid were capable and available to teach at the seminary. The rector was very vocal, saying that they could transfer to the seminary anytime. They were particularly interested in Sid's teaching English to the seminarians and young priests. The atmosphere of the meeting was very cordial and open. Fr. Abella also explained the reason for a missionary congregation and the role that we play worldwide. The group was interested to know some more details about the Claretians. The conversation continued later on during the banquet. Fr. Abella and Rene offered Mr. Liu some gifts. Later on that day, Mr. Liu gave all of us some remembrances also.

Although the setting was very formal in a gorgeous room, with a superb carpet and chairs, the formalities were light. Once the main conversation was made, I started introducing some of the books. I presented the Bible Diary and gave a copy to each one. They were very pleased with the gift. I explained that we had organized a team to prepare new commentaries in Chinese and launch the project as Bible Diary 2008. I also showed the small Daily Gospel.

Then I presented other books informing them that we were planning to translate and publish in Chinese: *How to Read the*

Bible Every Day, The First Five Years of the Priesthood, Journeying with Others, and finally samples of the ten-volume *Visual Series*, explaining the possible use of these books. They were all very pleased with the proposals.

From the meeting, we went to the basement chapel for the celebration of the Mass. The chapel had been inaugurated the night before, and it was only that morning that the first Mass would be celebrated there, after the consecration of the altar and the tabernacle. The Claretian priests concelebrated, and the Mass was presided by Fr. Abella. In attendance were a group of the most prominent persons of the Patriotic Catholic Church in China: Mr. Liu, the newly consecrated Bishop Ma, the rector of the seminary, the vice-rector and some professors. Fr. Abella explained the meaning of the religious vows, and afterward was the ceremony of the first religious profession of Br. Desiderio Ching.



It was solemn and simple. There were many pictures taken. It is to be noted that this was the first time a religious profession was done in China in a public and solemn way by a foreigner and the first time in the seminary history that a foreigner was the main celebrant, even with a bishop in attendance. Quite an honor and a privilege for the Claretians. We, later on, learned that they had taken exceptional care to rush the construction and preparation of the chapel that practically was inaugurated by us.

After the Mass, Mr. Liu accompanied us to visit the main buildings of the new

seminary. There are 41 seminarians now and 43 young priests in continuing education. The seminary has a capacity for 200 seminarians. We first visited the 4-story building library. A very well done and modern building. The library is still hungry for books. We promised to help them build the library. Then we went to the conference theater, a place to hold more than 200 people, with an amphitheater layout of seats, like a very modern auditorium. We were told that several cardinals had spoken in that place, and they took pride in recalling their names. We also visited the kitchen

and dining area and were shown the surroundings of the vast compound of the seminary premises. We could see a massive building at one side, and we were told that it was the sisters' quarters.

The whole place is organized to have the first Catholic university of China. It was mentioned that the government paid for the construction of the seminary with the local government taking pride in its structure and the professionalism they managed to create with subcontractors and dealers. It was placed as an example for other companies to follow. After we finished the tour of the place, several limousines arrived to bring us to the banquet.

Afternoon. We were honored with a fantastic banquet. We were 14 people at the table, and the meal took a good two hours. There was the usual "ganbei" traditional toast. We were already told what that means and how the guests are obliged to drink. We were quite moderate, excusing ourselves when we did not want to drink. The conversation went on in a very relaxed manner. We befriended, in particular, a seminary professor, Fr. Cheng who, we learned, had spent several months at St. John's Abbey at The Liturgical Press, working as a translator and with big plans to organize a team of translators in connection with Peter Dwyer and The Liturgical Press. He mentioned that Peter would come next year in May for a meeting with the team of translators, and he invited me to attend that meeting as well.

Mr. Liu was quite happy with the whole event and personally thanked me for what was going on. If it was a big event for us, it was also a huge event for them. The rector said in a moment of frankness that we were very daring in doing what we did. They all felt very proud of the accomplishment.

One other detail in the conversation was that Bishop Ma and Mr. Liu had recently gone to Japan for some meetings. The Cardinal of Tokyo treated them exceptionally well; they celebrated Mass together, etc. It should be remembered that the consecration of Bishop Ma was the most controversial in recent years since he still holds a government position and is connected directly with the authorities, the same with Mr. Liu. On the other hand, we could see how simple the bishop is. He invited me to go to his diocese, and I promised to go there sometime. His diocese is an impoverished place with several indigenous cultures on the border with Vietnam. The Jesuits from Macao visit that area that, according to the bishop, has four seasons: springtime, springtime, springtime, and springtime.

After the great banquet and the formal thanks, we were taken to visit the tomb of Mateo Ricci. Mr. Liu accompanied us and explained in detail the place, the history, etc. We also took several pictures there. And it was time to say goodbye to Mr. Liu. He had spent 7 hours with us despite being very busy with other commitments.



Fr. Fernando Armellini,
Fr. Claudio Doglio... and Alberto.

30

Fernando Armellini and Claudio Doglio are two of Italy's most renowned biblical scholars with a vast production of biblical material in the Italian language on YouTube. Armellini's weekly explanation of the Sunday liturgy, especially the Gospel, are simply among the best: challenging, instructive, straight to the point, down to earth, with a scholarly and contextual background of the readings, articulated in such a way that even the ordinary Catholic

without any particular biblical formation can grasp, understand and enjoy.

Claudio Doglio, on the other hand, has the unique and rare gift of putting the whole Bible, that is, every book of both the Old and New Testament, within the reach and understanding of Catholic laypeople. Each of his YouTube videos, 25 minutes each in Italian, is a little masterpiece of biblical explanation with the art of adapting the latest scholarly research to the level of his listeners. It is probably the most

comprehensive, complete presentation of commentaries and videos of the whole Bible in Italian.

How did Largo know about them? Everything started with one simple telephone call: "Largo, listen to this commentary in Italian; you will like it." Just like that. The first Italian biblical scholar to enter the "radar" of Alberto was Fernando Armellini in 2013. Claudio Doglio came mid-2020.

The rest is history: more than 2,000 videos already produced and dubbed in different languages with subtitles included, are made available for free on social media (the whole project will be around 3,000 videos). They are so far are in Spanish, English, Chinese (Mandarin), Chinese (Cantonese), and Portuguese.

Such a considerable quantity of videos is due to the number of videos needed to cover the different books of the Bible, like for instance: the 12 videos for the Gospel of Matthew in Italian mean a total production of 60 videos, 12 for each of the five languages mentioned above. Regarding Fr. Armellini, he is renewing and adapting his commentaries, which means that there are now two, sometimes three, different videos for any Sunday of, say, Cycle B.

Aside from the videos, the printed



text in different languages is also offered. One of the most difficult things found by Alberto in this work was

to master the technique of putting the subtitles in the five languages translated by native speakers of those languages. Alberto himself dubbed the Spanish and English versions.

Behind this gigantic production, there is, in the first place, the passion to bring the Word of God, explained and commented on, to as many people as possible and, in the process, thousands and thousands of working hours, iron discipline, and meticulous planning. Among all the projects of Alberto and Claretian Publications in Macau and Hong Kong, this probably is the one done almost exclusively by Largo himself.

The harvest of this sowing of the Word are the countless feedbacks of the people from different countries and cultures expressing their gratitude for having discovered, understood and enjoyed, many for the first time, the Word of God.

Needless to say that both, Fernando Armellini and Claudio Doglio, Alberto's friends now, were delighted to give him the permission to translate, use and spread all their commentaries by any means and in every possible language.

31 Final words.

Alberto Rossa, "El Largo," is now 76 years old, celebrating this 2021, the 50th anniversary of his priestly ordination... but if some of you think that after such an intense, hectic life as publisher and editor, always with two or three projects at hand, constantly under the pressure of deadlines, always answering emails (sometimes several hundreds a day), etc., he'd be a semi-retired, decrepit, full of stress old man... you are wrong. Just get an invitation from him if you pass by Hong Kong to go mountain climbing in the neighboring island of Lantau, where he works on weekends in the Claretian parish, and you will get the surprise of your life.







