

A HISTORY OF THE PARISH OF TALISAY CITY (NEG. OCC.) FROM 1850 TO THE 1990S

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On 20 June 1848, the whole island of Negros was entrusted to the Augustinian Recollects.¹ This was in the wake of the ocular inspection tour of the vast island of Negros by the governor of the Visayas in mid-1847 and his advice to the Dominican Bishop Romualdo Jimeno (1808-1872) of Cebu to increase the parishes. The governor deplored the state of the parishes in the hands of the diocesan priests. A few weeks after, Bishop Jimeno saw for himself the lamentable condition — both spiritual and material— of Negros Island and he then urged the transfer of the parishes to a religious order. The governor-general in Manila acceded to the bishop's request in a letter dated April 1848 and in May he informed the provincial superiors of the religious orders in Manila about the deplorable plight of Negros.

On 29 May 1948, the Augustinian Recollect prior provincial accepted the parishes of Negros and the governor general entrusted the spiritual administration of the huge but largely undeveloped province in a royal decree of 20 June 1848. The first two Recollects arrived at Amlan and Siaton [in present-day Negros Oriental] in August 1848.

On 26 October 1848, two Augustinian Recollect missionaries arrived in Negros. Father Tomás Mezquita (1817-1860) took possession of Himamaylan and, two days later, on 28 October Father Andrés Cobos (1816-1877) that of Kabankalan. The spiritual abandonment of the Christian population of the four towns was the chief reason for the priority of curate assignment given them by the Dominican prelate of Cebu.

1. Bishop Romualdo Jimeno and Minuluan

Minuluan was founded in 1788 and made into a parish in 1849.² In late 1848 or early 1849, Bishop Romualdo Jimeno advised the Augustinian Recollect prior provincial Father Joaquín Soriano (1800-1863) to designate not just any

1 Ángel MARTÍNEZ CUESTA, *History of Negros* (Manila 1980) 170-172.

2 Santiago José MARTÍNEZ LÁZARO, «El padre Fernando Cuenca, fundador de Negros (Filipinas)»: *Mayéutica* 41 (1990) 168.

missionary friar as parish priest of Minuluan but a good-natured one, because he would be alone and if he could not get along with priests of adjoining missions and parishes, he might become bored and this could probably give rise to fatal consequences. The two nearby curates were brothers and they belonged to the Locsin family of Molo, "haughty people"³ who were known as trouble-makers in the province of Iloilo.⁴

The Recollect prior provincial dispatched to Minuluan a rather young missionary named Fernando Cuenca de San José (1824-1902), twenty-five years of age. However, the two Locsin brothers—Father Román, parish priest of Bacolod, and Father Eusebio of Silay— would become in their senior years his patients in the convent-*cum*-hospital of Talisay. Father Eusebio would suffer from paralysis and weakening of nerves. His brother Román would also suffer from paralysis and degeneration of his eyesight. Father Fernando applied the hydrotherapeutic treatment on both of them.⁵

Let us quote lengthily the respected Recollect historian of Negros, Father Angel Martínez Cuesta, in his doctoral dissertation, who extensively discoursed on Father Fernando Cuenca and his works in Talisay as well as in Negros as a whole:

Father Fernando Cuenca de San José arrived at his parish on the first day of January 1850⁶ and practically did not leave it until his death on 28 March 1902. From his parish Fr. Cuenca soon became the foremost promoter of progress in the island. He personified the spirit of the time. He was not a genius, not even a brilliant man. He was practical, observant and full of enthusiasm. He had particular insight into the needs of the moment and frequently found a remedy. There were no problems, no anxieties in Negros that he did not share.

At the beginning, he devoted all his time to the resettlement of natives [*‘indígenas’*] and the establishment of population centers [*‘formación de poblados’*]. He then dedicated his time to the improvement of communications and the cultivation of

3 MARTÍNEZ CUESTA, *History*, 173. The translators rendered Father Cuesta's *gente altiva* in the original doctoral dissertation as *provincial people*. The two secular parish priests referred to by Bishop Jimeno were Father Eusebio Locsin and Father Román Locsin. See ÁNGEL MARTÍNEZ CUESTA, *Historia de la Isla de Negros, Filipinas (1565-1898)* (Madrid 1974) 72, especially footnote 48.

4 MARTÍNEZ CUESTA, *History*, 174; MARTÍNEZ CUESTA, *Historia*, 73.

5 ARCHIVO HISTÓRICO PROVINCIAL DE LA PROVINCIA DE SAN NICOLÁS DE TOLENTINO (AM), Marcilla, Navarra, España, *Relación nominal del clero secular indígena que han estado en el sanatorio de Minulúan en busca de salud*, 010r.

6 The original text is "a primeros días de enero del año 1850,": MARTÍNEZ CUESTA, *History*, 173.

sugarcane. To this he gave the best years of his life. It was he who invented, built and popularized a hydraulic machine for the preparation of sugarcane. Later in the mid-1880s when he saw that difficulties would arise from the cultivation of a single crop and from the competition that sugar beets would soon pose to sugarcane, he began to experiment with and to propagate the cultivation of abaca, coffee and various root crops.⁷

The foundation of San Nicolás de Tolentino parish of Talisay in Negros was on 1 January 1850. This was the date when the Augustinian Recollect Father Fernando Cuenca as the first parish priest took possession of the vast “cogon wasteland” named Minuluan, peopled by some settlers in the lowland and indigenous tribes of Aetas in the northeast mountain of Negros Island.

In that year, there were a little over three thousand inhabitants in the whole town of Minuluan. In 1851, a year after, Minuluan was reported to the provincial curia in Manila by the first parish priest to have the census population of 819½ tributes and 3,731 inhabitants. It was the third biggest town in western Negros in terms of population, after Himamaylan, the provincial capital since 1795, and Cauayan.⁸

In 1879, the Recollect historian Father Patricio Marcellán (1834-1889) provided a succinct description of the topography of Talisay in the second half of the 19th century and gave the reason of its sustained development and fast progress, stating:

In 1850, Talisay and its environs were an extensive cogon wasteland and, thanks to an ingenious and unrelenting supervision, the residents had established an important town center; they were instructed on what they could get from the land where they stood; they were encouraged to devote to cultivation and planting; they were constantly sustained in the face of setbacks of time and adversities of the seasons which were intended to subdue the native to his indolence; however, through religious instruction, they acquired the practical manifestation of the truth that he who sows, shall reap and that he who works hard shall become wealthy.⁹

The land was plain and well-ventilated by the coastal winds on account of its vicinity to the sea.¹⁰ In the early Spanish colonial period, Minuluan was one hour

7 MARTÍNEZ CUESTA, *History*, 173.

8 FIDEL DE BLAS, 44-45.

9 MARCELLÁN, 157.

10 *Ibid.*, 156.

away from Silay in the north and one hour away from Bacolod in the south. It was roughly eleven kilometers wide leading to the mountain. Minuluan was blest with big rivers or small rivulets that provided water to the plantations and thus fertilized the land. During the third quarter of the 19th century, the strong currents were used for a considerable number of hydraulic machines for the manufacture of sugar. The dwellers learned to value the phenomenal fertility of the land where they planted with sugarcane in almost its entirety.

The wealthy investors utilized powerful steam engines for their sugar mills. The impoverished farmer, however, had solely his carabao in ploughing with cane fields and with the sweat of his brow it had aided greatly in the production of sugar. Roads were opened and thus facilitated transit by carts and carriages and communications with the adjoining towns. Houses were constructed by the farm settlers. Progress and growth grew hand in hand. By the late 1870s the sugar haciendas of Talisay had produced a hundred thousand piculs. The construction of sturdy and extensive bridges was supervised by Father Cuenca. All experienced moral and material satisfaction in their hard work and welfare. All this proved that there was great wealth which was distributed proportionately to the whole population.¹¹

In 1925, Father Licinio Ruiz, Recollect chronicler of Saint Nicholas Province, wrote about the great multifarious tasks of evangelization, civilization, agriculture, town planning and development of Talisay under the tireless administration of Father Fernando Cuenca:

If we had proposed to describe extensively the beginnings of this town and the growth it had undergone during the last seventy years, we would have material enough for a book. By limiting ourselves to the small and reduced space we give to these notes, we shall only say that the town of Talisay has undergone a very deep metamorphosis under the activity of the Recollect missionary Father Cuenca, its only parish priest since the year 1851 until the Revolution.

As we discourse on the general situation of the Island, we took note of the material and spiritual backwardness of the towns that compose it. With respect to its situation, Talisay was a jungle; in the spot where we can now view magnificent houses and the beautiful roads where cars and trucks pass now were once a cogon wasteland. The Talisay of today with all its advancements and progress is due to the civilizing activity of Father Cuenca, to the tenacious work, wise administration and continued vigilance of this great religious.

11 *Ibid.*, 156.

Evidently, Father Cuenca exerted more effort in working and striving for the wellbeing of his spiritual children than for his own; because outside of the life of detachment he had always observed, as manifested by the very parish rectory where he lived, which neither through its proportions nor through its form, was not much different from other parish rectories.

2. Talisay inhabitants resettled and town established

The pioneering Recollect missionaries in Negros Island closely collaborated with the provincial governor Don Manuel Valdivieso Morchecho starting in 1848. They worked hard for “the conversion of the natives and their education in the urban way of life.”¹² In the *cabecera* of Himamaylan, the parish priest Father Agustín Olmedillas (1819-1870) and his young assistant Father Fernando Cuenca, who was at that time intensively learning the rudiments of the Hiligaynon tongue from an old woman, evangelized the valleys near the curacy, especially Tinungan which would give rise to the town of Isabela.¹³

In Minuluan, he resettled the scattered dwellers of Concepcion, Dos Hermanas and San Fernando. He had earlier constructed the first church and convent of Minuluan where upon his arrival there were but a few houses disseminated near the banks of Minuluan river or creeks. He then planned the growing town, by setting the outlines and boundaries, and creating the plaza fronting the church complex.

3. Talisay: springboard for mission and exploration in Negros

During his term in 1855-1857, Governor Emilio Saravia fully supported the systematic conversion of Negros inhabitants. Bishop Jimeno acceded to Saravia’s request for the Father Fernando’s missionary trips. The only possible means of transport then was on horseback and travelling along coastlines and crossing rivers, big and small. In a short period of time, the energetic young Recollect travelled to the rough and mountainous interiors of Bacolod, Bago, Valladolid, Hinigaran and Ilog.¹⁴

¹² MARTÍNEZ CUESTA, *History*, 225.

¹³ Marcelino SIMONENA, *Father Fernando Cuenca de San Jose, Augustinian Recollect. A Short Biography* (Bacolod City 1974) 10-11.

¹⁴ MARTÍNEZ CUESTA, *History*, 227; SIMONENA, 11-12.

Governor Saravia and Bishop Jimeno permitted the parish priest of Minuluan to make missionary sallies to the north and northeast portions of the island. In his journeys in 1856, Father Fernando travelled alone, conducted the census in places he visited and personally assigned village officials or *tenientes* in the new resettlements.

Father Fernando's Recollect confreres also helped him much later in the evangelization, "giving religious instruction, teaching and making a community of those poor people, who roamed around obeying their primitive instincts: some still pagan, while others who though baptized were still no better than the unruly and wild mountain dwellers."¹⁵ The resettlements organized along the coastal areas by Father Fernando would later become the towns of Saravia, Victorias, Manapla, Sicaba [now a barrio of Cadiz], Cadiz, Marianas [now Himugaan in Sagay], Argüelles [Bulanon in Sagay], Escalante and Calatrava.¹⁶ Father Fernando is then considered the founder of mission stations, future towns, cities and parishes in Negros Occidental.

4. Saint Ezekiel Moreno in Talisay¹⁷

In February 1872, Father Ezekiel Moreno (1948-1906) was appointed chief missionary and military chaplain of a missionary expedition whose objective was to set up a military stronghold and penal colony at Puerto Princesa in Palawan. He laid the foundation of the towns of Aborlan and Inagawan. Malaria nearly ended his earthly life while in a missionary sally to Inagawan.

A frigate took the ailing missionary to Manila in January 1873. Thence, Father Ezekiel travelled to Talisay to undergo hydrotherapeutic treatment of his anemia. We are indebted to Father Marcelino Simonena (1873-1959) for the detailed description of the Priessnitz method of hydrotherapy, to which patients with anaemia, burning fevers and many other ailments were subjected. No scientific explanation of the Priessnitz method was given. However, the hydrotherapy consisted of compresses, drenched blankets and consumption of large quantities of potable water. Recollect patients and chroniclers proclaimed the successful

15 SIMONENA quotes Robustiano ECHÁUZ's *Apuntes de la Isla de Negros* (Manila 1894).

16 MARTÍNEZ CUESTA, *History*, 229; SIMONENA, 15.

17 This topic is based on Chapter 8: "Convalescence in Talisay, Negros Occidental" in Emmanuel Luis A. ROMANILLOS, *Bishop Ezekiel Moreno, an Augustinian Recollect Saint among Filipinos* (Quezon City 1993) 67-77.

results and healings. It is positively confirmed Father Moreno underwent hydrotherapy.¹⁸ Father Simonena describes the treatment for us:

The patient is made to lie down naked on a wet blanket. He is wrapped with another wet blanket. He is covered on top with two or three more wraps to induce him to perspire. A soaked towel enfolds the head, except the face. And he is kept that way for about two hours. Off and on he is given water to drink. In a very warm country like this, it would seem natural for the patient to be drenched practically in sweat from the very first hour, but nothing of the sort happens during the first or second day of treatment. In subsequent days, however, he sweats profusely and through all the pores of the body. This subjects the organism to an honest-to-goodness purgation, washing away or ridding the body of heaviness and toxic accumulations. It was something to see beddings, blankets and towels saturated by a yellowish bilious hue difficult to wash away.

After two hours of treatment, the patient is moved from bed to take an ordinary bath of water at room temperature. His whole body is cleansed completely. He is then told to put on fresh clean clothes. Finally, he takes a stroll along the corridors of the rectory.

The blanket treatment is normally applied for nine consecutive days. If deemed convenient, then the process is repeated after some time for another nine days. The patient is advised to consume plenty of water.

Every patient of the Talisay curate was admitted as guest in the rectory, so was Father Moreno. There was really no special diet for the guest. The anemic patient partook of the same meager meals of a simple priest in a rural parish: boiled rice, chicken, fish, eggs, green vegetables, fruits, but no canned goods nor preserves. He was lodged *gratis et amore* in the parochial residence. Philanthropic Father Cuenca made it a habit to refuse any fee or remuneration whatsoever in cash or in kind for any consultation, medicine and treatment from his patients. "He did people a good turn with no strings attached or implicit obligations," Father Simonena apprises us.

In March of that year Father Ezekiel returned to Manila to accept his new assignment as parish priest of Calapan. Despite his young age, the archbishop of Manila and the Recollect provincial appointed the twenty-eight-year-old Saint Ezekiel as vicar forane and vicar provincial of the vast Mindoro island.

18 AM, *Relación nominal del clero secular indígena que han estado en el sanatorio de Mifulán en busca de salud*, 010r.

5. Father Cuenca and the Philippine Revolution¹⁹

We do not discuss here the Philippine Revolution that led to the independence of the colony from Spain. We can understand what this event meant for Father Fernando Cuenca and for the rest of the Recollect missionaries who had given the best they had for Negros as well as for various islands and provinces. The number of Augustinian Recollect missionaries who were assigned in both Negros Occidental and Oriental during these tumultuous years was more or less eighty.

Bacolod in Negros was one of the places where the revolution against the Spanish forces in its capital commenced and wherein distinguished persons from Minuluan took part with General Aniceto, Ledesma, Lacson (1857-1931), Father Fernando Cuenca's close friend, at their helm. Lacson would be the most important leader in the north of the western part of the Island. Father Fernando was not vexed by the revolutionaries on account of the good relationship the two had kept.²⁰

Father Fernando personally could not believe that an uprising that would remove the religious from the towns would ever take place. Father Marcelino Simonena²¹ narrated pertinent instances that took place shortly before Revolution.²² He was a witness to it all for he was his companion close assistant priest in Talisay in 1895-1896 and later in 1901-1904. He relates to us that:

«One day the politico-military governor of the province Don Luis Alcovendas together with José Luis de Luzuriaga²³ went to the convent. Very few days were left before the outbreak of the Revolution and the two informed Father Fernando about

19 MARTÍNEZ LÁZARO, 180-187.

20 MARTÍNEZ CUESTA, *History of Negros*, 448. The Revolution in Negros is extensively studied in pages 427-474. See also SIMONENA, 34-39.

21 Marcelino Simonena de San Luis Gonzaga was born 2 June 1873 in Olite, Navarra. He was a missionary of Negros where he served the parishes of Talisay, Hinigaran, Carol-an and Kabankalan. He was also a conventual in the convent at Cebu City. In November 1898, the revolutionists arrested him in Kabankalan. He regained his freedom less than three months later and returned to Manila, thence to Spain. He held high positions in the Order: prior of several houses in the Philippines and Spain, prior provincial in 1919 and general councilor in 1929. He authored *Manual del novicio agustino recoleto* [Augustinian Recollect Novice's Manual]; *Lo que debe saber un misionero* [What a Missionary Must Know], *La Medicina aplicada por los padres agustinos recoletos en Filipinas* [Medicine Applied by the Augustinian Recollect Fathers in the Philippines]. Among his unpublished works was the history of Collegio di Sant'Ildefonso in Rome, Italy. He was known for his great diligence, wise governance and intense love for the Order. He passed away on 22 October 1959 at the convent in Marcilla, Navarra: SÁDABA, 716-717; AVELLANEDA, 113.

22 SIMONENA, *Breve biografía*, 107-109.

23 He was a leader of the uprising in Talisay; see MARTÍNEZ CUESTA, *History*, 445-446.

it. He answered them: 'Governor, the province of Negros Occidental is not bad; it is good and rich, but may the authorities refrain from abusing it because it is very slippery and they can break the backbone.'»²⁴.

On 10 September 1898, a group of Recollect missionaries gathered at Minuluan to celebrate the feast day of their patron San Nicolas de Tolentino. Several religious had been murdered in Cavite in the last days of August [1896]. In their conversation, the Recollects showed some mistrust on the natives of the country, a mistrust Father Fernando did not share at all.

Father [Pedro] Corro had the gall to tell him: 'Don't be naive, Father Fernando.' How could he tell him that! That phrase seemed to pierce his soul, and he got even saying at the same time: 'Show-off, look, he called me naive, that Father Pedro!'

6. Father Fernando under house arrest at Talisay convent

The month of November in 1898 came, and almost all the religious missionaries of the west coast of Negros were taken prisoners, and slowly they were taken to Bacolod. Father Tiburcio Fernández (1863-1937), parish priest of adjoining Concepcion, soujourned at the convent in Talisay, with Father Tomás Preciado (1873-1928).²⁵

The revolutionary leaders of Talisay arrived at the convent and relayed to Father Fernando the order issued by their superiors to take his two companions to Bacolod. The conversation between the aging parish priest and a revolutionary leader was recorded.

24 SIMONENA, *Breve biografía*, 108. Father Cuenca did not close his eyes at the abuses of some provincial governors. He even exchanged heated words with Amadeo Valdés, governor in 1892-1894. Cf. A. MARTÍNEZ CUESTA, *Historia*, 127.

25 Father Tomás Preciado was Father Fernando's companion from 5 October 1898, after teaching at the Colegio de San José from 1 June 1896. He was transferred to Kabankalan after a month. In November 1898, he fell into the hands of the revolutionary forces and was later set free in February 1899 (cf. SÁDABA, 714). Father Fernando was protected by his own excellent reputation during the Revolution (cf. MARTÍNEZ CUESTA, *History*, 455.) Three religious were constrained to remain in their curacies, although they eventually left their parishes, like Father Mauricio Ferrero in Bacolod, Father Miguel Álvarez in Murcia and Father Pedro Bengoa in Vallehermoso.

“Well, and what do you want to do with me?” Father Fernando inquired from them. “We have no intention of doing anything to you. You can stay in the convent.” “No,” the missionary replied, “if you want to take me also, I am ready. Then, after I shall have passed Matab-ang River, I shall take my sandals off and I shall cast the dust at you.” They told him again: “No, you do not leave Talisay.”

Since his Filipino assistant priest, Father Nicolás Alba, had to go to Silay to administer the parish, Father Fernando stayed alone in the convent. He was the only Recollect religious who never abandoned the Island in the whole duration of the Revolution. He had problems with his eyesight on account of the cataracts.²⁶ Without any government pension at all, without the religious stipend, without financial savings, he would have undergone extreme deprivations and hardships were it not for the persons who knew him and who went to the parish rectory to give him every possible assistance.

As a prisoner, he could not leave the convent—he was under house arrest.²⁷ Ramon Diocsan accompanied him during the day. A *bata*, a son of his brother Domingo Cuenca, and Raymundo or Mundo, his faithful servant and assistant during his hydrotherapeutic treatments, spent the night with him in the convent. From his parish in Silay, Father Nicolás Alba visited him every month. Not a single moment did Father Fernando petition to leave for Manila, although he did ask the superiors in Manila to send him an assistant priest.

7. Aging priest’s companions: Father Fernández, Father Simonena

Father Fernando was a sort of landmark, a monument in the island, a living legend, an undeniable symbol of the agricultural progress of Negros, very much respected in his lifetime.²⁸ There never was an American who came to Bacolod and did not ask to meet the person whom fame deemed as the founder of Negros.

26 Cf. Letters of 15 January and 6 March 1896. In that 14 December 1895 letter he complained of his ailments, and in another letter dated 8 May about some *granos* [pimples]: “I am mortified by my *granos*; and if they say I am in good health I can give them to anybody.”

27 Cf. Licinio RUIZ 2, 455; MARTÍNEZ CUESTA, *History*, 454-455.

28 MARTÍNEZ CUESTA, *History*, 454.

At last, Father Tiburcio Fernández was assigned to him after acceding to the petition by the military authorities of Bacolod and Iloilo. The officers manifested to the bishop of Jaro their request to the prior provincial in order to dispatch a companion to Talisay. Father Tiburcio did not stay long in Talisay because of the circumstances adverse to the religious habit.²⁹

Later, on 28 June 1901, the superiors sent to Talisay Father Marcelino Simonena, erstwhile parish priest of Carolan and other Negros curacies. He remained beside Father Fernando until his death, providing us with minute details of the aging city founder's last months on earth.³⁰

Father Simonena declared how he was able to come in through the protection of the Lacsons. Since his arrival he could not wear the clerical garb because of the aversion that some people had shown against the religious habit. His presence had eventually stirred up protests in the newspapers in Bacolod.³¹ Gradually, the Augustinian Recollect missionaries returned to Negros and they found refuge under the beneficial shadow of the aged Father Fernando.

8. Illness and death

Father Simonena was at his bedside until his death. Thereafter, he succeeded him in the parish administration of Minuluan. Two existent letters were written by Father Simonena to the prior provincial. In those letters he described the development of Father Fernando's illness and consequent death:

About nine months had passed since I came to Talisay when Father Fernando caught a catarrh, apparently. He even underwent the treatment of wet blankets and general baths without being able to cure the catarrh. Perhaps, and that was my impression at that time, when –all drenched in sweat– he got out of the blankets and submerged himself in the bath-tub of water, he felt so very cold, or after the bath he did not react enough. What happened was that the catarrh took hold of his lungs and the slight illness got worse quickly until its final outcome.

29 Licinio RUIZ 2, 137.

30 SÁDABA 715-716.

31 We have not found the newspaper in question, although a proof of it is a document signed by individuals in Bacolod and addressed to the bishop of Jaro, wherein they showed their aversion to the presence of a friar there in 1902, in *Archivo Histórico de la Provincia de San Nicolás de Tolentino*, Marcilla, Navarra, Spain, legajo 57, núm. 4.

In his 25 March 1902 letter, Father Simonena wrote the prior provincial that in the beginning of the month Father Fernando's health was deteriorating fast:

We have no more hope that he would come out of this illness... About three weeks ago he commenced to swell, and far from diminishing, the swelling increased all the more. There was an American physician from Bacolod who paid him a visit. He wanted to send him to the capital but the old man refused [...] He was already starting to become worse and he had moments of great exhaustion. When the moment comes for the swelling to spread to the heart, then it will be the time he leaves us.

Father Simonena further said he had given him communion twice and the illness had come at the most inopportune moment, doubtless referring to the difficult plight that the Recollects were experiencing after the Revolution. At that time, Father Mauricio Ferrero sojourned for a while in Minuluan with plans to return to Bacolod, whose cathedral, rectory and prison he had constructed.

From the night of Maundy Thursday until Good Friday, he became gravely ill and the Sacraments were administered to him while he was still conscious. He sneezed in a very natural but forceful manner once and, followed by another sneeze, and he breathed his last at that very instant. We have this additional information culled from Father Simonena's letter on March 28:

Last night, at one o'clock in the morning our old man Father Fernando gave up his soul to the Creator after receiving all the Sacraments and the blessing of His Holiness. May he rest in peace. It was Good Friday so they placed the image of the dead Christ in the church for veneration by the faithful.

The corpse of Father Fernando was also taken down to the church in an open casket. 'The fact was that all the people formed a long queue before the cadaver of the father, kissing his hand, and stopped proceeding to the *Santo Entierro* of the Lord. I just allowed it to happen and I acted normally.'

9. Funeral and interment

The following day the interment took place. His mortal remains were taken to the parish cemetery. During the funeral rite Father Simonena donned the Augustinian Recollect friar's habit –something he had not done before in order to shun the attacks by some residents. And from that time on, he did not take his habit off

anymore in public. His March 30 letter reiterated the news of Father Fernando's demise. He had bequeathed almost nothing at his death, Father Simonena tells us: "If he had left anything at all, it was for our survival. That is all we have."³²

As written in the *Book of Noteworthy Events of Minuluan*, on 22 May 1912 his remains were exhumed together with those of Father Manzanares and Father Cándido Medrano (1868-1897). Father Fernando's remains were placed in an open niche on the wall of the presbytery on the Epistle side, following solemn funeral rites. A simple tombstone with his name on it indicates the place.

Towards 1930, Father Licinio Ruiz set up two statues to Father Cuenca and Father Mauricio Ferrero, garbed in their white habit, in the garden of the cathedral church of Bacolod. The same statues embellish the place until today.

10. A church begun by Father Cuenca, finished by Father Miguel

Father Miguel García (1860-1929), parish priest in 1915-1921 in his first term, erected a new convent for the priests' residence and offices. The old parish rectory would give way to the present one which was constructed in 1980-1981 during the parochial administration of Father Jesús Pérez Recio. Fondly called "Ilonggo" for his proficiency in the Hiligaynon language, he was the last Spanish parish priest of Talisay. He resided in Talisay for seventeen years—from 1969 to 1986.³³ He took over the helm of the parish in 1975.

32 Perhaps that amount of 200 pesos is the same one we have earlier referred to. In this letter and in a previous one, Father Simonena further recounted the behaviour of the family of Don Domingo Cuenca, Father Fernando's sibling. In the letter dated 25 [March 1902] visibly annoyed by the manner how the family members took away things from the parish rectory, including the inventory of the convent: "This updates me on their nobility and manners." Later, in his 30 March letter, he explained that it was Father Fernando himself who had requested them to take everything upon his death in order to surrender it to Father Simonena. As this assistant priest himself had earlier stated, majority of the objects in the convent belonged to the family of Father Fernando, although the manner how they did it was not correct.

33 After a year in Monteagudo, Spain, following his sacerdotal ordination at Marcilla in 1968, the 25-old-neo-presbyter was sent to Talisay in 1969. Father Recio was assigned to Guam (1986-1989); thence to the parish of Lodosa in Navarra, Spain (1989-1991). Since 1991, he worked in various parishes in the United States such as Saint Anselm in New York, Mesilla in New Mexico and El Paso in Texas. He was likewise assigned to Saint Anne Parish in Vauxhall, London. In 2009, he administered three parishes in Almeria (Spain) and later that of Puerto Viejo (Costa Rica). See *Tras el fulgor de una estrella*, 423. More information was culled from news items and reports in the Province of Saint Nicholas website: <http://www.provinciasannicolas.org>.

As regards the church, Father Fernando wanted to construct a monumental edifice at least for its dimensions but death had surprised him, when the church project was only half done. Father Miguel García himself, exerting his effort, brought to a completion the undertaking commenced by Father Fernando, by putting the ceiling and installing electricity in this second church edifice of Talisay.

11. Construction of the present church (1936-1939)

The urgent need for a new and bigger parish edifice was felt by the growing community of Talisay and by the parish priest himself, Father Luis Álvarez (1898-1960), who “with great enthusiasm” commenced the gigantic construction project in 1936.³⁴ A truly enormous project lay ahead and major preparations for it were done. The Recollect priest had prepared the hefty budget as well. Sadly, the construction of the grandiose church in Talisay was paralyzed, after its enthusiastic start, for a little over a year. This delay stemmed from utter lack of funds.

In the meantime, Father Pío Santillana (1909-1979) took over the reins of the curacy from Father Luis Álvarez in 1937. It was eventually the fortunate lot of the hard-working Father Santiago Vilda (1900-1966) who was appointed parish priest in early 1938,³⁵ to continue the monumental church project. And, “after a year and a half without any pause for rest,”³⁶ he was able to finish the magnificent church in time for its solemn blessing and inauguration on 9 September.

Father Vilda thought that the project could just not be delayed any longer because, first, “it was God’s work and then because the Recollect fathers have laid their hands on it.” The hefty church costs eventually rose up to 80,000 pesos when the project finally reached its happy conclusion.

34 LA VANGUARDIA, *Los Revdos. PP. Recoletos dejan completada otra grandiosa obra en la Isla de Negros Occidental, Islas Filipinas, con la terminación de nueva Iglesia del pueblo de Talisay, por el Rev. P. Santiago Vilda*, in BPSN 30 (1940) 19-20.

35 Father Vilda was appointed parish priest in early 1938 for his first term, not 1939 as claimed by the researcher on San Nicolás de Tolentino Parish in *Keeping the Fire Ablaze* (Quezon City 2009), page 98.

36 This information was translated literally from the Spanish text of *La Vanguardia* itself: *después de un año y medio sin descanso*.

12. Solemn blessing and inauguration in 1939

The big day for whole populace of Talisay commenced with the triumphal and grandiose entrance of a long convoy of more than 300 cars in the humble town of Talisay. The guests were led by the papal nuncio Archbishop Guglielmo Piani (1875-1976), Bishop Casimiro M. Lladoc (1893-1951) of Bacolod, and Bishop James Paul McCloskey (1870-1945) of Jaro. The famous musician Father Domingo Carceller (1894-1967), Provincial Councilor Father Manuel Gómara (1895-1979) and the Recollect confreres from the parishes in the Diocese of Bacolod covering the whole Negros Island were present in full force to celebrate another momentous event in the annals of the Augustinian Recollect Order in Negros in recent history.³⁷

The secular priests, consecrated men and women of various religious institutes and orders in the Diocese of Bacolod and Jaro, and other guests joined Father Santiago Vilda, his coadjutor Father Francisco Azcárate (1912-1985) and the parishioners of Talisay in the festive occasion.

At the entrance of the new temple of the Lord Almighty, the parish priest happily welcomed the apostolic delegate and multitude of guests. The solemn blessing and inauguration of the Church of San Nicolas de Tolentino started at once according to the rites prescribed by the ritual. The representative of Pope Pius XII (1876-1958) then addressed the congregation in glowing words. Archbishop Piani highlighted the works of the Recollect priests and brothers in the ecclesiastical territories entrusted to them by the Holy Mother Church since their first arrival in 1606. He heaped endless praises upon Father Vilda for the magnificent temple he had just blest.

At the choir loft, the choir of vibrant seventy voices under the expert baton of the famed musician Domingo Carceller sang his version of the thanksgiving hymn *Te Deum* he himself had composed for similar appropriate occasions.

The next day the 10th of September, feast of San Nicolás de Tolentino, under whose religious patronage the town and parish of Talisay had been entrusted by Father Fernando Cuenca in the distant past, Archbishop Piani celebrated the pontifical mass. The papal nuncio was assisted by the bishops of Bacolod and Jaro,

³⁷ The historic event in Talisay was the third significant church blessing in the period of four years: the parish church of San Carlos in November 1935 and that of Kabangkalan in December 1935, which in due time became cathedral churches, respectively. See Pablo PANEDAS, Emmanuel Luis ROMANILLOS, *Cathedral Churches Constructed by Augustinian Recollects in the Philippines* (Quezon City 2008) 9-12.

the superiors of the religious orders –Augustinians, Redemptorists, Vincentians, diocesan parish priests and Augustinian Recollects.

The great majority of mass-goers filled the brand-new church to the rafters. Father Vilda then delivered the sermon in flawless Visayan Ilongo. As he closed his inspired sermon, the parish priest addressed the papal nuncio in elegant Spanish offering to him as representative of the Roman Pontiff in the Philippines everything that was celebrated in the name of the entire Augustinian Recollect Order.

The guests filed out of the church in an orderly manner towards the parish rectory for the traditional *De missa ad mensam*, “from the mass to the table.” A sumptuous meal was earlier prepared by the parish priest, his coadjutor and friends for the scores of guests in that memorable evening celebration.

13. A Letter from Archbishop Guglielmo Piani

In the brief news write-up penned published in *La Vanguardia*, a Manila-based newspaper, the correspondent reported that the apostolic delegate wrote an appreciative personal letter to the Talisay parish priest from his official residence in Taft Avenue, Manila:

After leaving your parish and returning in Manila, I wish to manifest my wishes to you now that you have rested from the enormous task that the very solemn feasts in Talisay had imposed upon you.

I want to thank you for the attention, the kindness and the expressions brimming with affection and politeness proclaimed inside the church and outside of it by your Reverence, and certainly, that cordial company as well. I shall never be able to forget the days I spent in Negros, on the occasion of the solemn blessing of the Temple, beautiful and worthy of the Majesty of the Lord, with reference to our condition. My most sincere congratulations and greetings to your Reverence and to all of them, to the Catholic gentlemen and ladies of Talisay. With feelings of true esteem, we greet you and bless you.

14. 1972: a Recollect high school rises at Talisay

The chronicler and co-founder of what would be in the course of time the Colegio San Nicolás de Tolentino-Recoletos –Father Jesus Pérez Recio– himself

reveals to us the reasons for the establishment of a Recollect high school in Talisay in many words:

Set up in the shadow of the church, within the property of the parish, it is entirely a symbol of the mission that is incumbent upon all those who trudge the path of the predecessors. What we have proposed with its establishment is to instil religion in their souls and in their hearts, to educate the youth and to get them used to work. To train them as good citizens who in their tender age may comply with their religious and civic obligations. And even more, that they themselves may feel the need to accomplish their duties.³⁸

But then Vicar Provincial Father Jesús Sobejano, who authored the 1981 article on the origins of UNO-R High School, was succinct in informing us about the real motive for setting up this Recollect educational center in Talisay: “It was not only to provide civic education to its students, but also, principally, to encourage and create new Christian leaders while in their youth.”³⁹

15. Birth of UNO-R Talisay, now Colegio San Nicolás de Tolentino

A parochial school was established in Talisay in the early part of the 20th century. It was later closed for hitherto unknown reasons. There was a persistent talk among the priests who felt the convenience and the need of putting up a Catholic school. Plans were afoot to establish either a parochial grade school or a secondary school. The final decision was to set up a high school, affiliated to the University of Negros Occidental-Recoletos in Bacolod City under the Recollect administration.

The plans for that high school turned into reality in 1971. The cornerstone of the future Catholic school was laid on 1 January 1971. Bishop Antonio Y. Fortich (1913-2003) blest it in the presence of several Recollect priests, benefactors, parishioners and friends.⁴⁰

Five and a half months later, on 15 June 1971, the solemn blessing and inauguration of UNO-R High School Department took place. The academic year

38 Jesús PÉREZ RECIO, *Nueva escuela en Talisay*, in BPSN 63 (1973) 42.

39 Jesús SOBEJANO, *Los Agustinos Recoletos. 375 años en las Islas Filipinas. 1606-1981* (Quezon City 1982) 52.

40 *Ibid.*

1971-1972 commenced with only 90 students due to the stiff competition posed by other public high schools with its free education in the locality and, largely, because of the dearth of a much-needed aggressive propaganda.

16. Summer of preparations galore

The summer of 1972 for the Spanish Recollects of Talisay was different from all the other past summers. For them, that particular summer was not a deserved period of rest from the monotonous and habitual tasks nor was it a fine time to travel to other places for pleasure or leisure. It was a summer of hectic activity, extreme hard work and endless concerns and preoccupations.

The founders were fully aware of the challenges they faced upon setting themselves to the task of putting up the private high school project, challenges that they accepted bravely and willingly. They knew too well about the stiff competition posed by the free secondary education that a public high school was offering for a long time to the young children of the townspeople. Therefore, very intense publicity and all-out propaganda activities were the top priority in the Recollect fathers' summer agenda. No stone was left unturned. Literally, they were "babes in the woods" in the field of education in Talisay.

They knew only too well that there was a great need to disseminate information about the Recollect school and brand of education far and wide. A great deal of planning was done. Hence, they initially inquired assiduously about families with young boys in their high school age. Their next step was to write a personal letter each to those families informing them about everything pertinent to the subjects to be offered by the soon-to-open school.

The doubts and apprehensions were never lacking in the beginning. Qualms and anxieties prevalently plagued the minds of the school founders in the initial or planning stage.

Through the years, the growing Recollect school saw the construction of additional rooms, laboratories, mini-gymnasium and school buildings. The parish priest was concurrently the school director. The director was assigned to directly supervise and manage the school. In 2008, UNO-R Talisay High School obtained the new name "Colegio San Nicolás de Tolentino-Recoletos" upon the approval by the Department of Education. The Elementary Department was opened in the academic year 2009-2010. Since the turn of the century, the student population has roughly averaged 480 annually, a far cry from the ninety students in 1971. In

school year 2012-2013, the student population was 405 in high school and 198 in the grade school.⁴¹

17. A grateful town dedicates a monument to Fr. Cuenca (1974)⁴²

A date, a month, a year may not have the greatest importance for a town, for some individuals. Dates of little value abound in the calendar. But if such dates of minor significance abound, there are also those that have become famous in history and live on in the grateful memory of the people because of something that exalts and immortalizes them.

That date the people of Talisay held dear was the 30th of May. It was on the 30th of May 1824 when Father Fernando Cuenca de San José, the town founder, was born in Aragón [Spain]. And on the 30th day May 1974, the 150th anniversary of his birth, Talisay marked a page in its history in order to show its gratitude with the dedication of a commemorative plaque that was attached to the pedestal constructed at the public square. On it the statue of Father Fernando was built on the feast of San Nicolás de Tolentino, patron of the parish and town. Through this gesture, the 30th of May shall be indelibly embedded in the annals of Talisay.

Father Recio narrated about the true significance of that event, a glorious page in the annals of history of the Augustinian Recollect evangelization in Negros Occidental:

«These ceremonies paid homage to the person honored as well as to those who rendered honor. The honored personality was Father Fernando Cuenca who, as anyone aware of the mission history of the Philippines knew, was one of the chief architects of Negros Island. A newly ordained priest, he was one of the first Recollects who arrived in Negros in 1848. And he was one of those who worked most for the spiritual and material aggrandizement and progress with his renowned [evangelization] journeys to the interior of the island in 1856, with the motivation he gave to the sugar cane cultivation and production, with the construction of hydraulic [water-powered] mills, with the medical ministry at the parochial convent that was converted into an infirmary and hospital, with his apostolate and the foundation of

⁴¹ The information was provided by the prior and school director Father Jose Ernil Almayo through a text message on 16 May 2013.

⁴² The Spanish original is *Agradecimiento de un pueblo. En Talisay se erige un monumento al P. Fernando Cuenca*, in BPSN 65 (1975) 32-35.

Talisay which metamorphosed from a vast cogon wasteland during his arrival into a town that became the pride of Negros for its planning, for its elegant buildings, for its large-scale sugar plantations, wellspring of prosperity and wealth. They heaped accolade on our Recollect habit because they showed gratitude from their hearts to one of their distinguished benefactors».

Father Recio lamented that during those years past the name of Father Cuenca might not mean a great deal to the present generation of Negrenses. If he was not completely unknown, so his story and the achievements he had done were unbeknownst as well. He was glad, however, that Father Cuenca has become known through the efforts of the Negros Occidental Historical Commission, whose members included Father Pedro Lerga (1932-1984), a professor of University of Negros Occidental-Recoletos [UNO-R] in Bacolod City, and Modesto Sa-onoy, a great friend and historian of the Augustinian Recollect missionary work in Negros Island.

The idea of rendering tribute of public acknowledgement of his beneficial deeds in this island stemmed from that commission. For this purpose, the biography [of Father Fernando Cuenca] written by Father Marcelino Simonena⁴³ was translated into English by Soledad Lacson Locsin, the spouse of Aurelio Locsin, president of the Historical Commission.⁴⁴ The translation and printing followed the decision to build a monument for him at the public plaza of Talisay. Thus if Talisay was its implementing agency, the motivation and documentation were provided for by the Historical Commission.

Due to unavoidable circumstances, the setting up of the monument underwent two phases. The first phase was the location and construction of the pedestal with the commemorative plaque of Father Fernando. The second phase was the putting up of the statue and its blessing.

The first phase took place on the 30th of May. There was a concelebrated Mass presided by the bishop of the diocese, Msgr. Antonio Y. Fortich, who highlighted in his homily the great personality of the Recollect pioneer of Talisay in his

43 The following series of articles published in the *Boletín de la Provincia de San Nicolás de Tolentino* (BPSN) was collected and given by Father Lerga to the translator: Marcelino SIMONENA, *Breve biografía del padre Fernando Cuenca*, 33 (1943) 209-212; 231-234; 252-254. 34 (1944) 40-43; 63-64; 82-86; 105-109; 134-136.

44 Soledad Lacson Locsin was the acting chair of the Negros Occidental Historical Commission when the booklet *Father Fernando Cuenca of St. Joseph, Augustinian Recollect* she had earlier translated was published and launched in 1974 at Bacolod City. This biography was annotated by Negros historian Modesto P. Sa-onoy.

religious, human, social and educational aspects. The concelebrants were Father Víctor Hermosilla (1909-1983), the visitor general from Rome, the three priests of the parish and of the university in Bacolod. Representatives of provincial authorities, members of the Negros Occidental Historical Commission, all the municipal authorities led by the town mayor Jose Carlos V. Lacson, relatives of Father Cuenca, religious associations and the parishioners filled the church to the rafters.

On his tomb inside the church beautiful wreaths were laid, and prayers were recited so that from heaven he would continue to shower his beneficial action on the inhabitants of Talisay and the whole Negros Island.

Immediately afterwards, they proceeded to the solemn inauguration of the pedestal where the monument of Father Cuenca was going to be erected and the unveiling of the plaque dedicated to his memory that says:

Father Fernando Cuenca de San José
 Agustino Recoleta
 May 30, 1824-March 28, 1902
 Organizer of the Barrios and Town
 of Talisay and other Towns of Negros
 Occidental. Inventor of the Hydraulic
 Sugar Mill, Famed as Hydrotherapist,
 Moving Spirit of the Socio-Economic
 Progress of Negros Occidental
 May 30, 1974
 Municipality and Parish of
 Talisay Talisay
 Negros Occidental
 Historical Commission

At the ceremony, Mayor Jose Carlos V. Lacson delivered a speech. So did Modesto Sa-onoy, secretary of the Historical Commission, and a Cuenca family member in the name of the descendants of Don Domingo Cuenca, brother of Father Fernando. On behalf of the Order, Father Víctor Hermosilla gave thanks for the homage rendered to one of its illustrious members. The parish priest Father Florentino Echávarri (1926-1991) then encouraged everyone to continue cooperating for a better Talisay and for a Negros great in the spiritual, social and human spheres. The affair was followed by a fraternal lunch. During the meal the conversations focused on the personality and achievements of Father Fernando.

In the afternoon, there was an academic activity at the social hall of UNO-R. Various lectures were delivered, and they all highlighted the varied facets of the multifaceted character of Father Cuenca. In time, Father Hermosilla spoke on behalf of the Order and expressed the collective gratitude of the religious community. The final number of the program was the launching of the newly published biography of Father Cuenca.

The second phase of the celebration took place on the 10th of September, feast of San Nicolas de Tolentino and town fiesta of Talisay. It has been 124 years that Talisay had trod the path of life illumined by the light of the Star of Tolentino. It was Father Fernando Cuenca who had showed it to them. And it has been under its brilliant glitter when Father Fernando Cuenca was honored with the inauguration of this monument that should perpetuate his memory among Talisaynons and Negrenses and shall remind them —from up high in the pedestal— of his virtues and endless efforts for the wellbeing of their ancestors.

Because, if Talisay is now one of the great towns of the province of Negros Occidental for its big population, for the wealth of its great sugar industry and for the Catholic faith of its inhabitants, it was the glory of Father Cuenca who founded it, who administered it for fifty-two years and who established it in such a way that on the basis on the Faith even in these times it was still professed in 1974 by 57,245 of the total population of 57,284. Therefore, the San Nicolás feast day patron of that year was set aside for the inauguration of the monument as a well-deserved tribute of public recognition.

Since it was the town fiesta, the faithful and guests who arrived at Talisay to attend the religious celebrations were extraordinarily multitudinarian. The holy mass was presided by the bishop of the diocese and concelebrated by Recollects religious and secular priests. The municipal council came in full force together with the members of the Historical Commission and a great number of the faithful from other towns, barrios and farms joined the townspeople of Talisay.

It was after the Mass when the inauguration of the monument and the unveiling of the statue took place. During the ceremony, the following prayer composed by a Talisaynon was recited:

O Lord, our God, deign to hearken to the prayer of the faithful of Talisay, who ask you to bless this statue of Your servant Father Fernando Cuenca of the Order of the Recollects so that the memory of his missionary zeal in Christianizing and educating our ancestors be a seed that shall sprout with everlasting life and shall bear fruits of holiness and prosperity for our benefit and for that of our children and descendants. This we ask you through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

This monument built as a tribute to the city founder Father Fernando Cuenca was put up at the public plaza, fronting the main portal of the parish church. It was donated by the town council with contributions from individuals who wanted to honor him and to put it on the same level as the other Filipino heroes' statues erected at the same square.

18. Practices and devotions in the parish

Known devotions and devotionary practices are provided to us by parish priests in their annual reports [*memorias*] which began only in the second half of the 19th century. From the Spanish Recollects we know that there was the traditional popular devotion to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus in the parish. The Marian devotion is cherished also in her invocation as Our Lady Perpetual Help, for whom the novena prayers are recited every wednesday, as in every parish in the Philippines.

Lately, they have the devotion and novena to Saint Ezekiel Moreno who had earlier lived in Talisay with the forefathers in early 1873.

The patron saint of the parish Saint Nicholas of Tolentino is also well revered for a century and a half, thanks to the initiative of Father Fernando who gave the forefathers the first Augustinian saint as patron of Minuluan.

19. Father Casiano Cosmilla tells us about *palapak*

From the Filipino parish priest Father Casiano Cosmilla, we learn that the most endearing devotionary practice disseminated far and wide in Negros is the *palapak* which has been done since time immemorial. It is a very renowned tradition for which Talisay parish has attracted multitudes of devotees. It is a primarily a personal devotion to San Vicente Ferrer that takes place every First Friday of the month. But it is on the First Friday of the year when droves of devotees fill the parish church to the rafters for the traditional *palapak*.

The devotees of the Dominican priest and miracle-worker show their love by kissing the image of our patron saint and while kissing they prayers of petition for graces need from the Almighty God through the intercession of the saint. Furthermore, they ask the one holding the image of San Vicente Ferrer to have the image touch their heads and other parts of the body inflicted by an ailment and at the same time they pray for cures from their illnesses.

Father Kizzy, as Father Cosmilla is called, in an annual report further informs us that many devotees did:

...experience miracles of cure and attested that their prayers were answered. And they tell other people in their own places about the miraculous happenings in their life [lives] so that they may come back again and again. Blessed are these people because of their great faith and devotion they see miracles happening in their [life] lives. Most of the people who come to fulfil their devotion are simple but profoundly religious people because they have no other recourse for help in both their material and spiritual needs but God who is the source of everything that is good and through the prayers and intercessions of our patron saint.⁴⁵

Father Kizzy is remembered for putting a chapel or prayer room in 1992 inside the kumbento for the use of the community of the parish priests and vicars and school director in order to fulfil the mandated statutes of the Rule of Saint Augustine and Constitutions of the Order of Augustinian Recollects, such the daily prayer of the liturgy of the hours, meditation and visit to the Blessed Sacrament, principal acts of their religious and community life.

20. Population statistics (1851- 2010)

From a scattered community of merely 3,000 inhabitants and settlers in 1850, the new parish grew to 3,731 inhabitants a year after and 819½ tributes. A decade later, the population of Talisay had leapt to 5,525 inhabitants and 1,373 tributes, as recorded in the Recollect parish priests in the Philippines. In 1871, it had increased to 7,618 inhabitants and 2072 tributes. Twenty years later, in 1891, Father Fernando Cuenca reported to the provincial office in Manila the population of 12,828 souls and 4,252 tributes.

Towards the close of the 19th century, in 1897, the population had gone down to 12,132 souls but the tributes had slightly increased to 4,657 tributes.⁴⁶ The population decrease can be explained by the creation of the new curacy of Concepcion independent from its parish matrix of Talisay in 1895. The population of

45 Casiano COSMILLA, *Parish of San Nicolas de Tolentino, Talisay, Negros Occidental*, in BPSN 698 (Julio-Diciembre 1993) 243-244.

46 FIDEL DE BLAS, 45.

the new parish was recorded in 1897 by its Recollect parish priest Father Tiburcio to be 2,497 souls and 999 tributes.⁴⁷

The Roman Catholic population in 1995 was 68,581 souls. This total population included the faithful of the barangays of Dos Hermanas and Concepcion.⁴⁸

Talisay was created into a city on 11 February 1998 with a total land area of 20,118 hectares, over 60% of which is agricultural land and its forest land covers 33%.⁴⁹ As mandated by the national government in 2007, the census takers recorded a total population of 96,444. In 2010, the population of Talisay City had increased to 97,571.⁵⁰ It is the ninth of the thirteen cities with biggest population in the Province of Negros Occidental which has a total population of 2.4 million.

Epilogue

It is very opportune to recall the centennial document *Religiosas familias* (1912-2012) of Pope Saint Pius x who had honored the thousands of Augustinian Recollects who for four centuries offered their youthful priestly ministry and religious life for the world, especially in the Philippines, declaring:

We willingly and joyfully reverence and accord privileges and honors to those religious families that, by reason of antiquity of the great host of members throughout the world, of their exhausting labors to procure an increase of the glory of God and the eternal salvation of men, have deserved to be held in the highest regard by the Church.

It is wonderful to what degree the aforesaid Congregation has risen in so short a time, for, made resplendent, not only in Spain but also in South America, Japan, and the far-away Philippine Islands, by learned and holy men, many of whom became martyrs, it has everywhere given distinguished testimony of apostolic zeal.

In 2014, the 190th birth centenary of the city founder Father Fernando Cuenca de San José is commemorated with gratitude. Furthermore, the grateful parish-

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF THE PHILIPPINES, *The 1996 Catholic Directory of the Philippines* (Manila 1996) 12.

⁴⁹ "Talisay City Profile," in <http://www.talisaycity.gov.ph/about/city-profile>. Retrieved 23 August 2012.

⁵⁰ "2010 Census of Population and Housing: Western Visayas, Negros Occidental, Talisay City," in <http://www.census.gov.ph/sites/default/files/attachments/hsd/pressrelease/Western%20Visayas.pdf>. Retrieved 22 September 2012.

ioners and the Order of Augustinian Recollects celebrate in 2014 the Diamond Jubilee (1939-2014) of the parish church of San Nicolás de Tolentino. Future chroniclers shall declare that the twin commemoration doubtless serves as a fitting tribute to the big-hearted sugar hacenderos, well-to-do families, open-handed firms and hundreds of unheralded, generous parishioners whose names are known to the Almighty God and to the faithful of Talisay City, who indubitably can take pride in this timeless legacy and to the intangible heritage of Christian Faith.

Both sturdy temple of God church and steadfast Catholic Faith are a glorious and lasting memorial to the church builders Fathers Luis Álvarez and Santiago Vilda, all true spiritual brothers of San Nicolás de Tolentino, and to the selfless Augustinian Recollect pastors of Talisay from 1850 when Father Fernando Cuenca planted the seeds of the Gospel until the present time, true sons of a long line of offspring and followers of Saint Augustine of Hippo.

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Resumen

La estatua de Cuenca conocido como “El Padre de la Industria del Azúcar de Negros” se levanta desde el año 1930 a la entrada de la catedral de Bacolod. Cuenca predicó la Palabra de Dios y promovió la vida civilizada en los montes y costas de la isla de Negros donde no tardarían en surgir pueblos y barrios. A su convento de Talisay, que también servía de hospital, acudieron en busca de la salud perdida oficiales civiles, hacenderos y clérigos, incluso san Ezequiel Moreno. Inventor del molino hidráulico, promovió la industria del azúcar y mejoró las condiciones económicas del pueblo. Durante la revolución de fines de siglo, que vio la matanza de frailes en algunas partes del Archipiélago, a él le dejaron ileso. Sus sucesores siguieron sus tareas evangelizadoras, construyeron una nueva iglesia parroquial, convento y escuela y continuaron la popularísima devoción a san Vicente Ferrer. En 1974, el pueblo levantó en el parque público un monumento a fray Fernando Cuenca en agradecimiento por el legado de la fe y la ciencia y por sus aportaciones económicas.

Abstract

Deemed as “the Father of the Sugar Industry in Negros,” Cuenca’s life-size statue has stood since 1930 at the entrance of San Sebastian Cathedral in Bacolod City. Cuenca spread God’s Word and promoted the civilized lifestyle in upland and coastal Negros where villages and towns would shortly after be created. Ailing civil officials, landed folks and clergy, included Saint Ezekiel Moreno, flocked at his parish rectory-*cum*-hospital in Talisay and sought remedies for various maladies. Inventor of the hydraulic mill, he promoted the sugar industry and agriculture and uplifted the economic conditions of his townspeople. He was left unharmed during the revolutionary upheaval at the close of the 19th century. His successors went on with his evangelization tasks, constructing a new parochial church, rectory and school and continuing the very popular devotion to San Vicente Ferrer. In 1974, a thankful populace erected at the public plaza a lifesize monument to Fr. Fernando Cuenca for his legacy of faith and science and his economic contribution.