



E-BULLETIN #154

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*"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)*

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item 293

## Pallottines in the land of Taiwan

*God calls us, just as he called Abraham, away from the security we knew, out of our old, familiar, little room, down the ladder of faith and into his arms. Jesus called his disciples that way*  
- *just as a lover elopes with his beloved.*

Dr Peter Kreeft

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Taiwan has seven Catholic dioceses. Pallottines are present in two of them, those of **Taichung** - Frs Antony John, Leo Antony and Antony Fernandes, and **Chiayi** – Frs Bala Gilbert and myself. Taichung diocese is situated in the central part of Taiwan and Chiayi in the south.



‘Mission’ in this country primarily means evangelization. From the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards great missionary congregations contributed immensely towards evangelization here. Spanish Dominicans were the first to arrive [1626] from the Philippines, followed by Jesuits from mainland China. Then Dutch missionaries followed by many other missionary congregations, including the SVD’s [Society of the Divine Word]. History witnesses that down through the centuries they have explored every possible strategy to bring the Good News to the people of this land.

Despite this effort the reality is that we are still a missionary church, where only one percent of the population is Catholic. While Taiwan as a whole is relatively rich the church is poor and, in particular, still needs substantial personnel support. The people themselves here need to zealously take up the work of evangelization and to find ways to present the gospel to a population that is, on the one hand, both a beneficiary and victim of the global economy and culture and, on the other hand, experiencing a rapid degradation of faith.

As a Pallottine I am aware that we are primarily a mission congregation and that our founder St Vincent initially sent his followers to far away countries as missionaries. We are called upon by him to ‘revive faith and rekindle charity’. That call is certainly relevant in the mission atmosphere of Taiwan today where one can see a steady rate of decrease in the christian population. It is a dilemma which poses a great challenge to the

local bishops and priests, to keep alive the faith of the remaining Catholics. It is not easy because, on the one hand, traditional Chinese culture has taken deep root in the lives of the people and, on the other hand, our younger generation has been affected by consumerist and materialistic trends and is in danger of losing its basic sense of the reality of God. Together with the local church our task is to strive hard to keep Catholic spirituality alive.



A recent visitation by our Rector General and Provincial revived our optimism. Fr Jacob exhorted us to work with true missionary spirit and zeal, emphasising in the first place the implanting of our own charism: 'Become inculturated into the local church and strengthen your identity as Pallottines'. Stressing the importance of community life he said that we need to pay special attention to community living and not to let individualism creep into our lives. He further expressed the hope that, in the near future if God wills, we

might also think of entering countries like Vietnam, Macao and China. We are grateful for his words of support and encouragement. Our Provincial, Fr Camilo Simoes, gave us similar guidance promising to be with us in spirit.



Overall we are experiencing joy and happiness in our ministry. In both dioceses we are already into prison ministry, hospital ministry [ref blessing of expectant mothers at left], youth ministry. We also help in the apostleship of the sea.

**Solomon Raj Titus sac [BA] – Chiayi – TAIWAN**  
**01.01.15**  
**[solomon\\_titus@yahoo.com](mailto:solomon_titus@yahoo.com)**

## an apostle of reconciliation

**Fr Stanisław Szulmiński sac**, a member of the Polish Pallottine province [prior to its division], was born in Odessa on the Black Sea on 10.07.1894. He died in a labour camp at Uchta (Russia) on 27.11.1941.

His Cause for Beatification was officially initiated in St Petersburg, Russia, together with 15 other martyrs, on 31.05.2003. People refer to Fr Szulmiński as 'the apostle of reconciliation' between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church.

Stanisław was already a diocesan priest before entering the Pallottines. He desired to dedicate his entire life and strength to uniting the Eastern Orthodox Church with the Catholic Church, and was given an assurance that he could pursue his calling.

He combined the fulfilment of this desire with a very determined effort to live in complete faithfulness to the vocation he had received. He was aware of his human weaknesses but was also very aware of his call to holiness.

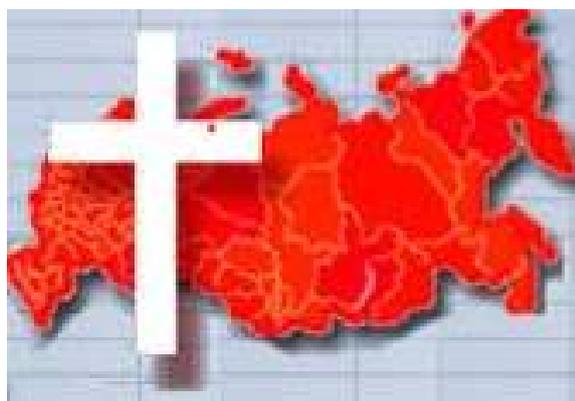


He wrote in his diary in 1934:

“But God wants me to be holy. In Mary most holy I find hope and I entrust myself so that despite everything I may acquire holiness”.

A priest who knew him well described him as 'a soul who lived daily life with God and in God'.

In Poland Fr Szulmiński founded an association called **The Apostolate of Reconciliation** as a section of the Union of Catholic Apostolate. At the beginning of 1937 various Pallottines belonged to this association as well as forty other persons; by 1939 this group already numbered one hundred. Priests who were not Pallottines were members as well as well-known lay people.



His Provincial Council, on February 3<sup>rd</sup> 1938, formally accepted **The Apostolate of Reconciliation** as a section of the Union of Catholic Apostolate. Fr Stanisław wished that there would be Pallottines of the Oriental Rite.

Several times he requested permission of his Superiors to travel into the Soviet Union in order to dedicate himself to pastoral work there. In 1939 he was sent by his Superior to the Pallottine house *Okopy Trójcy Świętej* (The trench of the Most Holy Trinity) near the meeting point of the three borders of Russia, Poland and Rumania. He was arrested by Soviet guards on 24.10.1939 and was sentenced to five

years hard labour at Uchta in the Western part of Russia on the White Sea.

At Uchta Fr Szulmiński served his fellow prisoners in an heroic manner. In spite of a strict prohibition on exercising his priestly functions he celebrated Holy Mass clandestinely, he consoled the prisoners and was a

Good Samaritan to all. When a pardon was granted to a large number of the prisoners he revealed to them that he was a priest and he celebrated Mass with those who were set free.

However, even though he himself had also received a document of release on 01.08.1941 he did not take advantage of it. He stayed on in the camp with the remaining 40 prisoners in order to be of help to those who were suffering. He accepted the hard labour, hunger and the humiliations he endured as a penance and offered them for reconciliation between the Churches.

Fr Szulmiński dedicated himself completely to the union of the Orthodox Church with the Catholic Church in following the wish of Jesus Christ "ut unum sint!" ("that may they be one!"). Worn out by ill-treatment and weakened by hunger and hard labour, he died in his sleep in the prison camp. His remains rest there in that inhospitable land.

Again from his diary:

"Everyone going to work in Russia should be ready to die. But it is not a tragedy to give one's life for Christ and the Church...martyrdom, if it eventually comes, purifies the soul."

The fame of his holiness and martyrdom spread among his confreres and the laity in both Poland and the Ukraine. It remains very much alive.

**Henryk Kietliński sac [WA] – Warsaw – POLAND**  
**Postulator**  
**wjacenty@wp.pl**

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**on #153**