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## Six Sonnet Laurels

A Belated Tribute  
to the  
Oblates of Mary Immaculate  
(A missionary order of service)  
on their  
Golden Jubilee  
(1936-1986)

Their pioneering work continues to  
this day (2001) uplifting  
the  
Muslim and Christian  
community of Jolo, Sulu, Philippines

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**Summa Sophia**  
1175 Harrington Place NE #212  
Renton WA 98056  
U.S.A.  
Phone (425) 227-6979

## Sonnet Tribute to Father Dion, OMI\*

1

The Philippines, an archipelago  
Of more than seven thousand islands all,  
That bids you welcome you can't help but go  
To find that hidden Eden to enthrall.  
You'll find it in the island of Sulu,  
And there a little town known as Jolo,  
Its history so rich made by a few  
Who gave their lives that everyone might grow.  
The O. M. I.'s came with a mission true  
Led by God's worker, Father George Dion,  
Who took upon himself so much to do,  
Expanding truth divine to carry on.  
Today such selfless pioneers are gone,  
We're left to live and learn we all are one.

2

Father Dion, a great American!  
He left his country, family and friends,  
To serve Jolo, to see what could be done,  
Uplifting all with all his heart and hands.  
As far as Tawi-tawi, South he sailed,  
With motorboat he braved the stormy seas;  
His selfless dedication never failed,  
From hardships hardly had he sought release.  
His vision of God's light he shared with all,  
That Muslims, Christians, live in harmony  
To help the poor, the sick, and those who fall  
Unknowing of their truest destiny.  
Although Bishop Dion has passed away,  
Our praise and gratitude will ever stay.

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\*Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a world-wide Catholic missionary order. In writing these sonnets I fondly remember being one of his daily altar boys, including Father Buldoc, and at that time (1938-41), the liturgy was in Latin. Also, with Father Billman, we could finish a one hour Holy Mass in twenty minutes. He made me his favorite acolyte, calling me his "Lucky Strike." To say the least, whenever we were scheduled to say Sunday Mass, the church would be full to overflowing. During Mass, as I poured wine for blessing he would quickly raised the chalice as a stop, adding after his prayers, "I leave some for you," winking with a smile.

(From a local to a global scale, the universality of spiritual ideals that are put to work as they surface in these sonnets can, in reality, shine through as brightly within every person or institution committed to the selfless service and upliftment of humanity.)

3

Before then World War II, Father Dion,  
Still young, braved far into the countryside  
With his blue car, at times he drove alone,  
By then he knew the way without a guide.  
The trust he put into his faith went strong,  
Fulfilling visions that he felt were good  
For Muslims and for Christians righting wrong,  
To live those teachings of true brotherhood.  
His life in peril when the War broke out,  
He slipped into Zamboanga to avoid  
Captivity, though dangers came about,  
His true vocation steadfast unalloyed;  
In freedom would he labor for God's peace,  
Above all else he knew would never cease.

4

Much later as a Bishop of his flock  
He worked with Bishop Smith to bring relief  
To housing problems, taking careful stock  
Of limited resources just beyond belief.  
Schools had to meet so many students' need  
As well as those of parents, all to grow  
With able character, the soul to feed,  
To draw forth wisdom each shall come to know.  
In building homes, first came *Kasan-ya-ngan*,\*  
*Kabu-ya-ngan*, such local testament,  
*Kasalamatan* to *Kasulutan*,  
Of what Cooperative projects meant.  
The College Notre Dame expanded too,  
For minds to learn and ever to renew.

— Bing Escudero

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\*In italics, COOP (1961) housing projects, named in the local Taosug dialect of Sulu, the dash added to facilitate pronunciation.

There's more to Father Dion's enterprise:  
 With Father Billman's scholarship and pen  
 The Sulu Star Newspaper did arise,  
 For answers to what, where, who, why, how, when.  
 Events to know the truth, to remedy,  
 Not just to criticize, but alleviate,  
 With great compassion, kindness, charity,  
 To volunteer before it is to late.  
 The work to bridge communication gaps  
 Brought greater understanding that would lead,  
 Resolving social ills and their relapse,  
 To nurture goodness growing from God's seed;  
 For all spiritual paths do merge as one  
 As every will with the Divine is done.

A Radio Station as DXMM  
 Was built, a first in the locality;  
 Its entertainment flavor was a gem,  
 With music, leisure with integrity;  
 Next was a TV Station to enhance  
 The local culture, bring the latest news  
 As well as worthy projects to advance,  
 Espousing lofty universal views.  
 With humble Father Buldoc's care for all,  
 Home visits followed, service would infuse,  
 To marshal help to reach a crying call,  
 To raise each broken spirit to enthuse.  
 Such are these wondrous works of O.M.I.'s  
 Beyond our thankfulness raised to the skies.

— Bing Escudero

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These sonnets are based on an English version of 50 stanzas, "To The Oblates  
 Of Mary Immaculate – A Tribute" by Walderico Escudero (my younger brother).  
 He also wrote the original Taosug version, "O.M.I. – *Panum-Tuman*,"  
 meaning, a tribute of remembrance; the metered verses of each quatrain are set in  
 rhymes to the sounds of the Taosug dialect, and when heard, the lingering  
 sentimental euphony is almost musical and so soothingly unforgettable. There  
 are other American OMI's mentioned, but I have written only about those who I  
 personally knew as their altar boy, as I am now in my 70's, retired, not yet tired.

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