As the subtitle indicates, this is primarily a prehistory of the Salesians in the Philippines—that is to say, the story of the many attempts made from outside the congregation and within, to bring the sons of Don Bosco to the Philippines. Ranging from Governor-General Eulogio Despujol in 1891, who hoped they would found a school of arts and trades, through a series of papal representatives here, several bishops and other concerned clergy, to M.J. Ossorio of the Victorias Milling Co. in Negros Occidental, there were repeated urgent requests. Due to a variety of circumstances—political vicissitudes, wars, problems of communication between Italy and East Asia, lack of sufficient personnel—it would only be in 1951 that the Salesians took charge of their first two schools. The needs they came to fill can be gathered from the fact that on their golden jubilee they number 298 members, the majority Filipinos, and have 34 houses in.
different parts of the country, as well as Filipino missionaries in ten foreign lands.

In spite of the failure of these early attempts, there was a significant Salesian presence in the Philippines from 1922 to 1948 in the persons of the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Guglielmo Piani, and his zealous and perhaps even better-known secretary, Father Louis Lavoire Morrow, the author of some 25 books with catechetical or devotional purpose. Almost 100 editions are listed in Appendix II. Three of these titles were published in as many as eight Filipino languages. Morrow was made Bishop of Krishnagar, India in 1939, but his books continued to be published here into the early 1970s. In addition, both men in their spare time promoted such apostolates as the Salesian Cooperators, the Don Bosco Boys’ Association, and the Archconfraternity of Mary Help of Christians. Through these organizations the clamor of numerous priests and zealous Filipino Catholics for an institutional presence of the congregation continued to grow.

Father Bicoming has explored numerous archives in Rome, Hong Kong, and the Philippines, and made use of all the multilingual and often hard-to-locate bibliography available. His book will be of interest not only to those concerned with the Salesians, but all interested in the history of the wider twentieth century Philippine church—till now almost a blank slate, at least in English, except for a few scholarly articles and some uncritical and often hagiographical diocesan histories. Only Noone on Archbishop O’Doherty, Achutegui and Bernad on Aglipayanism, and Connolly on church lands are exceptions that come to mind. They will find much to shed light on that history, with its many lights and dark shadows.

Lastly, the book is enlivened with numerous relevant photographs. A worthy memorial of the years narrated, it is a fitting tribute to the golden jubilee of Salesian work since their permanent arrival in 1951. One hopes Father Bicoming, professor of church history at the Don Bosco Center of Studies in Parañaque, will continue to recount at least part of those later years.