



## THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION IN THE PHILIPPINES<sup>1</sup>

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*The struggle for a well-formed clergy in the Philippines has been long and arduous as its development is naturally intertwined with the country's history. As the paper recounts the 150-year presence of the Congregation of the Mission in the country, it provides an outline of the life and work of the Vincentian Fathers. This labor is significantly shown in the Congregation's hidden yet painstaking role in the formation of the clergy. As such, the Vincentian Fathers' presence can almost be synonymous to helping the hierarchy form better and well-trained clergy.*

**T**he Congregation of the Mission – the Vincentian Fathers – has no boast to make either about its long and glorious past or its achievements in the Philippines. Its first centenary was only two years ago, and its work has, for the most part, been confined to the spiritually fruitful but quiet and in many ways unrewarding task of helping the Hierarchy to form its own clergy. So too, this historical outline of a century of life of the Vincentian Fathers in this Archipelago is a quiet exposition of the hidden struggle for a better clergy. The fruition of the attained aim has oftentimes turned disappointingly unsavory because once the mission was accomplished, and sometimes even before, the personnel had to pick up the tent and strike camp somewhere else.

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<sup>1</sup> Condensed from the *“History of the Vincentian Fathers”*.



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The story begins in 1846 when the Authorities of Manila requested the Crown to provide them with a group of Daughters of Charity to take over the Hospitals of Cavite and Manila, then in a deplorable state of affairs, and a batch of Priests of the Congregation of the Mission to take charge of the Sisters and to manage the Diocesan Seminaries of the Islands.

Negotiations to that effect started immediately in Madrid between Fr. Codina, then Provincial, and the Spanish Government. Queen Elizabeth II inserted the granting of the request in Her Royal Order of Oct. 18, 1852, which contained a re-organization of Missionary activities in the Overseas Territories of Spain.

To implement the section concerning the Congregation of the Mission the City, the Archbishop of Manila and the Queen had pledged their support. But promises did not materialize soon nor, when they finally did, was the Congregation, then torn by a threatening schism, ready to sail forth to the Orient. So ten more years had to go by.

It was on April 5, 1862 that the first team of Vincentian Fathers and Sisters of Charity were bidden farewell by the Provincial, Fr. Sanz, as they boarded the frigate "*Concepcion*" in Cadiz. In the company of seven Jesuit and 13 Recollect Fathers plus some Secular Priests they started a trip of 109 days before they landed in Manila by the end of July.

A "Te Deum" was sung at the Chapel of Sta. Isabel, acting at the time as the Cathedral. Both the Sisters and the Priests were warmly received by the Civil and Ecclesiastical authorities then held by the Governor General Echague and by the Archbishop Gregorio Meliton Martinez. The Archbishop was specially gladdened by the arrival of the four men from his own province of Burgos, two of which, Frs. Moral and Velasco, had been his own pupils in the Seminary in Spain. The other two were lay brothers.

After ten days as guests of the Jesuit Fathers and of the Archbishop he entrusted them with the spiritual care of the Diocesan Seminary of Manila. In seven days they had taken over the whole direction as well. The seminary functioned then as a convictorium and a seminary and there were also a number of priests sent there to do some overhauling in their priestly lives. Life there, before the arrival of the Fathers, was not the best for the training of priests.



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Seminarians and confined priests led their life in private rooms with private meals and private servants. Actually there were more of the latter than of the former.

Besides caring for the Sisters of Charity the Vincentians gave themselves completely to the reforms required by the institution. Pious exercises were started and tactfully pursued. A chapel was readied and the Blessed Sacrament could now be reserved there. The two priests, with the help of the brothers, ran the Seminary, gave retreats to the priests and ordinands, taught Moral Theology and Liturgy. Fr. Sanz himself had to write from Spain cautioning them against excessive zeal.

A year had gone by when the Bishops of Nueva Caceres and Cebu, observing the profound transformation worked in Manila, wrote to Fr. Sanz to send them also personnel for their own seminaries. The second team of Vincentians arrived in Manila on Nov. 5, 1863, headed by Fr. Casarramona who was to take over as Superior relieving Fr. Moral. The new superior took upon himself to marshal out by trial and error the rules for a Diocesan Seminary in the Philippines. A course of Dogmatic Theology was now added to the curriculum and a request of the Archbishop for a new building and a library was granted and bettered by the Prelate's own suggestions. Thus arrived the year 1864 and it was then that the contract with the Spanish Province was ratified by the Archbishop. Thus Manila's Seminary of St. Carlos passed over to the Vincentians who had to reform and practically refound it.

While this was taking place in Manila, in Naga Bishop Francisco Gainza, O.P., foreseeing the arrival of the Vincentians to his diocese, set out to formulate a set of rules and to rebuild the Seminary for them even before his petition was granted. Soon, on May 3, 1865, Fr. Moral with three companions arrived to take over what the Bishop had built. Three days after their arrival Bishop Gainza gave them the canonical possession of the Seminary and classes were started right away. Enrollment spiraled and soon the Vincentians added Dogmatic Theology and Preparatory to the course of studies of the Seminary-college. The school year was made to end with the Spiritual retreat that was made to serve as an introduction to a gradual increase in the piety and the spirituality of seminary life. The Bishop was so impressed that he wrote to the Queen that he possessed



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the best institution in the Islands outside Manila. Soon he pressed the Vincentians to give spiritual retreats and to care for the voluntarily, and not voluntarily, retired priests. The Rector had to refuse the office of Vicar General urged upon him. Nevertheless a proposal for the teaching of Photography and Pharmacy was readily accepted by the Superiors and entrusted to Fr. Santonja, an experienced scientist and a student of Medicine before entering the Congregation.

In 1867 Fr. Casaramona was sent to Cebu to take the direction of the diocesan Seminary handed over to him by Bishop Romualdo Jimeno, O.P., on 23 of May 1867. The ceremony was graced with the presence of Bishop Gainza and Fr. Moral. Notwithstanding the good start, difficulties arose because discipline proved hard and the Rector had a touch of harshness in his methods. The Bishop backed the Rector, sacrificing numbers to quality. The experience turned out to be rewarding and served to shape some of the shiniest jewels of the Philippine Hierarchy.

The number of Vincentians increased suddenly due to the political disturbances of the Peninsula. But there was never a problem of unemployment. The See of Jaro had just been created. Bishop Mariano Cuartero, O.P., took over and requested the help of the Vincentians to start the Seminary. His call was answered and in 1869 Fr. Moral arrived there with a handful of confreres to start from scratch. Construction of the building began at once. The Vincentians and the Bishop himself were seen working on the very walls to hurry the construction. Before it was finished, however, normal classes were started and Fr. Moral after setting the pace left immediately for another foundation.

While the Seminary of Jaro was rising, things were happening fast somewhere else. The Franco-Prussian war forced the Superiors in Europe to safeguard the Seminarians and Students sending them away across the seas to Cuba and the Philippines. Heading the expedition was Fr. Valdivielso named Vice-Provincial of the Philippine Islands. At the end of 1871 the Superior General in Paris decreed the Province of the Philippines into existence. Fr. Valdivielso had his personal objections and tried to conceal the fact while presenting them. But a Circular with the News arrived meanwhile. Fr. Valdivielso's resignation was accepted and a Mexican Vincentian, Fr. Salmeron, was appointed to head the Province consisting then of 27 priests and 10 lay brothers.



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While this was taking place Fr. Moral was travelling to another foundation: Vigan Seminary. Bishop Juan Aragonés, O.S.A. carried out the wishes of his predecessor when in March 1872 gave possession of the seminary to Fr. Moral and three other Vincentians. Wide reforms were needed there to make the idea of discipline workable. The serving of the Mass was not considered dignified enough for Seminarians to do it. Deacons had given up the practice of helping at the altar. The building itself had only five rooms serving for every kind of need. In the refectory there were only three glasses which made the rounds of the table according to the needs of the seminarians. All this had to be done, and it was introduced by the tactful enforcement of order and discipline under Fr. Moral who enjoyed the full confidence of the Bishop. The reforms were shortly accomplished but “much patience and prudence were required.” At the beginning of the new school year, courses of Latin, Philosophy and Moral Theology and other subjects were added to be taught on free days.

The diverse foundations going on required the frequent change of personnel. This affected specially Manila’s Seminary where there were five superiors in ten years. Besides, the Seminary of Manila had to lose one of its dependencies, occupied by the soldiers. No pleas of the Rector were to dislodge the army.

On his return from Paris, Fr. Moral brought the appointment of Fr. Orriols as Provincial of the Vincentians in the Philippines, who took it in possession on the 22nd of February 1875. At this time the Congregation of the Mission in the Philippines with its work in the diocesan seminaries was solidly getting established. The seminaries were flourishing, especially that of Vigan which counted around 300 pupils. Due to some misunderstanding between the Vicar General of the diocese and the Vincentians, they were forced to leave the said seminary in 1875.

The need for a Central House was being strongly felt. A property was bought in Manila on May 1875, of sixty thousand square meters, in the present site of the Central House of the Vincentians in San Marcelino Street. The property was at the time out of the city, and it was considered for many years something as a summer residence, and a residence also for the Fathers who were not directly engaged in the work of the seminaries. In 1878 a chapel was built to attend



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to the needs of the faithful living in the outskirts of the capital in the section of Ermita. In addition to their ministry and the work in the diocesan seminary, the Vincentians also during this period took care of the spiritual retreats to the clergy, and the laity, a work that flourished in all diocesan seminaries under the Vincentians.

As a result of a violent earthquake that destroyed the seminary on July 20, 1880, the seminarians of the diocese of Manila were housed temporarily in the house of the Vincentians in San Marcelino. Msgr. Pedro Payo, O.P., then Archbishop of the Archdiocese, contributed financially on this occasion to the building of a new house on the property of the Vincentians. He also returned to the diocesan seminary the chair of Dogmatic Theology that he had previously transferred to the University of Santo Tomas. In 1883 a new seminary was built near the palace of the archbishop to which faculty and pupils moved once the work was finished. At this time the house in San Marcelino became a retreat house for ten years. In monthly retreats that ceased in 1895 there lived in that house around 3,663 faithful of the city of Manila and suburbs.

Despite the insistence of the Superior General, Fr. Fiat, the Vincentians in the Philippines found it impossible to dedicate their energies to the most specific Vincentian type of apostolate, the popular missions, because of scarcity of personnel. The seminaries flourished in a quiet atmosphere of intellectual seriousness, piety and discipline. A revealing fact: in the seminary of Cebu only one *Meritissimus* in studies was granted in the space of ten years.

An incident in this seminary gave origin in 1877 to a new congregation, the Hermanitas de la Madre de Dios. Fr. La Canal was their founder. A man about to die at the gate of the diocesan seminary was lodged, with permission of the Ordinary, in a small house belonging to the seminary, the house that was called later Casa de la Caridad. A small community of women took care of the patients that were looked after in that house. The bishop of the diocese approved the constitutions of the new community in 1888, but seven years later, 1895, permission was requested from Rome to join the new congregation to the Sisters of Charity.

The enrollment in the diocesan seminaries grew steadily creating problems of accommodation. Extensions in the existing buildings were seen during this time in all seminaries run by the Vincentians, in



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Naga City, Iloilo, Cebu. In this last city the problems of expansion of recreation grounds brought about a 26,000 square meters reclamation project taken from the sea.

A danger was hovering over the Colegio-Seminarios. There were elements intent on wresting the pupils through devious means. One after another all the seminaries under the Vincentians sought Government recognition, which was readily granted in the form of first class schools attached to the Royal and Pontifical University of Santo Tomas. The curriculum followed step by step that which was followed in Spain and in its colonies.

There were important changes in regard to the internal government of the Vincentians. The summer house in San Marcelino was, finally, constituted as the Central House for the Vincentians in the Philippines on the 16th of January, 1891, becoming the residence of the Provincial. The land for the present San Luis, Gral. Luna streets was donated by the Vincentians.

At this time the first rumblings for independence were heard. Msgr. Nozaleda was successful in building a new seminary for the archdiocese of Manila. But the Seminary occupied its building for first year and its life was disrupted by the Katipunan in 1898. Shortly after the Katipunan the real revolution erupted. God's Providence spared the Vincentians any kind of persecution or suffering from any side. "Many religious," wrote Fr. Orriols, "have left the Philippines, and all will probably leave the country in a short time except perhaps the Jesuits. The Vincentians and the Daughters of Charity have nothing to complain about from either the Americans or the Filipinos."

In Cebu City Colonel Lukban, of the revolutionary army, wanted to get hold of the bishop, who barely managed to escape, helped by two Vincentian Fathers, on a German ship to Hong Kong. He returned to Cebu in 1900. The same Lukban robbed the seminary of Naga City of more than 16,000 pesos. The members of the faculty remained virtually prisoners in the seminary, and were allowed to go out only to accompany the pupils in their walks. In the seminary of Jaro the normal seminary life was seriously impeded for some time when the revolutionary troops took the city on the 25th of December, 1898. The seminary of Manila was closed temporarily by order of the archbishop on the 4th of September, 1899.



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Here follows a summary of the work of the Vincentians up to this period in the history of the Philippines (from the year of their coming to this country, 1862-1899). The seminary of Cebu saw the ordination of 119 priests; that of Naga, 125; Jaro, 117; Vigan, 30; and Manila, 260. A total of 651 priests then were ordained in the seminaries ran by the Vincentians. Out of that number, 4 became bishops: Their Excellencies Juan Gorordo, Jorge Barlin, Francisco Reyes and Santiago Sancho.

With the exodus of the Spanish missionaries from the Philippines, the Church received a hard blow from which she has not yet fully recovered. Only 825 Filipino priests were left to cover an area of work that was previously looked after by around two thousand priests. But by this time the presence of the friars had become impossible in places where the masonic propaganda against them had taken especially virulent forms. In the diocese of Jaro the rector of the Seminary, Fr. Viera, had to suffer a great deal because of the animosity against him of some Filipino priests. The new bishop, Msgr. Andres Ferrero, could not take possession of his See because of the circumstances, and some members of the clergy centered their grievances on Fr. Viera in his standing of caretaker of ecclesiastical affairs during the absence of the Ordinary. With the departure of the Americans the Vincentians tried to begin the most urgent repairs in the seminary building which had been left in such a sorry condition by the occupants that the Fathers had to sit down on the stairs for lack of chairs. Upon his coming, the Bishop, to his diocese, found a curious schism among the members of his clergy. No fewer than 39 diocesan priests had set up a schismatic movement that had reached the point of having its own seminary. In his desire to placate the malcontent priests the Bishop went as far as ordaining four of those educated in the "Schismatic" seminary. All this was taking place while the legitimate seminary was left in the run down condition brought about by the vicissitudes of the war. We can easily imagine the state of mind of the Vincentian community. Despite his condescending attitude the Bishop could not manage to bring to obedience the revolting priests. All these problems nearly drove him mad, as he himself wrote later to Fr. Viera.

The more serious schism of Aglipay made its inroads among the priests educated by the Vincentians, although not in great numbers.



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Aglipay himself was not educated by the Vincentians, but ten priests who had known for some time the sons of Saint Vincent in the seminary of Vigan chose to follow the heretic. The count-down in other dioceses of priests educated by the Vincentians who followed Aglipay is as follows: two in the diocese of Manila; one in Nueva Caceres; four in Jaro; two in Cebu.

September of 1902 marked an important date in the history of the seminaries in the Philippines. That was the date of the important constitution "*Quae mari sinico*" of Leo XIII, which tried to instill some order in the troubled waters of the Church in the Philippines. For their part the Vincentians tried step by step to put to practice the provisions that regarded the seminaries in that apostolic constitution.

On January 16, 1903, Fr. Rafael de la Iglesia was appointed the new Provincial.

In the second half of the year 1904 there were thoughts of establishing a Novitiate in the house of San Marcelino for the training of Filipino boys who might be interested in becoming Vincentians. The idea came from the Hierarchy and particularly from the Ordinaries of Manila, Jaro, Cebu, and Vigan, who, in a joint letter to Fr. Fiat, the Superior General, suggested the idea of establishing Novitiates both for the Vincentians and for the Daughters of Charity with a view to training Filipino candidates for both congregations, so that their magnificent apostolic work might be kept up by native priests and sisters. But all plans and dreams were shattered by the opposition of the Provincial of Spain, Fr. Eladio Arnaiz.

In 1905 a new foundation took shape in Samar in the form of a High School in Calbayog City, with Fr. Gregorio Tabar as rector, and Fr. Fernando Saiz. They arrived in Calbayog on the first of August, 1905, and two more Fathers were added to the community for the next school years, Pedro Martinez and Amador Crespo.

With the setting up of Samar and Leyte as a diocese independent from Cebu in 1910, the first Bishop, Msgr. Pablo Singzon de la Anunciacion, dedicated the till then, diocesan High School, to the training of seminarians for the services of the new diocese. The new Colegio-Seminario was entrusted to the Vincentian Fathers, as it had been since its foundation as high school.



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The year 1906 was marked by tragedy in the history of the seminary of Jaro. A fire brought about by carelessness on the part of the sacristan burned down the seminary building. The rector, Fr. Napal, barely saved his life jumping out of a window. This misfortune was quickly obliterated by the energy of the bishop of the diocese, Msgr. Rooker, and of the Vincentian community, because only eleven months after the accident a new seminary building was blessed by His Excellency. Msgr. Rooker died suddenly twenty four hours after the blessing ceremonies, and it was his successor, Bishop Dougherty, later Cardinal, who brought the new seminary to completion.

The year 1911 saw the first Vincentian foundation in a new island, Bohol. The Vincentians were given in charge of a school with the character of preparatory seminary, with a view to sending to Cebu properly prepared young Boholanos who might feel themselves called to the priesthood. Fr. Villain, formerly rector in the seminary of Cebu, and Fr. Salustiano Zaro began the school year with a group of 150 pupils.

The fifty years of the coming of the Vincentians to the Philippines was marked by an important work, viz., the building of the Saint Vincent de Paul Church. After some initial delays, the church was consecrated on the 16th of July, 1913. The church was the first to be built entirely of concrete in the country.

1913 was also the year when the archdiocesan seminary of San Carlos of Manila was entrusted for the second time to the Vincentian Fathers by the Archbishop. The seminary had been under the Secular Priests for a few years from the end of the Filipino-American war till 1904, when it was given to the Jesuits by the Apostolic Delegate. The new seminary was to be established in Mandaluyong, in a 7-hectare property bought from the Augustinian Fathers. This seminary began, as the other seminaries under the Vincentians, with its double character of Colegio-Seminary. The original enrollment gave the following numbers: 50 seminarians, major for the most part, and 40 interns and the same number of externs.

Another foundation with the same character was offered to the Vincentians in the following year, 1914, in San Pablo, diocese of Lipa. The new Colegio-Seminario began in that city in June, but only six months later it was transferred by the Bishop, Msgr. Petrelli,



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to Bauan, Batangas, only to return to San Pablo under Msgr. Verzosa, the following Ordinary, three years later, 1917. At this time the Seminary-Colegio numbered a few seminarians and then around 600 students, 200 of whom were interns.

The Colegio-Seminario set-up offered at the time some advantages. From the several Vincentian institutions of that type have come out numberless politicians, businessmen, lawyers, doctors who are spread today all over the country. But it was Msgr. O'Doherty, promoted to the archdiocese of Manila in 1916, the first to see clearly the disadvantages of a mixed system of education, a system that was responsible for the alarming decrease in the number of vocations to the priesthood in the archdiocese of Manila. Accordingly His Excellency decided to separate seminary from College, the latter being transferred to the Vincentian Central House on San Marcelino Street with the old name of Colegio de Santa Mesa, a name which was changed to that of Colegio de San Vicente de Paul in 1920. The said college offered complete courses for Intermediate, High School and College till in 1927 it closed its doors to lay students to be dedicated "to the formation and preparation of future priests."

The Seminario-Colegio of Manila was the first to separate into different functions the dual role of seminary and school. At the prodding of the Apostolic Delegate and despite some opposition, all the Vincentian foundations followed the example of Manila in 1925. From that date the Vincentians completely got rid of the schools which had been attached to the diocesan seminaries, while keeping these, except for the Colegio de San Carlos in Cebu City, which, although separated from the diocesan seminary, remained in the hands of the Vincentians for six more years. The main obvious advantage of the Colegio-Seminario set-up was one of financial character. The Curia of Manila, for example, spent an average of 3,200.00 per year for the education of seminarians while seminary and college formed but one institution. With the separation of functions, the expenses for the education of seminarians reached as high as 22,000.00 pesos per annum. With these numbers in view it was not surprising that there was some resistance on the part of the hierarchy to the breaking up of the old and rather economical Seminario-Colegio type of institutions.



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With the new system the number of seminarians grew everywhere to the point that in the year 1930-1931 out of a total number of 1,156 seminarians being trained in all the seminaries of the Philippines, the seven seminaries ran by the Vincentians counted no fewer than 851.

The years that preceded World War II saw the consecration of several eminent members of the Filipino clergy, who were alumni of seminaries ran by the Vincentian Fathers: Bishop Francisco Reyes, Ordinary in the diocese of Nueva Caceres since 1925; Gabriel Reyes, born in Capiz, elevated to the See of Cebu in 1932; later, the first Filipino to occupy the See of Manila; Casimiro Lladoc, first Bishop in the diocese of Bacolod, Negros; Manuel Mascarinas, born in Bohol and appointed Bishop to the See of that Diocese in 1938; Miguel Acebedo, consecrated bishop in 1938 for the diocese of Calbayog, Samar.

The year 1935 saw the maturity of an old dream of the Vincentians in the Philippines, the coming into being of a Novitiate for the training of Filipinos to be admitted to the Congregation of the Mission. The Vincentian Novitiate opened with Fr. Maximo Juguera as first Master of Novices, and with two novices who were today active Vincentians in Naga City and in Rome respectively, Fr. Teotimo Pacis and Fr. Jesus Cavanna, the First Filipino Vincentians.

The coming of the war brought about a radical disruption of the normal activities in the seminaries. Better or worse, with frequent interruptions, the seminaries ran by the Vincentians continued in their quiet activity as far as it was feasible. The house of San Marcelino had the privilege of housing for several months the Jesuit Fathers and their scholastics and seminarians from the San Jose Seminary till the moment when they were expelled by the members of a Japanese ship that had been sunk by the Americans.

February 1945, was a month marked with blood for the Vincentians in the Philippines. During the battle for the city of Manila, during the night of the 8th of that month, several Fathers and Brothers of that and of other communities were assassinated to a total number of 14 priests and 4 Brothers Coadjutors. In addition most of the buildings of the diocesan seminaries were either totally or partly destroyed in the hazards of the war.



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It was no small enterprise that fell to the hands of Fr. Teodoro Robredo who took over the government of the Vincentians right after the end of the war, until another Fr. Provincial could be appointed by the M. H. Fr. General.

These 20 years after the Second World War are a matter of a chronicle that is not even a draft of history.

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