

HISTORICAL SECTION

Notes on

THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN IN THE PHILIPPINES* 1521-1898 *(continued)*

• Pablo Fernandez, O.P.

Chapter Five

THE PARROQUIAL ORGANIZATION

1. Kinds of Parishes

In the Philippines for more than two centuries, there were no parishes except those administered by the secular clergy. Other centers of ministry, founded and maintained by the religious orders, were considered as "missions" until the arrival in Manila of Archbishop Sancho de Santa Justa y Rufina. Backed by royal power and the governors-general, he was able, in the face of great difficulties, to convert into parishes the missions attached to the archdiocese of Manila. The other bishops, following the lead of Manila, did the same. Since then, that is, from the year 1776 on, the parochial system has been followed by the religious orders.

And so, right from the sixteenth century, there were in the islands, parishes, mission-parishes, and active missions. Mission-parishes were

* An essay towards a history of the Church in the Philippines during the Spanish period 1521-1898, translated by Jose Arcilla, S.J., faculty member of Ateneo University, Department of History.

those administered by the religious, but had grown into the self-sufficiency of a parish. But, because they were not subject to the laws of Royal Patronage and to diocesan visitation, they had been classified, according to the Laws of the Indies, as "missions." The active-missions, as they were later called, were mission-parishes still in the stages of development.¹ Before the arrival of Archbishop Basilio Sancho, almost all the ministries in the Philippines were mission-parishes; after his arrival, the parishes outnumbered the missions.

2. Provision for the Parishes

According to the Laws of the Indies, provisions for the parishes was to be in this manner. When a parish became vacant, the Ordinary posted on the doors of the cathedral church and of the other churches a public notice to announce the vacancy. It should be done in such a way that it would reach those who wished to apply for the vacancy through competition. After the applicants had all been listed, they were examined by a board of diocesan examiners in the form required by the Council of Trent. After this, the Ordinary made the TERNA or list of the three most deserving candidates for presentation to the Royal Vice-Patron. The latter chose the one he thought best of the three and presented him in turn to the Ordinary for the canonical appointment. But, because of a great scarcity of secular priests, this was scarcely the procedure in the Philippines.

With regards to the curacies of the religious orders, the Laws of the Indies (*Recopilación de las Leyes de Indias*, Libro 1, título xv, ley 3) provided that:

¹ ...the laws of patronage distinguish between curacies, *doctrinas* and reductions. The curacies are those that are entrusted to religious by right of canonical institution and perpetual title; the *doctrinas* are those reductions which have been under the administration of the religious for ten years and are by law handed over to the bishops who would entrust them to the secular clergy; and the reductions, strictly understood, are those centers where there are actual conversions of the heathen, or those which are called active missions." Arbea, Carlos, O.P. *Memoria sobre el Estado actual de las Corporaciones Religiosas en estas Islas con relación á los decretos de las Cortes sobraenas de la Nación* (1823) in *APSR*, Sección Historia Eclesiástica de Filipinas, fol. 21.

a) When a curacy entrusted to the religious orders had to be provided for, the Provincial or the Provincial Chapter should name three religious;

b) This TERNA should be presented to the Royal Vice-Patron for him to choose one of the three;

c) Once the choice is made, the Vice-Patron would send his name to the Ordinary for the subsequent canonical investiture. The Ordinary could subject the chosen religious to an examination and scrutiny before granting canonical appointment, in accordance with the Laws of the Indies (ley 3, título xv, libro 1).²

It can be seen that the difference in the provision for parishes administered by secular or religious priests lies in two things: a) the religious were not obliged to take a previous competitive examination; b) the religious Superior, not the diocesan Ordinary, made the TERNA which was presented to Royal Vice-Patron.³

3. Philippine Parishes and Two Ecclesiastical Conferences

The synod held in 1582 concluded that the spiritual care of more than 600 souls could not in conscience be entrusted to one pastor.⁴ In 1771, the Council, keeping in mind the poverty of the towns and the dearth of ministers of the gospel, decreed that the priest who served a parish of more than 500 tributes (more or less about 2,000 souls) should be given an assistant. It also approved a triple classification of the parishes, and no pastor would be moved to the second class parish without having served in a parish of the first class. Nor could he be advanced to serve in a third class parish before having served with distinction in a second class parish for three years.⁵

² *Recopilación de las Leyes de los Reinos de Indias*. (Gráficas "Ultra," S.A., Madrid, 1943), T. 1, 131-32.

³ Cfr. APSR, Bases sobre parroquias, HEF (General), año 1887.

⁴ Marin, Valentín, O.P., *Ensayo de una síntesis etc.* (Manila: Imprenta de Santo Tomas, 1901), T. 1, 327.

⁵ Tamayo, Serapio, O.P., *Idea general de la disciplina eclesiástica en Filipinas durante la dominación española* (Manila: Establecimiento tipográfico del Colegio de Santo Tomas, 1906), 67-68.

4. Erection of Parishes

No parish in the Philippines could be erected without approval from the Ordinary and from the civil government. In the nineteenth century many new parishes were formed by separating them from the older ones. This was due to the great increase of population. It was customary to demand the local *gobernadorcillo* to build at least temporarily buildings for worship and for the priest's residence. Once they had these, the church authorities or the religious superior had no difficulty assigning a parish priest. The ideal of the pastors was to have all the faithful "bajo campana" (within earshot of the bell tower), as they used to say, to serve as a nucleus or center of residence, in the style of European towns. But this proved to be impossible for the Filipinos were very much attached to their fields and only with difficulty parted from them. This explains the existence of the "visitas," of which several became in time parishes.

5. Classes of Parishes and Missions by the End of the Nineteenth Century

By royal decree dated 10 July 1894, the parishes in the Philippines were for the future to be classed according to the following plan: parishes of 5,000 souls = *de primera entrada*; parishes of 5,000 — 10,000 souls = *de segunda entrada*; parishes of 10,000 — 20,000 souls = *de primer ascenso*; parishes of 20,000 — 30,000 souls = *de segundo ascenso*; parishes of more than 30,000 souls = *de término*. It was decided that the missions should be classified according to their level of advancement into "active missions" and "mission-parishes." The former could be assimilated to parishes *de primer ascenso*, and the mission-parish to the parish *de segunda entrada*.⁶

6. Assistant Priests

To help pastors in the administration of their vast parishes, the bishops of the Philippines used to ordain *titulo operarii* (with the title of worker) priests whom they assigned as assistant pastors wherever

⁶ Cfr. *APSR*, Mss., Sección Comunicaciones oficiales, Tomo 3, fols. 102-111; 135-152.

they were needed. They enjoyed rights of housing, food, and received a small stipend which was increased in cases where the assistant priest lived apart from the pastor. In the archdiocese of Manila, the coadjutor's salary in 1869 was ₱16.00 a month, ₱10.00 if board and lodging were provided. The salary in the other dioceses was a bit smaller.⁷

7. Parroquial Buildings

There were four parroquial buildings: the church, the parroquial house (in the Philippines called until now "convento"), the chapels in the "visitas" (or subsidiary chapels in the barrios), and the cemeteries. In the beginning, the churches were weak structures of nipa and bamboo: but in time, they gave way to edifices of more solid materials (stone, brick, tile, wood). Fires, earthquakes and typhoons, so frequent in the Philippines, taught the missionaries and pastors to construct the edifices of the parish solidly, except the barrio chapels which were used infrequently and so built provisionally. For that purpose, they taught the Filipinos how to make lime and brick, how to cut stone, erect stone walls — in general, to master the arts of carpentry and brickwork. The wood they obtained from neighboring forests. Because of lack of means, the construction of a church was delayed many years.

The rectories (*conventos*) were not built along aesthetic lines, but almost all of them, following a plan suited to the needs of the tropics, were large, spacious and comfortable. The expenses for the construction of these buildings were shouldered by occasional government funds, by the encomenderos who resided in the area, by the priest's savings, and, above all, by the people who contributed both gifts of money and their personal labor. For the support of the church services and the repair of the churches, *conventos* and cemeteries, the natives were taxed a half *real* per person, or a *real* for every tribute paid, and two *reales* per Chinese-Filipino mestizo. The king provided a newly constructed church with a set of sacred furnishings, a chalice with its paten, and a bell. The parishes and missions of the religious were for a long time supplied (also by the king) with mass wine and oil for the sanctuary lamp.⁸

⁷ Cfr. *APSR*, Mss. Sección Comunicaciones oficiales, Tomo 1, fol. 41.

⁸ Tamayo, *op. cit.*, 94-96.

8. Government Aid for Parishes and Missions

Following the laws of royal patronage, the Spanish government approved a stipend to support each parish and mission. The stipend was bigger for the poor parishes and the active missions, although the exact amount varied with time. In the beginning, it was either in money or in kind; but starting with a royal cedula of 1835, it was paid only in kind. During the seventeenth century, the government paid a stipend of ₱100 and 100 cavans of rice for the active missions; towards the end of the nineteenth century, it was ₱400, at times, ₱800.

By royal order dated 10 December 1835, the metropolitan government granted pastors a sum of ₱180 a year for every 500 tributes. The revolutionary government of 1868 in Spain wanted to reduce this amount; but, on petition and representation by the diocesan ordinaries and the religious orders, it was left as it was until then.⁹ When the old system of tribute in the Philippines was changed to that of the personal *cedula*, the government decreed in 1884 that for every 1000 *cedulas* on the official census, a stipend of ₱180 would devolve to the pastors, except those of Cebu, Bohol, Samar, Leyte, Misamis and Mindoro, who would receive ₱212.50 because of their special circumstances.

Another royal decree dated 17 October 1887 provided that the Vice-Patron, in accord with the prelates and the General Overseer of the Treasury (*Intendente General de Hacienda*), should specify a certain percentage in lieu of the categories designated for every thousand *cedulas*, as provided for in the decree of 1884. Accordingly, the Governor General decreed on 27 February, 1888 that the former categories had been abrogated by the 12 or 12½ percentage off the total revenue expected from the *cedulas*, following the lists of each parish.¹⁰ We shall discuss the diocesan fees elsewhere.

9. Influence of the Religious Pastors

Because of their knowledge of the idiom and customs of the place; because of the prestige and influence they generally had over the faith-

⁹ Cfr. *APSR*, *loc cit.*, fol. 40 ff.

¹⁰ Tamayo, *op. cit.*, 69-70.

ful; because of their tireless dedication to improve the material and moral condition of the towns — the religious pastors were as the axis around which revolved the governmental wheel in the islands. They were the indispensable element which both the church and the civil authorities had to use to institute reforms among the people, or whatever important measure they wanted to effect. If the pastors supported the will of the authorities, all went well. If secretly or openly they were opposed, the ruling powers were inviting failure. The religious parish priests had won their ascendancy and influence over the people by their selfless labor, and by having acted as the defender against abuses and outrages committed by both foreigners and natives. Nonetheless, one must admit that, because they had almost always through force or necessity served as the support of government action in purely civil, and sometimes hateful, matters, they incurred on themselves the hatred of those who disagreed with the government policies at the time, or of those who had suffered personally because of the pastor's intervention. And in the end this led to the loss of their parishes.

The religious pastors supervised public instruction, maintained several schools, or purchased on occasion the school furnishings with their own funds and paid the teachers when necessary. In several places, they took care of the physical sufferings of the faithful, giving them medicines. And in time of great calamity, like an earthquake, drought, fire, typhoon, raids by pagan tribes or by the Moslems, they were the ones who spoke for them before the government and before the public, seeking to alleviate their penury.¹¹

10. Statistics

In 1898, there were in the archdiocese of Manila 219 parishes, 24 mission-parishes and 16 active missions, a total of 259 ministries administered by 259 pastors. In the diocese of Cebu there were 166 parishes, 15 mission-parishes, 32 active missions, which reached a total of 213, under the administration of an equal number of pastors or missionaries. The diocese of Jaro had 144 parishes, 23 mission-parishes, 33 active missions, making a total of 200 under the spiritual care of as many

¹¹ Tamayo, *op. cit.*, 71-73.

pastors or missionaries. The diocese of Nueva Segovia reached a total of 171 ministries, divided into 110 parishes, 26 mission-parishes, and 35 active missions under the charge of as many pastors and missionaries. Finally, 107 parishes and 17 mission-parishes administered by 124 ministers was the total number presented by the diocese of Nueva Caceres.

The parishes totalled 746, the mission-parishes 105, and the active missions 116. The total number of pastors and missionaries in the Archipelago reached 967. Of them, 233 were Recollects, 228 Augustinians, 175 Franciscans, 109 Dominicans, 42 Jesuits, 16 Capuchins, 6 Benedictines, and 158 were from the secular clergy.

The number of secular priests distributed among the parishes of the archdiocese of Manila reached 198; while Cebu had 125, Jaro 73. Nueva Segovia 131 and Nueva Caceres 148. The number of souls of the dioceses was: Manila — 1,811,445; Cebu — 1,748,872; Jaro — 1,310,754; Nueva Segovia — 997,629; Nueva Caceres — 691,298. Their total: 6,558,998.
