

HISTORICAL SECTION

Notes on

THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN THE PHILIPPINES* 1521 - 1898

(continued)

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Chapter Nine

RELIGIOUS ORDERS AND CONGREGATIONS OF WOMEN

1. **Santa Clara Monastery.** Already by the end of the sixteenth century, the residents of Manila had wanted to have a monastery for cloistered nuns in the city, where Spanish girls who felt called to the religious state could enter. But because of objections from the Council of the Indies, nothing was done until 1619.

Finally, with all the necessary civil and ecclesiastical permits, 8 nuns of St. Clair sailed from Cadiz to the Philippines on 5 July 1620. Headed by Mother Jeronima de la Asuncion, they arrived in Manila on 5 August 1621, after a long and tedious voyage of more than one year. They were lodged at first in a convent in Sampaloc, where they stayed until their house in Intramuros was ready, which had belonged to the couple Pedro de Chavez and Ana de Vera, the patrons of this foundation. In a few weeks 20 Spanish maidens entered the monastery, which was known as the monastery of Santa Clara.

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This event alarmed many residents for, if the number of vocations increased, there would scarcely be available in Manila young girls for the youth who might want to marry. To prevent such lack, the authorities thought of limiting the number of postulants. This occasioned serious misunderstandings with the foundress. It also occasioned enough headaches to the Franciscan provincial, since he had to see to it that the nuns accepted rent and servants for the household chores. But in all this, Mother Jerónima acted with great prudence and success. Finally consumed with age, labors and penance, the Mother foundress passed to a better life on 22 October 1630 at the age of 75 years. This noble soul cherished a plan to open a monastery in Pandacan for native girls, but it did not succeed because she did not receive the support of the authorities.¹

2. **Beaterio of the Society of Jesus.** Inspired by Fr. Paul Klein, S.J. this Beaterio was founded in 1684 or a little after by Ignacia del Espiritu Santo, a Chinese mestiza. The *beatas* (pious women) lived in a building near the Jesuit church in Intramuros, and they dedicated themselves to teach Spanish, mestizas and native girls the fear of God and works proper to their sex. They lived poor, on occasion begging alms, and they earned their livelihood through the work of their hands. They were called *beatas* because, without belonging to a religious family, they wore a religious habit, followed common life and observed certain rules. They were "Jesuit" because, without being technically bound to the Society of Jesus, they went to the Jesuit church to confess, to hear mass and receive communion.

Unlike the nuns of Santa Clara who were Spaniards, the *beatas* were Filipinos or mestizas. In 1755, King Ferdinand VI, acceding to a previous petition by Archbishop Pedro de Arízala, granted the *beaterio* legal existence. In the second half of the nineteenth century, they began to expand around Manila and to the Jesuit missions in Mindanao.

¹ Concepción, Juan de la, O.R.S.A., *Historia General de Filipinas*, Manila, 1788, Tomo V, páginas 5-17; Perez, P. Lorenzo, O.M., *Compendio de la vida de la Venerable Madre Sor Jerónima de la Asunción*, Manila, 1963 (St. Paul Publications), pp. 38-43.

In the beginning of the present century, they became the Religious of the Virgin Mary (RVM)² today quite spread all over in the Philippines.²

3. Beaterio of Santa Catalina. Already in 1633, the Dominicans had intended to found a monastery, similar to that of Santa Clara. But they had to discontinue the project lest they prejudice the interest of the first institution. In 1696 a Beaterio was inaugurated, supported by a donation of Doña Clemencia Naveda and organized by Fr. Juan de Sto. Domingo. The *beatas*, in the original plan, would pronounce solemn vows, observe strict cloister, wear the Dominican habit and follow the Rule written by their founder. In the course of time, the Beaterio, under the patronage of Saint Catherine, had to face various crises: the lack of funds, the threat of the diocesan visitation in the time of Archbishop Camacho, the opposition of the Sta. Clara Monastery, and the controversy on the solemnity of the vows. Nonetheless they survived these difficulties, thanks to the generosity of Sr. Juan de Escaño y Cordoba, who left them a bequest of P40,000, and the help and guidance of the Dominican fathers. By mid-eighteenth century, occasioned by the defection of a nun, a dispute arose on the solemnity of the vows. The church authorities resolved the problem against the mind and the practice of the Dominicans and the nuns. It was also necessary to admit students towards 1740, because of the needs of the city residents. That is why the foundation continued as a Monastery-College.

After about a century of stagnation, the nuns began to spread out at the end of 1858. First they went to the province of Fookien, China under the shadow of the Dominican missions, and later throughout the Philippines, with the foundation, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, of colleges in Lingayen, Vigan and Tuguegarao. To attend to the needs of the Monastery-College, the missions and their educational institutions in the provinces, the Dominican fathers had to bring personnel from Spain, since the nuns of Spanish descent but Philippine-born, were not enough. The first peninsular religious arrived on 12 April 1865. In 1933, the Filipino membership separated from the

² Anon, *Mother Ignacia del Espiritu Santo*, Manila, 1959, pp. 17-44.

Spanish, resulting in two groups: the congregation of St. Catherine of Siena for the Filipinos, and the Missionaries of St. Dominic for the foreigners. The latter, strangely, has many Filipinos in its membership today.³

4. Third Order of Recollect Sisters. This Institute was founded in 1719 and was housed for a long time in a residence in the area now fronting the San Sebastian Church, the Plaza del Carmen in Quiapo (Manila). It has also served as a school since its foundation and, since 1907, is known as Santa Rita College.⁴

5. Daughters of Charity. On 19 October 1852, Her Majesty Queen Isabel II dispatched a Royal Order communicating some important measures for the better spiritual administration of the Philippines. The same Royal Order decreed the coming of the Vincentian Fathers (*Paules*) and the Daughters of Charity to the Philippines. The latter would take care of the hospital and other institutions of learning and charity in Manila.⁵

The first mission of fifteen Sisters reached Manila on 21 July 1862. This year and the following they took charge of the following institutions (chronologically listed for greater clarity, some of which we have already mentioned): the Military Hospital (1862), Escuela Municipal of Manila (1864), Colegio de Sta. Isabel in Manila (1864), Hospicio de San Jose (1865), Colegio de Sta. Rosa (1866), Normal School and College of Sta. Isabel in Nueva Cáceres (1868), San Juan de Dios Hospital in Manila (1869), Colegio de San José in Jaro (1872), Hospital de la Marina in Cañacao (1876), San Juan de Dios Hospital in Cavite and a school attached to it (1885), Asilo-Colegio de San Vicente de Paul in Looban, Manila (1885), and finally the College, School, Hospital and House of Charity in Cebu (1895).⁶

We shall now briefly review the institutions which we have not yet discussed.

³ *Dominicos donde nace el sol*, pp. 193-94, 380, 423, 427, 433, 520-21.

⁴ *Misiones Cathólicas en Filipinas*, Manila, p. 103.

⁵ Un sacerdote de la Congregación de la Misión, *Op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, 136-41.

6. **Escuela Municipal.** The Escuela or Ateneo Municipal of Manila was three years old when the Government, at the coming of the Daughters of Charity to the Philippines in 1862, thought of opening a similar school for girls under the direction of these sisters. It was opened in 1864 with 100 pupils, an enrollment that grew to 400 by the end of the century. The building originally occupied the spot at the end of Archbishop street in Intramuros. After the earthquake in 1882, it was transferred near the college of Sta. Isabel. Finally in 1892 a new edifice was built following the new style of the age to answer the needs of the school. With the change of sovereignty, the American government, faithfully following the principle of total separation of church and state in the United States and in the Philippines, forbade the Sisters from teaching religion. No less faithful to their principles, the latter decided to give up the administration of the school which reverted to the government and became a high school under the Bureau of Education.⁷

7. **Santa Rosa College.** Under the patronage of Saint Rose of Lima, a college was founded in 1750 by a Dominican tertiary, Sor Paula de la Santísima Trinidad. She had just arrived from Spain, impelled by her ardent desire to do good for the young girls of Manila. On her death some years later, she entrusted the school to a Board of Directors under the supervision of the Archbishop, following the norms of the *Patronato Real*. For a century, pious ladies in residence took charge of its internal administration and taught in the classes. On 19 January 1866, after the death of the last lay directress, the Daughters of Charity assumed the government of this educational center. They inherited a building ruined by the earthquake of 1863 and they had to sweat blood and tears to rebuild it. Seismic tremors brought it to the ground again in 1882, and once more, together with the Board of Directors, the Sisters reconstructed the college. Although burned in 1941 during the Japanese raid of December 27, it still continues on a modest scale under the care of the Josephine Sisters.⁸

⁷ *Op. cit.*, pp. 111-14.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, pp. 136-41.

8. **Santa Isabel College (Naga).** This college owes its foundation in 1868 to the zeal and foresight of Bishop Francisco Gainza, who entrusted it to the Daughters of Charity from the beginning. Within its square and spacious edifice which Bishop Gainza erected on a new foundation, there were almost from the start three educational institutions: a free school for poor girls, a boarding school, and a normal school for teachers. This last was the reason why bishop Gainza opened Santa Isabel College. He hoped that from it well trained teachers would graduate, who would in time raise the level of education throughout the diocese. Although the Spanish government had elevated it to the rank of a normal school for teachers in 1872, it did not begin to function as such until 1875. About 350 teachers were trained in Santa Isabel until the end of the century, and around 1500 girls received their schooling there.⁹

9. **La Concordia College.** The first Daughters of Charity had scarcely arrived in Manila in 1862 when an aristocratic, but virtuous lady, Doña Margarita Roxas de Avala, donated a beautiful estate on the outskirts of the city, called "*La Concordia*," in order to found a college for girls. She also defrayed the expenses for the journey of 8 Sisters who took charge of the new school on 3 May 1868. This was the first college they had administered by themselves. The others, Santa Isabel, Santa Rosa, the Escuela Municipal, the Military Hospital, San Juan de Dios Hospital, the Hospicio de San José, were governed by their respective administrative councils under the *Patronato Real*. Besides the 40 girls, called "*de gracia*", who received free education, La Concordia maintained a free school for the girls of the suburb. The school was in another age famous as an outstanding school for piano and singing. The buildings of La Concordia have also served as the Mother House of the Daughters of Charity in the Philippines.¹⁰

10. **San José College (Jaro).** On 1 May 1872, the Daughters of Charity opened by themselves a college in Iloilo under the patronage of Saint Joseph. For the first five

⁹ *Op. cit.*, 144-48.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, pp. 150-58.

years they had to close it for lack of funds and for other causes. That the sisters might not leave his diocese, Mons. Mariano Cuartero entrusted them with the *Escuela Municipal*.¹¹

11. Marine Hospital (Cañacao). This government hospital for sick soldiers and sailors was entrusted to the Daughters of Charity in 1876. The spiritual care was in the hands of a military chaplain, while a group of physicians took charge of technical matters.¹²

12. The Daughters of Charity in Cebu. In 1895 the Little Sisters of the Mother of God were integrated with the Daughters of Charity. The former were a local religious community in Cebu, organized some years previously by Fr. Fernando de la Canal, a sagacious apostle and social worker. In this way a school, a small hospital and a Casa de Caridad passed to the hands of the Daughters of Saint Vincent de Paul. They had been administered by the Little Sisters, guided by Fr. de la Canal and supported by Bishops Madridejos and Alcocer of Cebu.¹³

13. Augustinian Tertiary Sisters. In 1883, 4 Augustinian sisters arrived in the Philippines. They were members of a religious group in Barcelona, founded in 1877 and known as the *Beatas de San Agustín*. Their purpose was to help the Augustinian fathers gather together, support and educate the numerous orphan girls who were left destitute after the cholera of 1882. In the beginning they were lodged in a spacious building in San Felipe Neri which the fathers had given them. In 1889, they admitted the first six filipina girls to their congregation. The tertiaries and their girls stayed in this same place until 1898, when the building was bombarded, and they had to evacuate to the convent in Guadalupe which the Augustinian fathers had abandoned. The years following the revolution were for the Augustinian sisters a road of suffering: from Guadalupe they had to move to the College of Santa Isabel; from here to the convent of the

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 169-73.

¹² *Op. cit.*, pp. 174-77.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, pp. 189-197.

Venerable Third Order of Saint Francis in Sampaloc; finally, in 1908, they transferred to the Beaterio in Pasig where they opened a school called *Colegio del Buen Consejo*.¹⁴

14. The Mothers of the Assumption. When the Queen Regent Maria Cristina decided to enrich the Philippines with a normal school on a more pretentious level, the only institute she found suitable for her plan was the Congregation of the Mothers of the Assumption. In 1892, they arrived in the Philippines charged with the administration of such a school. With the end of the Spanish government in the Philippines, the Mothers gave up the Normal School, but not their work of education. This they have continued until our own days for the girls and young ladies of high society.¹⁵

¹⁴ *Misiones Católicas en Filipinas*, p. 105.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 106.