

A FRAGMENT OF HISTORY AND CONTEXT

Since their arrival in the Philippines in July 1862, the Vincentians totally dedicated themselves to the formation of the local diocesan clergy. On August 2, 1862—a mere eleven days after they set foot on the Islands—the Vincentians started to work in the new vineyard to which they were sent. Four Vincentian priests and brothers zealously set themselves to the task at hand by taking over the administration of *Seminario Conciliar de San Carlos* in Manila.

They instituted new set of disciplinary rules, improved the infrastructures and taught Moral Theology, Liturgy and Gregorian chants (since most courses were then taken at the Faculty of Theology in the University of Santo Tomas). After more than a month, Fr. Moral reported that the two Vincentian priests were already multitasking in several apostolates: “besides the direction of and administration of the Seminary, [they were also engaged in] spiritual exercises for the ordinands and priests who wanted to have a short retreat, the teaching of Moral Theology and Rubrics, the hearing of confessions in the hospitals (San Juan de Dios and the Military Hospital), and at times, outside the hospitals, especially for dying persons.”¹

The bishops of Naga and Cebu heard about the work that they were doing and requested for their service in their dioceses. The Vincentians took over the Naga seminary in 1865 and Cebu in 1867. The Vincentians started administering the seminary in Jaro in 1869 and Vigan in 1872. Thus, after ten years from their arrival, the missionaries of St. Vincent were handling practically all the diocesan seminaries in the country.

The shortest stint was in the seminary of Vigan—a mere four years (1872 to 1876) and the longest service the Vincentians have offered in the formation of the local clergy was in the Cebu seminary

¹ Rolando Delagoza and Jesús María Cavanna, *Vincentians in the Philippines 1862-1982* (Manila: Congregación de la Misión en Filipinas, Inc., 1985), 72.

(1867 to 1998) — 131 years of service to a local Church. It was from the Naga seminary that the first Filipino bishop, Jorge Barlin (1850–1909), graduated. The next two next bishops meanwhile came from the San Carlos Seminary in Cebu: Pablo Singzon (1851–1920) of Calbayog; and Juan Gorordo (1862–1934) of Cebu. In the following century, they accepted other requests for seminary teaching and administration: Jagna, Bohol (1911–1922); San Felipe Neri in Manila (1913–1953); San Pablo (1914–1942); Lipa (1931–1944); Bacolod (1946–1959); Argao, Cebu (1946–1950); Sorsogon (1956–1958).² In all these years when the Vincentians assiduously worked in the formation of the Filipino local clergy, they did not recruit any Filipino candidate for their own Congregation. It was only on July 4, 1935 (73 years after their arrival) that a Vincentian novitiate was opened in the Philippines.

Beyond the hundreds of priests, many great and heroic Christian laymen obtained their first education outside the Manila metropolis from these *colegio-seminarios*: Sergio Osmeña, Dionisio Jakosalem, Sotero Cabahug, Vicente and Filemon Sotto (and many others from San Carlos Seminary-College in Cebu); Jose Ma. Panganiban, Tomas Flordeliza, Vicente de Vera (and many others from Colegio-Seminario of Naga); Graciano Lopez Jaena, Ramon Avanceña, Quentin Salas (and some others from the Naga seminary), and others too many to mention here.³ In those times, Cebu, Naga, Jaro, and Calbayog were peripheral cities and the Vincentians dedicated most of their resources for the empowerment of the youth in these marginal places. After the closing of the *colegio-seminarios*, the schools for lay people flourished on their own—an example of which is the University of San Carlos in Cebu City.

Side by side with their work for the clergy, the Vincentians also took upon themselves the task of the formation of the laity by giving

² Ibid., 466–468. Also see [Bruno Saiz], *Los Padres Paules y las Hijas de la Caridad en Filipinas: Breve Reseña Histórica de la Labor Realizada en estas Islas por la Doble Familia de San Vicente de Paul 1862-1912* (Manila: Imprenta de Santos y Bernal, 1912), 235-239.

³ For this list, see Rolando Delagoza, “The Contributions of the Congregation of the Mission to Philippine Culture,” Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Santo Tomas, May 1974, Appendix D; see also, Delagoza and Cavanna, *Vincentians in the Philippines*, 472-473.

popular missions in remote parishes (in cooperation with the diocesan clergy) and by founding associations linked with the Vincentian family in those places where they gave missions. When the diocesan clergy proved themselves to be equipped and ready to administer their own seminaries in the era after Vatican II, the Vincentians moved to other apostolates where they were needed—missionary parishes and popular missions, grassroots organizing and cooperative-building, social services and community development, advocacy work and formation of BECs, foreign missions and care for migrants, work among indigenous peoples and the vulnerable sectors.

In these present times, when the diocesan clergy already administers their own diocesan and regional seminaries, St. Vincent School of Theology presents itself as one of the Vincentian responses to the contemporary needs of the theological and pastoral formation of our local Churches. The original Vincentian mission to help form the local clergy remains in SVST as it caters to the philosophical, theological and pastoral formation of seminarians, priests, religious and lay people from different dioceses all over the country. In the spirit of the *colegio-seminarios*, SVST still pursues the vision of making education accessible to the marginalized and of forming lay people and clergy in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul.

St. Vincent School of Theology first opened its doors on the school year 1985-1986 in the old St. Vincent Seminary building in Tandang Sora Avenue, Quezon City. Born during the times of upheaval leading towards EDSA people power revolution, it continues to foster its critical spirit in their theological orientation and pastoral training. It moved to its present building on the school year 1988-1989 after having been inaugurated and blessed by the late Jaime Cardinal Sin. At present, it serves as the Graduate School of theology and philosophy of Adamson University in Manila.

Attempting to surpass the paradigm of theological education as a clerical privilege, SVST takes the view of theological formation as both a right and responsibility of the whole people of God. It is for this that it offers not only courses for the priesthood but also for all the laity and religious alike. In an effort to go beyond the one-sidedness of a highly academic theology, on the one hand, and a purely pastoral application, on the other; or, of mere historical research, on one side,

and a basically practical theology, on the other, SVST tries to design its programs with the view of establishing a synthesis of pastoral competence and academic endeavor, of historical-critical inquiry and contemporary relevance, of critical stance and constructive collaboration with other agents of transformation within society, in general, and with the Church, in particular.

True to its motto of “doing theology from the margins”, SVST’s programs are geared towards valuing the grassroots communities as a contemporary *locus theologicus*. In concrete, its whole theological-pastoral curriculum aims not only to form people – lay, religious and priests – to evangelize the poor but also to take the grassroots’ struggles for survival and their experiences of God – most often neglected and unarticulated – as the preferred starting point of theological reflection and pastoral practice.

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