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## **Catholic Education and Church-State Relations until the Sixties**

Education in the Philippines during the Spanish colonial rule was within the jurisdiction of the Church. The Church in turn was dominated by the religious orders. The different members of the missionary congregations were generally referred to as “friars,” albeit inaccurately (Jesuits are not friars). They established institutions of learning all over the country as soon as they inaugurated their missionary evangelization in the archipelago. The Franciscans were known to have initiated the “*escuelas de niños*” to educate and train the children of natives. The first of such schools was founded in Bantay, Ilocos Sur. The Jesuits put up a catechetical institute in Tigbauan, Iloilo, shortly after their arrival in the colony, and eventually founded an institute of higher learning—the *Universidad de San Ignacio*—that would dominate the educational system of colonial Manila until the mid-18th century. Through the efforts of Bishop Miguel de Benavidez, the Dominicans established what would become the first and only pontifical university in the country and in Asia, the *Universidad de Santo Tomas*.<sup>1</sup>

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1 See Evergisto Bazaco, OP, *History of Education in the Philippines*, vol. 1, *Spanish Period – 1565–1898* (Manila: Santo Tomas, 1939), 181–82.

It appears that all throughout the colonial period, the State laid its trust utterly in these missionary corporations in educating both the Spaniards and mestizos in the colony, including the natives. In the 19th century, however, the missionaries became direct beneficiaries of state intervention in the educational policies in the colony. In 1863 Queen Isabel II issued a decree creating the Board of Public Instruction that initiated the public school system of primary schools in the colony<sup>2</sup> and established a normal school under the Jesuits.<sup>3</sup> The Royal and Pontifical University of Santo Tomas, which at that time carried the title of *Universidad de Filipinas* and was the only official institution of higher learning in the Islands, underwent reform through the initiatives and decrees issued by the Crown.

Marked improvement and growth in education was very much well ahead of its time until it was disrupted by the end of the 19th century because of the revolution.

## Post-Revolution and the American Period

The educational system in the Philippines went through sweeping changes with the arrival of the Americans. If the teaching of religion was obligatory during the Spanish colonial rule, it was banned in the American public school system. The Organic Act of 1900, enacted by the Second Philippine Commission headed by William Taft, created the Department of Public Instruction that controlled all schools in the country.<sup>4</sup> One of its controversial policies was the prohibition of the teaching of religion in public schools.

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2 Ibid., 237–38, 256–57.

3 Ibid., 289; see also 296 on the first normal schools for girls.

4 Emmanuel V. Sunga, Ruperto C. Santos, and Armando F. de Jesus, *The Archdiocese of Manila: A Pilgrimage in Time (1565–1999)*, ed. Crisostomo A. Yalung, vol. 2 (Manila: RCAM, 2000), 264.

Exacerbating the problem in the Church was the arrival of a big number of Protestant preachers from the United States, most of whom were instilled with anti-Catholic sentiments distinctive of 19th-century American society and, in addition, were harboring disdain for non-American Catholicism.<sup>5</sup>

With the arrival of 600 trained American teachers aboard the vessel *Thomas*, American-style education dominated the country.<sup>6</sup> These teachers, called Thomasites, after the ship that brought them here, were assigned to different areas in the country to spread American education to the Filipinos. And for the first time, the English language became both the medium of instruction and a subject in Philippine education.

### **Resentment in the Catholic Church and William Taft's Compromise**

The ban on religious teaching met resistance from the Catholic Church. This was shared not only by the local church, but also by other Catholic communities abroad. Although Roman Catholic groups in the United States resented it, they could not do much to change the policy except to denounce it openly in their news publications.<sup>7</sup>

In the aftermath of the Revolution, the institutions of learning administered by the religious were not able to cope with the pace in which the Americans were moving. The sad reality of Catholic catechetical instruction in the rural areas outside Manila was all the more compounded by the local clergy's inability to be at par with the American-sponsored public schools.

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5 See Kenton J. Clymer, *Protestant Missionaries in the Philippines, 1898–1916* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

6 Corazon Villareal, ed., *Back to the Future: Perspectives on the Thomasite Legacy to Philippine Education* (Manila: American Studies Association of the Philippines, 2003).

7 Sunga, Santos, and de Jesus, *Archdiocese of Manila*, 266–67.

But the US Philippine Commission was cognizant of the Catholic opposition. Anxious to mollify the Catholics and warm them up to the public school system as much as possible, William Taft, who was head of the commission, proposed the “Faribault Plan.” This had been adopted in some places in the American diocese of his friend, Archbishop John Ireland of St. Paul, and Taft considered it an acceptable compromise for the Philippines.<sup>8</sup> This plan allowed a priest or minister of any Church to teach religion for half an hour three times a week to those public school pupils whose parents or guardians desired it and who expressed their desire in writing.<sup>9</sup> The local parish priests, however, were not able to take advantage of the relaxation of policy because of the unavailability of funds to support their catechists, following the financial crisis experienced by the Church after the Revolution. Besides, members of the local clergy were not yet attuned to the American public school system and were not well-versed in or unable to speak English, which was already the medium of instruction in the schools. This last proved to be the major disadvantage that the entire Catholic school system faced, with regard to the government or Protestant schools in the country.

### **Hostility of the Masons and Aggressive Proselytizing of Protestant Ministers**

The hostile Protestant and Masonic influences in the public school system further diminished the Church’s initiative in reviving Catholic education in the country. With the dominant presence of Protestants and Masons in the American colonial government and particularly in the Department of Public Instruction, it had become more difficult for Catholic education to recover its previously widespread clout.

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8 John Schumacher, SJ, *Readings in Philippine Church History* (Quezon City: Loyola School of Theology, 1979), 346.

9 *Ibid.*, 347.

In higher education, the Protestants were active, particularly in the Visayas, and their schools were at that time openly proselytizing. Nonetheless, because they were generally better than average schools, and above all, were English-language schools (many of the Catholic institutions long continued with Spanish), they attracted many Catholics, with even more serious results for the faith of many students. The open attacks of these schools on Catholicism likewise met with vehement hostility from concerned Catholics, especially the clergy.<sup>10</sup>

However, despite the American public school system's negative effects on the Catholic faith, it nevertheless contributed significantly to improving literacy in the country. With the Gabaldon Act of 1907, enacted by the American-influenced First Philippine National Assembly, one million pesos was appropriated for the construction of schools in the barrios. Since the arrival of the Americans at the turn of the century, elementary and secondary public schools had mushroomed all over the country. During the first decade of American rule, the country witnessed as well the establishment of a number of vocational and professional schools and a state university (University of the Philippines).

### **The Arrival of Other Religious Congregations and the Revival of Catholic Education**

Some of the leading learning institutions founded by the missionaries during the Spanish colonial period continued to function during the beginning of American rule. However, these were not able to cope with the American public school system because of reasons already mentioned above. The insistence of these schools to use the Spanish language as medium of instruction made it more difficult for graduates to find jobs in a country where English had already been established as *lingua franca*.

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10 Ibid., 348–349.

In the meantime, the new hierarchy in the Philippine Church—facing a lack of priests and prospective Filipino secular clergy—called for religious congregations from foreign countries other than Spain. Those who immediately responded to the invitation were the Irish Redemptorists (CSsR), the Dutch Mill Hill Missionaries (MHM), the Belgian Scheut Missionaries (CICM), the Dutch Sacred Heart Missionaries (MSC), and the German Divine Word Missionaries (SVD). Aside from engaging in outright missionary evangelization work with the indigenous peoples in the north and in the remote villages in the south (Visayas and Mindanao), these European religious (especially the CICMs and SVDs) made sure that schools were put up in their mission areas.

Much more can be said about the role played by the religious congregations for women in the growth of Catholic schools in the country. Upon the invitation of the bishops, more of these congregations came to establish their presence in the Philippines. Some came to undertake work of education and charity in their dioceses while others labored with their counterpart male congregations, such as the ICM sisters (1910) with the CICMs and the Holy Spirit Sisters (1912) with the SVDs. The ICMs eventually established vocational schools in Bontoc Province and in Tondo, Manila.<sup>11</sup>

Other congregations for women came during the first quarter after the appointment of American bishops. They built or engaged themselves in hospitals, schools, and works of charity. These congregations were the Sisters of St. Paul of Chartres (1904), the Benedictine Sisters (1906), the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (1912), and the Good Shepherd Sisters (1912). All of them, notwithstanding their specific charisms, subsequently opened schools in some parts of the country, especially in Manila. These schools were to play an important role in preserving and strengthening the (Catholic) faith in circumstances of greatly

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11 Sunga, Santos, and de Jesus, *Archdiocese of Manila*, 271–272.

increased access to education under the American regime, as well as in providing generally high-quality education.<sup>12</sup>

Those that came during the Spanish era had likewise involved themselves in education: the Daughters of Charity (1862), who took over the various hospitals and some older schools for women; the Augustinian Sisters (1883); and the French Assumption Sisters (1892), who founded Assumption College. Locally founded congregations such as the Beaterio of Sta. Catalina of Mother Francisca, the Beaterio de la Compañía de Jesus of Mother Ignacia del Espiritu Santo (1684), and the Beaterio de San Sebastián de Calumpang (1719) began to be actively involved in education as well.

The Christian Brothers established La Salle College while the Benedictine monks, who were already in the colony as early as 1895, founded San Beda College. St. Scholastica College was also founded during this period.

The schools established by all of these congregations helped to a great extent in promoting the Catholic faith and bringing back those who had already departed from the Church.

### ***Quae Mari Sinico* (1902) and the Royal and Pontifical University of Santo Tomas**

On 17 September 1902, Pope Leo XIII signed the Apostolic Constitution, *Quae Mari Sinico*, which aimed to address the revival and reorganization of the Church in the Philippines in the aftermath of the Philippine Revolution and the end of the Spanish rule. It provided for the establishment of new dioceses, and set guidelines for the administration of parishes, the formation of the clergy, the role of the religious, and the education of the young.

Chapter VII of the constitution dealt with the education of the youth and the full conferment of the title of “Pontifical” on the University of Santo Tomas. This act boosted the status of

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12 Ibid., 345.

the University as erstwhile the only official institution of higher learning in the archipelago. At the forefront of Catholic higher education, the University underwent a notable improvement in its educational system. With the increase of student population and the need to accommodate additional courses, it had to procure a new campus outside Intramuros in Sulucan Hills (Sampaloc, Manila) for its structural expansion.

### **Growth of Catholic Education in the 1920s**

The Papal Constitution also provided the needed impetus to steer the Catholic Church forward amid the challenges and realities that awaited it after the first quarter of American colonial rule.

Two decades after the end of Spanish rule and the establishment of a new regime in the country, the Church was faced with new realities that unexpectedly worked to its advantage. The American-influenced young generation began to be oblivious to the excesses of the country's former colonial masters. The old-style grievances and anti-clericalism (expressed through anti-friar sentiments) that characterized the turn of the century had faded, and Masonry had been confined exclusively to the intellectual elite. There was a marked decline in nationalism, and the new breed of political and civilian leaders had been co-opted in the pervading American system and culture.<sup>13</sup>

The schools established by the religious congregations reached a certain level of credibility and standard of excellence.<sup>14</sup> The gradual process of modernization and upgrading of Catholic schools provided an added attraction to a great number of students who began to flock to these schools and to avail themselves of the best religious, cultural, and professional formation and training that these institutions offered, despite the prevailing "Statist"

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13 Cf. Schumacher, *Philippine Church History*, 356–357.

14 Sunga, Santos, and de Jesus, *Archdiocese of Manila*, 281–282.



philosophy of the American-sponsored educational system in the country.

The use of English as the official language of the country since 1913 made it exigent for the Catholic schools to adopt it as their medium.<sup>15</sup> One of the earliest Catholic institutions to do so in the primary, intermediate, and secondary levels was Assumption College. It was only when American Jesuits took over the administration of the Society of Jesus in the Philippines from the Spanish Jesuits in 1921 that English was introduced at the Ateneo de Manila. Only UST and Ateneo offered higher education, both equipped with the best modern facilities.

Private schools and colleges under the religious generally had beautiful and better edifices. Ateneo and Letran in Manila and the colleges in Jaro, Vigan, and Silliman had the best school buildings in the country based on the 1911 Report on Private Schools. La Salle was recognized as having the finest edifice for a school in the country in 1925. In the same year, the Monroe Commission—appointed by the government to study the educational system and make recommendations for its improvement—made general laudatory comments on Catholic-sponsored education.<sup>16</sup>

By the end of the first quarter, Catholic education improved tremendously, with some of them reaching the highest standards of instruction. Vital signs of the growing vigor of the Philippine Church and the educated laity were undeniably visible during the first National Congress of Catholic Action held in Manila in 1925. Its resolutions showed a “new realization of the responsibilities of the laity in the Church, and the necessity of real Catholicism

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15 For the difficulty of this adjustment in the context of schools and seminaries, see John Schumacher, “A Hispanized Clergy in an Americanized Country, 1910–1970,” in *Growth and Decline: Essays in Philippine Church History* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2009), 247–262.

16 Paul Monroe, *A Survey of Educational Systems of the Philippine Islands by the Board of Educational Surveys* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1925). See also Schumacher, *Philippine Church History*, 362–364.

showing itself in social action for the poor and the oppressed of society.”<sup>17</sup>

## The Church and Politics in the 1930s

The increasing number of graduates and intellectuals coming from Catholic schools would eventually change Philippine politics and society. The growing influence of the Church on national affairs was strongly being felt during this period. And thanks to the growth and influence of Catholic schools, anti-clericalism, while still significant among the elite, had already declined among the general population.

It should be remembered that one of the major problems that the Church encountered at the beginning of American rule was the controversy regarding the teaching of religion in public schools. The compromise offered by the Philippine Commission under Taft failed because of the hostile attitude of the Masons and aggressive Protestant denominations that influenced the Department of Education.

The Church, supported by well-meaning and Catholic-educated members of the laity, began a sustained campaign in 1936 to make possible the real implementation of the provision on religious instruction in the 1935 Constitution (where Article XIII, Section 5, states that “optional religious instruction shall be maintained in the public schools as now authorized by law”). During the 33rd International Eucharistic Congress held in Manila in 1937, the Catholic faithful rallied together to press for the implementation of the constitutional provision for sectarian instruction.

In 1938, Congress passed a bill requiring the curriculum of all public schools to include a course in character building, good manners and right conduct, and permitting the members of any religious organizations to have their children excused from such a

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17 Schumacher, *Philippine Church History*, 366.

course on condition that they attend religious instruction by their own denomination. In spite of the passing of the bill in Congress and approval by the majority, President Manuel L. Quezon vetoed it on the ground that it was not constitutional.

The presidential disapproval did not, however, dampen the spirit of the Catholic Church hierarchy and many members of the laity. Archbishop Gabriel M. Reyes of Cebu and the other bishops of the ecclesiastical province issued a pastoral letter that strongly disagreed with Quezon's veto and assertion that the bill was unconstitutional. The letter of the bishops appealed to the rights of the Catholic Filipino citizens.

Although the letter did not change the mind of the president, the efforts and tenacity of the Church hierarchy and a good number of educated Catholics, especially among the young graduates of Catholic schools, proved that the Catholic Church was no longer willing to be a sitting target for the attacks by Masons, Protestants, and other "enemies" of the faith.

### **The Founding of CEAP (Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines)**

A big stride in the growth and development of Catholic education was the founding of the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines in 1941. The launch of the Association came out of the need for the Catholic Church to be better organized in the educational field, with the voice of the Catholic schools establishing prominence in the educational system. The idea of founding an association came from Archbishop Michael O'Doherty of Manila. The association's first inaugural convention was held from 28 May to 1 June 1941. In his address in the convention, the archbishop stressed that "this organization will not merely influence the currents of education, but also the broad stream of Catholicity, which has always energized the progress of national life." The archbishop also challenged the convention delegates not to forget that the fundamental objective of Catholic

educators was to instill in the minds of the youth the knowledge of religion.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, Catholic educators should emphasize the importance of “Catholic action,” defined as “the participation of the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy,” for each and every lay person.

With the founding of the CEAP, vigor and hope characterized the Church and Catholic education at the turn of the decade. But on 8 December 1941, the Japanese invasion of the Islands ended all these. Many of the schools, together with other institutions such as hospitals, orphanages, and churches in Manila and in the countryside, were destroyed by the war.

## Priorities in the Post-World War II Philippine Church

The Church after the war was faced with the gargantuan task of rehabilitating and reconstructing damaged structures (churches, schools, hospitals, etc.). Considerable effort and funds were needed to rebuild the society’s war-ravaged institutions. On top of these, the Church also had to deal with other issues that surfaced during the period of restoration in 1945 and thereafter. There were political issues like the challenge of communism (Hukbalahap) and the shaky church-state relationship, especially in the area of education.

In 1946 CEAP opposed the practice of the Office of Private Education to deputize officials of public schools to inspect Catholic schools. Instead, CEAP offered its own personnel and facilities to make inspections of Catholic schools on the Office’s behalf.

In its 1948 convention, the CEAP went on record against the policy of the government to deny permission for the opening of new schools in towns where there were already existing public schools or other recognized schools.

In the mid-’50s, a primary concern of the bishops was education, specifically religious instruction in public schools,

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18 “Archbishop Praises Catholic Colleges for their Standards,” *The Tribune* (May 29, 1941).

which was strongly opposed by the Freemasons and other anti-Catholic groups. The bishops' position and sentiments on this issue are well articulated in the documents of this decade, specifically in the Joint Statement Concerning Optional Religious Instruction in Public Schools, followed immediately after by the Pastoral Letter on Religious Instruction in Public Schools, the Joint Pastoral Letter on Catholic Education, and the Statement on Adherence to Religion.<sup>19</sup>

### **Catholic Education and the *Filipinization* Controversy**

A bill was sponsored in 1958 by Senator Roseller Lim in the Senate and by Congressman Manuel Enverga in the lower house that sought to prohibit foreigners from heading Philippine schools and teaching social sciences in Philippine schools. This spawned a controversy that affected the relationship between church and state. Many schools involved belonged to the Church and were administered by religious congregations. The bill was opposed by CEAP on the ground that it was against the liberty and rights of the Church. CEAP argued against "Filipinization through legislation" and instead proposed the "gradual and spontaneous Filipinization of schools through demonstrated merit."<sup>20</sup>

### **Catholic Education in the Sixties**

More religious congregations arrived in the 1960s from other countries outside Europe. There were also congregations that were

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19 (1) "Joint Statement of the Hierarchy on the Defense of the Constitutional Rights of Citizens Concerning Optional Religious Instruction in Public Schools" (January 29, 1953); (2) "A Time to Speak: Joint Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Hierarchy on Religious Instruction in Public Schools," (February 18, 1953); (3) "Joint Pastoral Letter on Catholic Education," (April 10, 1955); (4) "Statement of the Administrative Council of the Catholic Welfare Organization on Adherence to Religion" (June 18, 1955).

20 Cf. Sunga, Santos, and de Jesus, *Archdiocese of Manila*, vol. 2: 378.

founded locally. Most of these new religious communities were engaged in the apostolate of education; hence, as expected, they founded schools especially for primary and secondary education. There were also efforts done in the local churches to develop parochial schools.

In the national scene, the impact of Filipinization was still being felt in institutions of learning, especially among the religious congregations that administered schools in the country. With the rise of nationalism among the educated and civic-minded individuals, which inspired student activism toward the end of the decade, the move to nationalize the schools was given a stronger push—a push that included even religious congregations, seminaries, and formation houses.

In the meantime, CEAP continued to provide leadership and opportunities in guiding Catholic schools in their indispensable role as vanguards of Christian education and agents of social transformation, while taking up the following as its motto for the next decade: “pro Deo et pro patria.”