

SALESIANS IN THE PHILIPPINES (1949-1963): HISTORICAL NOTES

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1. SITUATION

1.1. Rector Majors

- 1.1.1. Don Ricaldone. During the rectorship of Don Rinaldi, he went to the Philippines after his extraordinary visitation of Macao. He was a guest of the Apostolic Delegate to the Philippines, Archbishop William Piani (a Salesian).
- 1.1.2. Don Renato Ziggiotti. It was during his term that the decision for the Salesians to go to the Philippines was made. He visited the Philippines in 1955.

1.2. Religion

- 1.2.1. There was the growing presence of protestants due to the American colonization of the Philippines.
- 1.2.2. The local protestant sects (Aglipayan church or Philippine Independent Church and Iglesia ni Kristo) were active in proselytism.
- 1.2.3. New male religious congregations arrived (FSC, CICM, MSC, OSB) to work beside the traditional orders (OSA, OP, SJ, OFM, OSAR). They undertook educational work but in the private sector which meant the effective exclusion of the majority of the poor. They also worked in mission areas.
- 1.2.4. Msgr. Egidio Vagnozzi, the successor of Msgr. Piani, personally intervened to have the Salesians come to the Philippines.

1.3. Postwar situation

- 1.3.1. The Japanese occupation and subsequent liberation brought destruction to the Philippines.
- 1.3.2. The American government granted independence to the Philippines but the latter was still very much under the influence of the former.

1.4. Economic situation

- 1.4.1. There was a wide gap between the rich and the poor, especially in terms of landownership. This is significant because the Philippines was largely agricultural. This economic imbalance fuelled the growth of the communist insurgency.
- 1.4.2. At the same time there was the beginning of industrialization. This was a niche for the Salesian educational apostolate in the Philippines.

1.5. China

- 1.5.1. The rise of Communism in China resulted in the forfeiture of the Salesian work, the expulsion of foreign missionaries and the imprisonment of Chinese religious and priests.
- 1.5.2. The presence in Hong Kong was reinforced.
- 1.5.3. Foreign confreres were sent home for vacation. And when they returned, some of them were sent to the Philippines which they came to consider as their providential refuge.

2. NEGOTIATIONS

2.1. Turin's Initiative

- 2.1.1. On November 18, 1949 Fr. Ricaldone instructed Fr. Braga, Provincial of the China Province, to go and see the two offers extended to the Salesians. He gave to instructions: a) don't make any commitments and b) present the plans of Aberdeen School (HK) to those who had offered to build a technical school in Victorias, Negros Occidental.
- 2.1.2. Fr. Modesto Bellido, in-charge of the Salesian Missions, had earlier visited Manila and had met the Apostolic Nuncio. He had suggested Fr. Ricaldone to send someone to survey the possibilities for the Salesians in the Philippines.
- 2.1.3. Archbishop Piani, now Apostolic Delegate to Mexico, gave the following advice:
 - 2.1.3.1. First open a presence in the capital.
 - 2.1.3.2. Show special concern for the Oratory.

- 2.1.3.3. Don't get tied up with boards of trustees, nor committees nor bishops in order to be free to carry out their mission.
- 2.2. Braga's Visits
 - 2.2.1. First visit. He left Hong Kong for the Philippines on February 26, 1950.
 - 2.2.2. On June 7, 1950 he was in Turin to give a report to the General Council about his visit.
 - 2.2.2.1. Negros Occidental – trade school
 - 2.2.2.2. Cebu – Center for streetchildren and orphans.
 - 2.2.2.3. Tarlac – school
 - 2.2.2.4. Iloilo – two schools
 - 2.2.2.5. Batangas – minor seminary and school
 - 2.2.2.6. Manila – unspecified offer.
 - 2.2.3. He seemed to have made a promise to Archbishop Vagnozzi that the Salesians would come and take over the school in Tarlac for the coming school year. But the Salesians did not come to the disappointment and embarrassment of the Apostolic Nuncio and of the priest who had offered a school.
 - 2.2.4. Second visit. February 20, 1951
 - 2.2.5. Instructions from Fr. Ziggiotti
 - 2.2.5.1. Let concrete offers be made.
 - 2.2.5.2. Give the Salesians a free hand.
 - 2.2.5.3. Since there is a limited number of Salesians available, he should not accept many offers.
 - 2.2.6. Results
 - 2.2.6.1. The proposed technical school in Victorias, Negros Occidental seemed to be the most feasible.
 - 2.2.6.2. A new offer from the Mountain Province was forwarded.
 - 2.2.6.3. But Archbishop Vagnozzi insisted that the Salesians immediately take over the school in Tarlac.
- 2.3. Braga's Recommendations
 - 2.3.1. Presences
 - 2.3.1.1. Accept the offer of a technical school in Victorias, Negros Occidental because of the need and because the conditions offered by the donors were good.
 - 2.3.1.2. But start first in Tarlac because the Salesians were already expected for the opening of the school year.
 - 2.3.1.3. Accept the offer of Cebu because the donors had already started construction for the Salesians.
 - 2.3.1.4. The offer from Lipa, Batangas could be considered later.
 - 2.3.2. Recommendations
 - 2.3.2.1. The Salesians should be scattered in the different provinces of the archipelago.
 - 2.3.2.2. They should have a parish as a source of income.
 - 2.3.2.3. They should have a rest house.
 - 2.3.2.4. Regarding the initial insistence on financial support in the beginning. Fr. Braga changed his mind. First, because the religious in the Philippines were known to have money because of their exclusive schools. And second, because the Filipino Catholics were generous when they see that the Salesians were working seriously for souls.
 - 2.3.3. Personnel
 - 2.3.3.1. Immediately send one Salesian to supervise the construction of the technical school.
 - 2.3.3.2. Immediately send one Salesian to Tarlac for the opening of the school year.
 - 2.3.3.3. European Salesians who had moved out of China should be sent to the Philippines as well as from other Provinces.
 - 2.3.3.4. Turin should send English-speaking confreres because the Salesians were to run schools and the schools of the religious were known for their facility in the English language. Don Braga remarked: "We should not present ourselves as handicapped because we can't speak English."
 - 2.3.4. Decision of Turin (May 30, 1951)
 - 2.3.4.1. Tarlac, Cebu and Victorias were approved.
 - 2.3.4.2. Fr. Braga thought of sending Guido D'Amore to Victorias
 - 2.3.4.3. Fr. Luigi Ferrari was chosen to be the delegate of the provincial for the Philippines.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1. Don Bosco Tarlac

3.1.1. St. John Bosco Academy in Tarlac was founded by Fr. James Wilson, an American army chaplain who came to the Philippines in 1945.

3.1.2. The Salesian who took over the school was Fr. Anthony di Falco, a Salesian of the USA western province.

3.2. Don Bosco Victorias

3.2.1. The school in Victorias was an offer of a father (Don Miguel Ossorio) and his son (Frederic) who were both God-fearing, and who wanted to apply the social teachings of the Church contained in the papal encyclicals in their own life as industrialists.

3.2.2. The school was personally visited by the President of the Philippines who remarked that this was the kind of schools that the Philippines needed.

3.2.3. In the mind of Fr. Braga, Don Bosco Victorias was the work which opened the doors to the Salesians and which had facilitated all the rest.

3.3. Cebu Boys' Town

3.3.1. The Salesian Boys' Town was an initiative of Don Ramon and Dona Mara Aboitiz of Cebu. Together with them were civic-minded and also religious-motivated ladies who were mostly members of the Catholic Women's League. The work was for street children and orphans who were creating an ugly social situation in the Philippines' second most important city.

3.3.2. When Fr. Attilio Boscariol and the cleric Agustin Lopez came to Boys' Town to begin their work on March 15, 1954, they received their first four boys from the Asilo de la Medalla Milagrosa. Others would come who were picked up from the pier or who were recommended by concerned citizens.

3.4. Foundations "fait'accompli"

3.4.1. The beginnings of the Salesian work in the Philippines did not always go according to plan nor did it always have the immediate approval of the superiors in Turin. Fr. Braga and Fr. Acquistapace were in fact reprimanded by Turin because of this. But the Salesians perhaps thought that the works they accepted were sent by Divine Providence and therefore, opportunities not to be let go. This was how Don Bosco Makati and Don Bosco Seminary-College started.

3.4.2. The beginning of the Salesians in the Philippines was definitely Chinese in character. This was obviously reflected in the first personnel who came over. And with regards to Fr. Braga, his heart had always remained in China, even if he tried to be Filipino, too.