Chapter Four

Taking Over The Manila Seminary
(1852-1862)

New Setup in San Carlos Seminary

Monsignor Gregorio Meliton Martinez de Sta. Cruz took possession of the Archdiocese of Manila on May 27, 1862. On August 2 of the same year, the Vincentian priests, Fr. Gregorio Velasco and Fr. Ildefonso Moral, with Brothers Romualdo Lopez and Brother Gregorio Perez, were entrusted with the spiritual and temporal administration of the Conciliar Seminary of San Carlos by order and disposition of the same Archbishop of Manila. The Archbishop chose Fr. Velasco for his Confessor and Adviser.

At that time there were about 50 seminarians in Manila. But in those days, both in the Philippines and in other parts of the world, the seminary was often not only a house of formation for the priesthood, but at the same time a sort of boarding house for priests, some of whom were in need of disciplinary reform. Such was the Manila seminary when the Vincentians arrived: a seminary, that served at the same time as a boarding house for priests, and even as a reformatory for clerics in need of correction or discipline. Obviously this situation was far from ideal for a proper and effective seminary formation.

Unlike other seminaries that were later entrusted to the Vincentians in other parts of the Philippines, the Manila Seminary never became a college of secondary instruction or high school Minor Seminary. The students were “major seminarians” who received their secondary training from colleges like San Juan de Letran, Sto. Tomas, etc. The Manila seminary remained until the beginning of the 20th century, a major seminary for the theology course.1

The first attempt of reform introduced by the Vincentians dealt with the Seminarians’ reception of the sacrament of confession. This was then a source of disciplinary problems in the seminary. The prevailing custom was for each seminarian to go freely at his own whim to any of the churches in the city to make his confession. Naturally,
there was no way by which superiors could supervise the seminarians wandering in the city streets nor the regularity of their confessions, nor the qualifications of their confessors. The latter were supposed to direct the seminarians in their vocation in the internal sacramental forum. In accordance with the observations of the Vincentians, the Archbishop immediately decreed that such a practice be discontinued. He ordered that every Saturday, five priests from the various Religious Orders should go to the Seminary to administer (with the two Vincentians), the Sacrament of Penance to the resident seminarians. The resident seminarians were separated from the day scholars who lived outside the Seminary as was customary in those days both in the Philippines as well as in Europe.

After revising the procedure of confessions of seminarians, the Fathers next focused their attention on the physical plant of the seminary. They asked for a doctor to take care of the seminarians; the abolition of the practice of breakfast in individual rooms; reduction of the number of 44 servants for the seminarian's and 36 for the priests; the arrangement of a chapel; and the attendance of review-classes in moral theology and liturgy in the seminary, besides those in the University. The reasons for these innovations were partly administrative in nature, and partly because, as the Vincentians reminded the Archbishop, they were necessary for the ecclesiastical spirit and better recollection of everybody concerned.

The Archbishop consulted with the Metropolitan Chapter Councillors, and on September 4, approved the following resolutions. He ordered the Seminary Rector to read these resolutions publicly to the whole community so that everybody may abide by them:

"1. Since the main object of a seminary is to form the youth called to the priesthood both in piety and science, and since the building destined for this purpose has a limited capacity, only the two Father-Directors will live in it, together with the "Review Instructor" (pasante), the administrator (mayordomo), the seminarians, the two brothers of the Congregation of the Mission and the indispensable servants.

2. The priests who are living there and do not have any work and the extra-servants who are not needed will leave the seminary; giving them September 15 as deadline so that they will have time to find other lodgings.

3. The Father-Directors will reduce, if possible, the number of servants to 30; that is 10 or 12 for the seminarians; 5 or 8 for the kitchen and for lighting the lamps; five of the more robust helpers to clean all the rooms of the building, including the floors
of the rooms of the seminarians, and to perform heavy work; one for the sacristy; one for helping the Brother Janitor; two or three for the Mayordomo, for whom the other Brother will be a helper to buy the food, which should be good, healthful, and well seasoned. The same Brother will be in charge of the storeroom. The Father-Directors will keep the servants they think necessary.

4. The helpers who do no manual work will be self-supporting students. In order to find out who among them will remain in such rank, the Father-Directors will examine them in Latin and in other Faculty (Philosophy or Theology) if they are studying any; and they will select those who have the greatest promise for the Church and the Seminary.

5. Henceforth, the Father-Directors will send out those who behave badly; and he will substitute them with others who, in his judgment, are fit for filling the job. The Spiritual Director will see to it that all receive frequently the Sacraments (of Confession and Communion).

6. The Father-Directors, after getting information from reliable persons and consulting the mind of the seminarians, will take in a doctor, to assist the sick, and give him an annual honorarium which should come from the funds of the Establishment. A contract should also be made with a pharmacist. In the future, no sick seminarian will be allowed to leave without the advice of the doctor.

7. The Seminarians will take chocolate and bread for breakfast which will be served in the Refectory. The Mayordomo will procure the quantity of cacao, sugar and cinnamon ("canela") which are needed, all of good quality; and will prepare the chocolate at the Seminary. The merienda of fruits and bread will also be served in the Refectory. The Brother helper of the Mayordomo, to whom the keys of the pantry will be given, will have charge of the said articles and other provisions and victuals: he will give an account of them every month and whenever the Mayordomo asks for it.

8. The Conference on ceremonies (Liturgy class) will be held only on Sundays and Thursdays; if the latter is a class-day, on the corresponding feastday. Those who study at an ecclesiastical Faculty in the University, are exempted from attending the review classes in Moral Theology.

9. So that the Seminarians get used to habits of regularity and clerical decorum, they should wear inside the house, a white cotton "sotana", white pants; socks and shoes. The Father-Directors should not allow luxury and distinctions; on the contrary the
clothes should be of the same cut and quality, choosing material that is neither expensive, nor shabby.

"10. The Father-Directors will see to it that the chapel does no not lack the necessary ornaments and that additions to the building be made, so long as the cost is not excessive.

"11. The Mayordomo will present to the Provvisor (Chancellor) of the Archdiocese a trimestral account of income and expenses. He shall be accountable for the board and lodging fees which the seminarians fail to pay through his neglect."2

After these most urgent disciplinary measures were put to effect, the Fathers arranged to reserve the Blessed Sacrament in the Seminary. The chapel was formerly located on one side of the cloister adjacent to the place for military exercises of soldiers who were lodged in the seminary building. The seminarians had to come in and out of the chapel through the same door with other persons, men and women alike. To prevent disciplinary problems arising from such communication, the Fathers suggested the transfer of the Chapel to the seminary proper. A room with a vaulted roof was found appropriate for a chapel, far away from the noisy house entrance. This location was found more suitable for recollection and prayer. The Fathers prepared and furnished the new chapel, which was duly inspected and approved according to canonical requirements. On September 15, it was inaugurated; and from that day, the Blessed Sacrament was worthily reserved.

After formulating the discipline and attending to the physical set-up of the Seminary, including a more decent chapel, the Vincentians started to pay attention to the baptismal certificates of the Seminarians and marriage certificates of their parents.

Fr. Moral reported on September 20, 1862, that the activities of the Vincentian Fathers included besides the direction and administration of the Seminary also 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. He was hopeful that with some increase of personnel, they could introduce the Conferences for Priests and give Missions in some of the towns where people could understand Spanish. The small community desired to increase their competence and efficiency.

Evaluation from Madrid.

At the beginning of 1863, Fr. Ramon Sanz, the Visitor of the Madrid Province, wrote to Fr. Maller, the representative of the province in Paris, to acquaint him with the process of the newly-opened
Philippine Mission. He told Fr. Maller that Frs. Velasco and Moral were working wonders; because both were full of the true spirit of the Congregation, and always followed the advice of their Superiors. Nonetheless, the nature and volume of their work made the sending of more priests to the Philippine Mission necessary.

Fr. Sanz was careful to keep the enthusiasm of the missionaries under control, suggesting that they concentrate on the Seminary and on the Direction of the Daughters of Charity so as not to endanger their health. He told them that the Philippine Mission was very important to him and that there was no house in the Province of Spain that interested him so much.

The priestly zeal and exemplary behavior of those first Vincentians did not escape the attention of the people, especially those who were close to them, as well as the ecclesiastical and civil authorities. Even before the end of 1862, a young man, most probably from among the full-blooded Filipino seminarians trained by the Vincentians, asked to join the Congregation. The Provincial Visitor in Madrid, Fr. Sanz, told them without hesitation that the young man could be admitted to the novitiate under Fr. Moral. However, it was stipulated that this permission, granted for this case, should not be taken as a rule since the novitiate should be made in a real formation house canonically established. The absence of any racial discrimination between Spanish candidates, creoles or mestizos and full-blooded Filipino natives should be noted here. The Vincentians were far-removed and seemingly unaware of such racial prejudices.

Again, the ecclesiastical authorities noticed how, from the first months, the good Fathers of the seminary not only conducted classes but also attended to the disciplinary and administrative problems of about 50 seminarians. Moreover, they heard confessions in the hospitals and gave the sacraments to the dying in the city. The authorities urged them again to take over the chaplaincy of a Hospital (possibly San Juan de Dios which by this time was in very poor condition, or the Military Hospital where the Sisters worked). But Father Sanz from Spain, instructed them to make it clear to the authorities concerned, that this was not possible for them due to their present duties and occupations. Even if it were possible, they could not accept such obligation without previous authorization from the Visitor of Spain.

The Vincentian Fathers had stayed in Manila but a few months when other Bishops of different dioceses of the Philippines asked for the privilege of entrusting their seminaries to them. The joint letter of the Bishops of Cebu and Nueva Caceres addressed to the Vincentian Provincial Fr. Ramon Sanz, bears witness to the great work being done by the Vincentians:"

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The undersigned Bishops of Cebu and Nueva Caceres are desirous of organizing the Seminaries of their respective dioceses. They see the futility of the efforts done up to now, because of lack of personnel, to whom the direction and education of the youth who aspire to the dignity of the priesthood may be confided. They are firmly persuaded that a zealous and illustrious corporation could attain great success (in the priestly training) among the natives of these islands. These circumstances concur in favor of the corporation of St. Vincent de Paul, of which you are the worthy superior. We have agreed in consultation with Fathers Velasco and Moral, to put before you the great service which you would give to our Religion, the State and the country, by sending as soon as possible a Director, three or four professors and a couple of lay Brothers, so that we may hand over to them the religious, scientific and temporal direction of these seedbeds of ministers of the Church.4

This letter was written in Manila, March 2, 1863, and signed by Fray Francisco Gainza, O.P., Bishop of Nueva Caceres and Fray Romualdo Jimeno, O.P., Bishop of Cebu.

Seconding the Bishops' petition, the two lonely Vincentian priests in Manila requested for more reinforcements from Spain. The Vincentian Visitor in Madrid, Fr. Sanz, willing to oblige, wrote back: "As far as in me lies, you don't have to doubt that I will help you by sending all the personnel whom I can dispose of, and I will see to it that they are the best in the Province."5

More Missionaries.

Accordingly, two more Vincentian Fathers were sent from Spain with sixteen Daughters of Charity, carrying specific instructions for the priests to practice their ministry in the Seminary: Fathers Jose Casarramona and Antonio Serra were sent specifically for the Seminary and were directed not to engage in other occupations. Both were not even to take charge of the Daughters of Charity who would be under the direction of Fathers Velasco and Moral. Father Casarramona would be assigned, according to Fr. Sanz's letter, as professor of Moral Theology and Fr. Serra, as liturgy professor and procurator. By the end of June, 1863, the Fathers were in Cadiz waiting to depart for the Philippines.

In those days, the mission of religious coming from Spain to work in the Philippines under the Royal Patronage had to be arranged between the ecclesiastical and civil superiors, since the expenses entailed in their apostolic work were to be paid by the Crown. Before
the missionaries were sent a petition and concession by Royal Order should precede them. Thus, on July 6, 1863, Fr. Velasco wrote from Manila to Fr. Sanz that the Royal Order relative to the coming of Fr. Jose Casarromana and Fr. Antonio Serra with 16 Sisters, had already been received. The two missionaries — a minimal reinforcement indeed, but truly much awaited — and the Sisters arrived in Manila on November 5, 1863.

The contract between Manila Archdiocese and the Congregation was then undertaken.

Father Velasco made a trial draft of this contract and sent it to Father Sanz on April 8, 1863. On June 22, the Spanish Visitor returned to Fr. Velasco two copies of the proposed contract, one of them with slight modifications, leaving the final decision and choice of the terms to the good will of the Archbishop.

Terms of the Contract Made by the Congregation of the Mission with The Archdiocese of Manila for Undertaking The Direction of the Seminary of San Carlos (Manila)

On July 29, 1864 the Manila Archbishop Gregorio Meliton Martinez, after due consultation with the San Carlos Seminary Councillors, Fr. Ramon Martinez Lavaiaron and Fr. Francisco Gutierrez Robles signed the contract under the following terms:

“1. The personnel of the Congregation of the Mission assigned to the Royal Seminary of San Carlos, Manila, shall be for the time being, four priests and three or four brothers; the Visitor of the Mission will maintain this number intact, replacing any vacancy which may arise from death or incapacity of any member.

“2. The Priests and Brothers shall enjoy complete liberty with respect to internal government and the observance of their rules and pious exercises and no one should allege any “right” as a pretext to lead them away from their religious observance.

“3. The Priests of the Mission will take over the direction and management of the Seminary, as well as the teaching of Moral Theology, morning and afternoon; and Rubrics or sacred ceremonies on the days assigned by His Excellency the Archbishop. They will also direct the spiritual exercises of the Ordinands and of other Priests who would like to make them in the seminary.

“4. A member of the Congregation of the Mission appointed by the Superior General, with the approval of His Excellency, the Archbishop shall act as Director of the Seminary. After receiving
his assignment, he shall not recognize any superior in the direction of the Seminary other than the Archbishop, or his representative.

"5. It shall be the prerogative of the Director of the Seminary to present to the Archbishop the persons best suited for the offices of spiritual directors, professors and a procurator; and to designate the works of the Brothers and helpers in the establishment.

"6. Since Direction of the Daughters of Charity is compatible with the greater part of the ministries that the Priests of the Mission have to exercise in the Seminary and since that direction is due to them by reason of their Constitutions and the special mission of some of them in these islands, they shall not be impeded under any pretext whatsoever from this special obligation.

"7. The Seminary shall pay for the travel of the Priests and Brothers who are assigned to fill up the number specified in the first condition; but this shall not apply when the substitution is resorted to in order to replace the victims of infirmity or other similar incident; in case of infirmity, the sick missionary shall not be required to leave the Seminary but will be taken care of in accordance with provision number nine.

"8. The Seminary shall also pay for the maintenance of Priests and Brothers of the Congregation, contributing in addition, for expenses in clothing, in the amount of twenty pesos monthly for each priest who does not receive a government pension; and ten pesos for each brother under the same circumstances. And if at any time the Government of His Majesty should refuse to pay the travelling expenses and pension assigned by his Majesty to the Priests and Brothers who are mentioned in the Royal Order of January 22, 1862, it shall become the obligation of the Seminary to pay for the travel and pension in an amount considered appropriate under a previous agreement with the Prelate.

"9. It will be the obligation of the Seminary to attend to the sick from among the personnel of the Community of the Mission, with doctor and medicines prescribed by the doctor, including "baths" (in hot springs) which, according to the doctor's judgment, may be necessary for them.

"10. The Visitor of the Congregation of the Mission can shuffle the Priests and Brothers whenever he thinks convenient; substituting in this case, other suitable priests to take over the ministries that the former exercised; the expenses for the trip are to be charged to the Visitor.

"11. Since the Priests of the Mission should, according to their Rules, admit in their houses those who would like to do
Spiritual Exercises, the Director may admit the Priests who would like to undertake such pious acts, as long as they don't remain in the establishment for more than ten or fifteen days, and they pay the seminary the amount which His Excellency determines.

"12. Should time and experience prove that some necessary circumstances have been omitted, or that something should be changed in this contract for the better direction of the seminary and the convenience of those who rule and govern it, the desirable additions shall be agreed upon by both parties."6

The 1863 Earthquake.

On the 3rd of June at 7:31 p.m., during the Vigil of Corpus Christi an earthquake suddenly occurred, leaving the whole city in ruins in half a minute. Reported Governor General Echague to the Madrid Government. "The tremor was followed by oscillatory movements, so violent that the most solid buildings were toppled. Ruin and desolation were soon everywhere with the destruction of the whole city."7 There were 317 dead and 218 injured. The material losses were estimated to reach eight million pesos; 46 public buildings and 570 private houses were in ruins, 528 others were still standing but in a dangerous condition, and the rest, more or less damaged. The total of buildings rendered useless was 1,172.8

At the Manila Cathedral, nine members of the Metropolitan Chapter, among them the famous Father Dr. Pedro Pelaez, while chanting the solemn Matins were buried under the ruins of the Choir. Practically the whole temple, and the rest of the churches of Manila, except those of St. Agustin and of the Third Order of St. Francis, were badly damaged. The Vincentian family was saved from disaster; and, in the midst of the catastrophe, emulated the heroic example of other priests and religious who came out to serve the distressed. The Vincentians saw the church of the Manila Seminary, formerly the building of the Colegio Maximo of St. Ignatius, crumbled. Both Fr. Velasco and Fr. Moral did not spare themselves serving spiritually and corporally the poor victims everywhere. In the Military Hospital, adjoining the convent of Poor Clares, close to Fort Santiago and near the Pasig River, the Sisters worked hard helping those trapped among the ruins, or those who were jumping from the windows to the street. Only four patients died and, thanks to God's loving providence not one of the Sisters was hurt. "Praise the Lord — as St. Vincent would say — who watches so lovingly over those who care for the poor."

Meantime, the Superiors in Madrid realized that the new missionaries should have difficulties adjusting to tropical climate of the Philippines. Thus, although the Spanish Visitor, Fr. Sanz, insisted on
keeping the Rules, he wrote to the Superior. “One of the most pressing duties in you and in me is to try to preserve the health and strength of the Missionaries and Sisters destined to those missions in which they are easily lost and are so hard to replace. You should resolve all cases from this principle which ought to be the compass of your conduct.”

He advised the missionaries to use light clothing and to eat what they thought was suitable. He advised Father Velasco to eat well to be able to cope with the work that he had to face, and to alleviate a little, his nagging headache which could very well derive precisely from weakness. He expressly forbade him to fast. Later, Fr. Sanz, through letters and personal representations with the Holy Father in Rome, was able to obtain by April 3, 1865, an exemption from fasting for the missionaries and the Daughters of Charity, in perpetuum. And after communicating the news to the first missionaries, he specifically told Fr. Moral, “And you should be the first one not to fast, nor should you permit that the others fast.”

After the Trials Life as Usual.

Since July 21, 1863, at the end of his first year in the Philippines, Fr. Velasco realized the difficulties of his manifold responsibilities as Superior of the Vincentian Mission, Director of the Sisters and Rector and Professor in the Conciliar Seminary. He wrote about these difficulties to the Visitor in Spain, his immediate superior, and also to Fr. General in Paris, and asked to be relieved of some of his responsibilities. He asked the Superior General to leave him free from the Seminary and if possible to relieve him from any post of superior. His reasons were convincing: he had to go out very often to take care of the Sisters, he had to spend time walking back and forth from Intramuros to La Concordia, a distance of three kilometers; he had to serve spiritually four or five houses of the Sisters; he also had other obligations to the Civil authorities. With all these duties, he could not possibly spend enough time in the Seminary where he was needed as superior.

On November 6, 1865, the Superiors in Madrid, relieved Fr. Velasco of some of his burdens. Fr. Casarramona was appointed confessor and sub-director of the Sisters whenever Fr. Velasco would be absent. Fr. Moral in spite of his ill health, was appointed Assistant to the Superior. On December 6, 1865, Rev. Fr. Casarramona was named superior of the Seminary.

With the appointment of Fr. Jose Casarramona as Rector of the Seminary, a new atmosphere permeated the administration of the Seminary. New attempts at improving the discipline and administration were noted. A book of Rules for Seminarians, to be implemented in the Seminaries run by the Vincentian Fathers, was prepared. It was edited in final form by Fr. Casarramona and was published in 1878.
Before leaving his post as superior of the Manila Seminary, Fr. Velasco consulted the other Vincentian Fathers and agreed with them on several important improvements for the Seminary. In a letter dated April 20, 1865, he formally presented to the Archbishop of Manila a proposal for these improvements.\textsuperscript{11}

It was necessary, according to the Vincentian Fathers, to introduce a class in Dogmatic Theology in the Seminary because most of the students who studied at Santo Tomas University took only Canon Law. It was obvious that if they did not study Dogmatic Theology they would be unable, as priests, to teach the doctrines of the Church without the risk of error. Thus a course in Dogmatic Theology in the Seminary was urged even though the number of priests in the Seminary and the payment from the students remained the same.

Furthermore, the fact that the Seminarians had to go out often for their classes in the University, and be in frequent contact with youth who do not intend to be ecclesiastics or do not know what they wish to be, plus the time lost in going to, waiting for, and returning from the classes — all in all, about two hours lost everyday — were a hindrance and disadvantage to their proper formation and training. The Seminarians themselves had often manifested the desire to have their Theology classes in the Seminary. Some of them went to the extent of saying that otherwise, they would not study it, because it was so troublesome to go to the University using the clerical habit when the weather was very warm. The advantages then of holding Theology classes in the Seminary were: 1) that those who were called to the ecclesiastical state may study well the Dogmatic Theology in preference to Roman and civil laws; 2) that students entering this seminary upon finishing their Philosophy course, may be better protected from the dangers of the world and may also acquire more easily the ecclesiastical spirit.

These suggestions and proposals were submitted to the Archbishop of Manila, not impulsively, but after lengthy thought on April 20, 1865, three years after the Vincentians took over the Seminary administration. The Manila Archbishop submitted for study the proposals to the Archdiocesan Councillors for the seminary. Three months later, after obtaining their unanimous and unreserved endorsement, he sent his official decision approving all the proposals, in a letter dated, July 26, 1865.\textsuperscript{12}

It is interesting to note that in the school year 1864-1865 only 26 students were taking Moral Theology — the only other subject offered together with Gregorian Chant and Sacred Liturgy in the Manila Seminary. This number was about half of the total number of Seminarians when they took over the Seminary in 1862. Let us not forget that the Seminary was then a sort of boarding house. At any rate, those
examined at the end of the course in Moral Theology were: six priests, three deacons, three subdeacons, nine ordained in Minor Orders, two clerics of Tonsure, and three major seminarians already wearing the cassock (habitistas).

After the new course in Dogmatic Theology was introduced, 45 Seminarians enrolled in the class of Dogma, and 11 in Moral. The new students of Dogma were seminarians, three of whom had come in 1863; nine in 1864; five in 1865 before the inauguration of the course. All the others were recently admitted seminarians. What the Fathers expected therefore, was achieved. With the improvements, the increase in the number of seminarians followed.13

By that time, a new reinforcement of three priests and one lay Brother arrived in Manila on April 12, 1865. Fr. Miguel Perez Gallardo, Fr. Antonio Santonja and Fr. Santiago Serrallonga with Brother Antonio del Rio Comitre left the port of Cadiz on December 1, 1864 aboard the frigate “Concepcion” for their new mission in the Philippines. The purpose of this mission was to extend further the work of the Vincentians who were sought in the other dioceses.
Most Rev. FRANCISCO GAINZA, O.P. (1818-1879) Bishop of Nueva Caceres (Naga) who welcomed the Vincentians and entrusted to them his Seminario Colegio del Sto. Rosario on May 7, 1865.
Most Rev. ROMUALDO JIMENO, O.P. (1808-1872) BISHOP OF CEBU, who welcomed the Vincentians in his Diocesan Seminary, in 1867. In that same year he established in the San Carlos Seminary of Cebú the Colegio de San Carlos, the oldest Catholic College for boys in the Visayas, which in 1948 became the University of San Carlos.