Chapter Five

First Expansion: Naga and Cebu
(1865-1870)

The Bicol Region

The city of Naga or Nueva Caceres is of special interest because the Seminary run by the Vincentian Fathers was located in it. Mariano Goyena del Prado gives the following brief history of Bicol:

In 1573, on his second expedition to this region, the great conquistador, Juan de Salcedo, discovered a flourishing Bicol Village called Naga, so-called because of an abundance of narra (naga, in Bicol) trees, all over the place. In 1575 (1200 years before the start of the American Revolution), captain Pedro de Chavez, commander of the garrison left behind by Salcedo, founded on the site of the present business center, (across the river from the original Naga), a Spanish city which he named Ciudad de Caceres in honor of de Sande, then governor general and native of the city of Caceres in Spain. It was still by this name that it was identified in the papal bull of August 14, 1595, which erected the See of Caceres, (together with those of Cebu and Nueva Segovia), and made it the seat of the new bishopric.¹

The institution which contributed most to the cultural and intellectual progress of the Bicolanos and to their political, social, cultural and economic growth for about one hundred years, was the Seminario-Colegio del Santisimo Rosario. Many ecclesiastical and religious leaders of the Bicol region finished the rudiments of their education in this Seminario-Colegio.

Preparations for the Seminary of Nueva Caceres

Since 1863, Bishop Francisco Gainza O. P. Archbishop of Nueva Caceres, had kept requesting for Missionaries for his Seminary, though
he was aware that the Vincentians were painfully undermanned. His insistence resulted in a meeting of the four Vincentians in Manila January, 1864, in a domestic council which released the following report.

The Council has determined to answer the Bishop of Camarines about his request for a priest and a Brother for the direction of the Seminary, that there is no available personnel to take care of it. Sending one alone would be neither in conformity with our Institute nor adequate enough to achieve the desired end; and now it is impossible to send even two priests there.2

The Visitor of the Vincentians in Madrid, Fr. Ramon Sanz, approved the resolution on March 22, 1864, adding that “It doesn’t seem suitable for now that you take charge of the Seminary of Nueva Caceres by dismembering the personnel in Manila.”3

However, when the third mission of three Vincentian priests and a lay Brother was already on its way to the Philippines, Father Sanz wrote on January 6, 1864 to Fr. Velasco: “In case you feel obliged to start that foundation in the Seminary of Nueva Caceres, Fr. Moral could go as Superior and Fr. Santonja with Fr. Serrallonga and one Brother might go with him.”4

On April 12 of that year, Fr. Antonio Santonja, Fr. Santiago Serrallonga, Fr. Miguel Perez Gallardo and Brother Antonio del Rio Comitre arrived in Manila. After a one-year stay in the San Carlos Seminary, on April 25, 1865, the first two Fathers and Bro. del Rio were assigned to the Seminary of Nueva Caceres with Father Moral as the superior in the new Seminary where they arrived on May 3. The Priests were — in the opinion of Father Sanz — endowed with “talent, orthodox ideas and good spirit,” while the Brother was “a holy man, well educated, and fully trustworthy.”5 They were excellent personnel indeed for a new foundation.

They found the Naga Seminary well organized, thanks to the zeal of Bishop Francisco Gainza, a Dominican stalwart who already had to his name an outstanding record in the education of the youth.

Bishop Gainza worked very hard to restore the seminary building which had been burned some years before. His formidable energy, and his many connections in the country worked to his advantage in harnessing the funds necessary for the reconstruction of the Seminary building. Finally, his efforts bore fruit. He was able to obtain a respectable amount of money from the Government and from private sources, with the cooperation of the faithful. Herculean sacrifices seemed
natural to this prelate in his eagerness to turn the Seminary into a College which would also be open to the youth, and serve as a center of learning and culture in the Bicol region. Thus, after two years, the College-Seminary was standing on its feet once more; and again seminarian and students were being formed after the tenets of the Council of Trent.

When the Vincentians arrived in Naga, the Bishop was sick with cholera. However this did not deter him from managing every kind of attention for them. On May 7, 1865 the Vincentian Fathers were installed as the temporal, scientific and religious administrators of the Seminary. This was the final ceremony that followed the Te Deum in the Cathedral, the blessing of the Seminary and the procession joined in by the Seminarians, the Franciscan priests and the people at large. 6

The opening of the school year 1865-1866, saw the Seminary full of students totalling 334. The Vincentians taught Latin as well as Spanish. Christian Doctrine and Good Manners, Liturgy, Sacred Oratory, Gregorian Chant, and Review of Catechism, were part of the curriculum. The Bishop entertained high hopes for the success of the enterprise:

Since I know very well your zeal and goodwill as well as those of your respected confreres, I am cherishing the hope that, even with so few personnel and limited resources, you will know how to take advantage of this situation in such a way that the scientific and religious education of the youth who come to the halls of this institution may flourish; and that the students, the parents, the clergy and the whole diocese may feel, very soon the salutary effects of your prudent and illustrious direction. 7

The spiritual formation of the Seminarians was the core of religious Seminary education. To it the Prelate paid dominant attention, and his zeal touched the administrators and professors. They felt a compelling necessity to give the Seminarians spiritual conferences. For this, the professors took turns. Confessions were done in separate sessions for seminarians and externs; the “Congregacion Mariana” and the Association of St. Luis Gonzaga were promoted. Bishop Gainza proudly wrote Queen Isabel II of Spain, his protector and helper.

At present, Your Majesty can enjoy the satisfaction that the Seminary of Nueva Caceres is the best run establishment outside the Capital here in the Philippines, thanks to the resolute protection of the Government and the increasing vigilance of the Father-Directors and Professors who try to
measure up to the unlimited and well-deserved confidence that I have placed on them. 8

With the establishment of the Vincentians in his diocese, Bishop Gainza speculated that most of his problems would now find definite solution. He toyed with the idea of making the Rector of the Seminary the “Provisor” (Chancellor) of the Diocese; and the Seminary Fathers and Brother would be given charge of the Cathedral Parish and its Sacristy. However, such duties meant more personnel, so the Provincial of Spain suggested that all these employments be postponed to a later time when the Congregation would be able to afford greater manpower. But nevertheless Fr. Moral was forced to take up the Cathedral parish work and the post of Chancellor of the Diocese.

Another task that the Bishop wanted to entrust to the Vincentians was that of examiners of the Clergy when the latter applied for their ministerial licenses. The Vincentian Fathers thought that this would be odious to the members of the Clergy, but in the end, they yielded to the Bishop because of its real and urgent necessity. Moreover, for lack of a better place, the Seminary had to serve as a reformation house for erring priests. Fr. Sanz on March 26, 1866, wrote:

Concerning priests shut up in the Seminary, I told you in my last letter of March 6, that you should find a way with the Bishop that they should not be sent to that institution, but in view of the convincing reasons that the Bishop advances, it seems that we have to admit them. I believe that Saint Vincent would do this and hence authorize you to do so. But, see to it that these priests be not as a sort of prisoners, but rather of retreatants for the time that the Bishop pleases to determine never under key, or as if imprisoned. 9

It was the duty of the Rector of the Seminary to collect and supervise the three percent given for the benefit of the Seminaries of the Philippines from the stole fees. In addition he had to collect rent from some lands which belonged to the Seminary. Bishop Gainza, was aware all along, that the Fathers in the Seminary, were saddled with various jobs, together with the administration of the Seminary. He made reference to this in his letter of August 3, 1866 to Fr. Maller. He noted that the situation in Naga was notably different from that of Manila because the establishment was not only a Seminary offering courses in Latin, Philosophy and Theology, but, also a college for day-scholars.
Bishop Gainza, thus insisted and made new representations about the urgency of having some more priests and brothers. He suggested that those destined for Cebu be deployed instead to the Seminary of Naga, to “secure the firmness of this foundation before undertaking another, weakening both with little personnel.” With the increasing number of students enrolling in the year 1867-1868, Bishop Gainza was more than justified in asking for more priests and Brothers. In that school year, there were 29 Seminarians, and 390 college students, 56 of whom were interns, and 334 externs: all in all, 419 students to train.

The staff, more adequate in number, and better prepared for work, must be credited for the marked improvement.

Instead of the old teaching staff of a Rector, Vice-Rector and three professors, the Vincentians had six or eight priests, some lay Brothers and outside professors.

Day-to-Day Running of the Naga Seminary

The Vincentians organized themselves in order to run the seminary more effectively. Father Moral had already been named Rector of the seminary in charge of the “temporal, scientific and religious direction of the seminary.” For professor of second year philosophy, Fr. Moral proposed Fr. Santonja and for prefect of the fourth and fifth year Latin, Fr. Serrallonga. The only secular priest, Father Esteban Oquealda was in charge of first year Humanities. Theology was taught by Fr. Moral, the Rector. Among the non-academic officers were the vice-rector Fr. Santonja, and the procurator Fr. Serrallonga.

The Bishop decided that the former Directors and professors of the seminary could in the meantime continue living in the seminary, supported by the Establishment, in order to give them worthy occupation later on. This was also motivated by the great number of young students coming in at the opening of the school year. The former procurator became the assistant of Fr. Serrallonga. The seminarian D. Juan Alonso was deemed worthy to stay as Secretary of Studies.

At the start of the school year, 1865-1866, the number of students was 334; in the school-year 1867-1868, there were 419 students including, non-ecclesiastical students. In the past years, 4 hours daily was devoted to Latin. This time however, one hour of the four was devoted to Spanish because the Bishop found the students weak in Spanish. The Vincentians also proposed that Saturday afternoons be dedicated to classes in Christian Doctrine and Good Manners. This was approved by the Bishop who also reminded them that some professors should explain Liturgy, Sacred Oratory and Gregorian Chant. Moreover, it
was seen that the young students needed to review catechism in their native dialects with a professor who would be assigned by the Rector.

The Vincentian faculty members gathered often to discuss the needs of the Seminarians and the ways by which the quality of instruction in the Institution could be improved. Among the things discussed in their Council were: (1) the need for a preparatory or remedial class in Latin for the new students; (2) the need to arrange schedules convenient to the students; (3) the need for more scholarships, etc.

It is interesting to note the time distribution of the courses for the seminarians at that time (1866):

**Morning:**
- Remedial class in Latin: 7:00-9:00
- Latin Classes (2 courses): 7:00-8:00
- Philosophy and Moral Theology: 8:30-9:30

**Afternoon:**
- Remedial class in Latin: 2:30-4:30
- Latin classes (2 courses): 3:00-4:00
- Philosophy and Moral Theology: 5:00-6:00

In addition, the Theologians had Gregorian Chant daily from 9:30-10:00 a.m., and on Thursdays from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. On Sundays, they had Rubrics from 10:00-11:00 a.m.

This curriculum was not as burdened with requirements as a contemporary Seminary curriculum but offered more courses of Latin, Philosophy and Moral theology. The students had daily classes except Sundays. There were so few professors to teach twice daily classes in Philosophy and Moral theology; later, it was decided that dogmatic theology will be taught in the morning, and Moral theology in the afternoon in order to improve the theological formation of the students.

At the end of the year, all students had their Spiritual Exercises. Although there were so many of them, all held their retreat days in the seminary. The seminarians had a retreat separate from the externs. They attended conferences at night, and in the morning, listened to the interpretation of some texts of the New Testament. Externs were given daily talks, one of them in Bicol, their native language.

But not all was prayer, spiritual retreats and classes, in the Seminary of Nueva Caceres. The Vincentians ordered books, medicines and other necessities from Cadiz to be brought to the faraway Bicol.
seminary. However, it took time before these things finally got them. It was only after two years that they got their requisitions from Madrid. Father Sanz approved other activities of Father Santonja.

It is also very well done that you have permitted Father Santonja to put up the teaching of photography; and that the same confere be occupied with an apothecary’s shop or pharmacy (Botica) and the care of the sick, because there are no doctors in that place: Charity is the supreme law and the first rule we have to observe.12

After two years, Father Joaquin Jaume, Miguel Pedros, Francisco Masferrer and two more Brothers joined the Vincentians in Nueva Caceres. The year 1867-1868, 4 priests were ordained, 7 deacons, 6 subdeacons, 6 with Minor Orders and 6 with Tonsure, and there were 419 students. On April 10, 1867 Father Moral recommended Father Santonja as provisional Superior of the Seminary because he had to attend the important Provincial Assembly in Madrid, that year. For almost one year, he stayed in Europe, still sickly and weak. Too long had he been insistently urging to be relieved from his office as Superior. Upon his return to the Philippines, at last, his Superiors allowed him to go to the Diocese of Jaro, in 1869, leaving Fr. Antonio Santonja as provisional Superior and Director of the Seminary of Caceres.

CEBU AT THE COMING OF THE VINCENTIANS

Enrique Abella y Casariego wrote in 1886 about Cebu:

Because of its importance and its location in the center of the Visayan Archipelago, the Politico-Military Governor of the Visayas, the Episcopacy of the same name and a naval artillery station are found in Cebu in addition to the authorities and functionaries featuring all the districts and provinces of the Philippines.13

Cebu has played some important roles in Philippine History. Encyclopedia Britannica says:

Cebu is one of the most historic spots in the Philippines. An important native port occupies the site where Ferdinand Magellan, commander of the first circumnavigatory expedition, landed on April 7, 1521. It was on Mactan Island that he met the native chief Humabon (Hamabar), and sealed with
him a blood compact, only to lose his life later in a battle with another. . . Miguel Lopez de Legaspi and Friar Urdaneta arrived in Cebu on April 27, 1565, to found the first Spanish settlement and the first Catholic mission. . . until Legaspi’s transfer to Manila, Cebu was the Spanish colonial capital. Cebu continued to be an important Spanish center of control in the south. Cebuanos took prominent part in the insurrection against both Spain and the U.S.¹⁴

One of the important institutions that made Cebu a historic place was the Seminario de San Carlos. On August 21, 1595 the Jesuits Pedro Chirino and Antonio Pereira founded in Cebu a school that was named Colegio de San Ildefonso. After the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1768 that Jesuit House ceased to exist; and its building, left to fall into ruin, was fifteen years later occupied by the Cebu Diocesan Seminary, the Colegio Seminario Conciliar de San Carlos, an institution which has nothing to do and was entirely independent from the Jesuit residence called Colegio de San Ildefonso. The San Carlos Seminary of Cebu began to function in the former building of the San Ildefonso College on August 23, 1783. The “Royal Seminary of San Carlos” of Cebu was founded by the King of Spain on October 29, 1779 upon petition of the Bishop of Cebu, Mateo Joaquin Rubio de Arevalo. When the Vincentians arrived on January 23, 1867 to take charge of the Seminary, they found that since 1782 the Seminary had a curriculum that needed improvement. Philosophy, Theology and Latin were summarily taught; and Mathematics, Geography and other subjects had been included only at one time or another.¹⁵

The Period of Waiting

After the establishment of the Seminaries of Manila and Nueva Caceres, the Cebu Seminary loomed as the next project. However, it had to wait two years more before the Vincentians arrived. Fr. Ramon Sanz, the Madrid Provincial wrote Bishop Romualdo Jimeno, O.P. of Cebu on June 12, 1863 explaining that it was still impossible to send the missionaries over to his Diocese. The main reason was the lack of personnel, a perennial problem. Fr. Sanz wrote to Bishop Jimeno on June 12, 1863: “The Congregation recently established in Spain, is composed of young members. Even if these members offered numerous and consoling hopes, they need a formation that depends only on time, and to speed it up is to put in jeopardy these young men and the good results of their ministry.”¹⁶ He ended with hopes that he might be able to satisfy the Bishop within two or three years. On May 5, 1866, Fr.
Sanz wrote to Fr. Ildefonso Moral, making some reference to the Seminary of Cebu "which we cannot help any more but accept it." But about a week later, Fr. Ramon Sanz, weighed down by infirmity and old age, and unable to bear the burden of his office, resigned. It was for the better that Fr. Mariano Joaquin Maller, who knew everything that went on in the Province of Madrid, became the Provincial. It was he who eventually granted the wishes of Bishop Jimeno with the following letter:

This letter will be placed in your hands by Father Jose Casarramona who, together with two companions, Fr. Gabino Lopez and Fr. Francisco Potellas, will take charge of the Seminary of your Diocese, following a desire which Your Excellency has manifested. I hope, they will earn all the esteem and help which Your Excellency could give them. Little by little, as necessity demands, and in the measure of our power, the number of workers will continue to grow until we shall have fully satisfied the desires of Your Excellency.

Fr. Maller sent to the Philippines the fourth mission, composed of Fr. Antonio Farre, Fr. Joaquin Jaume, Fr. Gabino Lopez, Fr. Francisco Potellas, and Bro. Fermin Cobisa. They departed from Marseille, France, on July 15, 1866, and arrived in Manila on August 31, almost half the time that the previous missions took to travel from Cadiz to Manila. This was because the route they followed was through the Isthmus of Suez, instead of the long, tedious and dangerous trip round the Cape of Good Hope. This 4th mission came to reinforce the Vincentians working in the Philippines who were, by 1866, composed of seven priests and three Brothers; from the 1st Mission, Fr. Gregorio Velasco, Fr. Ildefonso Moral, Bro. Gregorio Perez, Bro Romualdo Lopez; from the 2nd Mission, Fr. Jose Casarramona and Fr. Antonio Serra; from the 3rd mission, Fr. Antonio Santonja, Fr. Santiago Serralonga, Fr. Miguel P. Gallardo, and Bro. Antonio del Rio.

With the arrival of the 4th mission in 1866, the Vincentians, grew to eleven priests and four Brothers with the following assignments: in 1866: in Manila, Father Casarramona, as Superior-Rector, since 1865 (instead of Fr. Velasco who had long been asking to be relieved from office), Frs. Velasco, Serra, Gallardo, Lopez and Potellas with Bros. Lopez and Perez; in Naga, Frs. Moral, Santonja, Serralonga and Jaume with Bros. del Rio and Cobisa; in 1867 in Manila: Fr. Farre as Superior-Rector, instead of Fr. Casarramona (who was sent to Cebu as Superior-Rector), together with Frs. Velasco, Gallardo and Bros. Lopez and Perez; in Naga, Fr. Santonja as Superior-Rector (in the
absence of Fr. Moral who went to Europe) with Fr. Serra, Frs. Serralonga and Jaume and Bros. del Rio and Cobisa; in Cebu, Fathers Casarramona as Superior-Rector with Fathers Lopez and Potellas.

We have seen above the urgent petition in 1863 of the Bishops of Nueva Caceres and Cebu, for some Vincentians to take over the administration and direction of their seminaries. But due to scarcity of personnel and finances, it was very difficult for the superiors to satisfy such demands at once. It took two years for the Bishop of Naga, Msgr. Gainza to see his dream realized in 1865; and two years later, the Bishop of Cebu got his request. The Madrid Provincial, Fr. Sanz, eager to send as soon as possible long needed missionaries for the Seminary of Manila, Nueva Caceres and the prospective one of Cebu, wrote on December 1865 to Fr. Moral in Naga. He requested him to find out if he could obtain a loan of "a thousand dollars" (mil duros) so that he could send the 4th mission through the Isthmus of Suez for a speedier assistance to the long over-burdened Philippine Vincentians. When Bishop Gainza learned about the penury of the Madrid Province, he assured them that he was ready to lend them such an amount. And thus through the generous efforts of Fr. Sanz and Bishop Gainza, the 4th mission arrived much earlier in Manila, via Suez Canal.

After the arrival of the reinforcement on August 31, 1866, Fr. Casarramona, the Manila Superior, went to Cebu at the end of October of the same year, accompanied by three Daughters of Charity, in order to arrange for the installation of the Vincentian family in Cebu. There, he set up the contract with the Bishop for taking over the administration of the Seminary. Two months later, on January 23, 1867, the Vincentians were formally established in the Real Seminario de San Carlos. Bishop Romualdo Jimeno, O.P., Conferred on them, just like in Naga, posts of responsibility and honor.

Inconspicuous Beginnings

The Bishop of Cebu, Romualdo Jimeno, O.P. placed in the hands of the Vincentians all the powers necessary to reform the seminary. Fr. Casarramona, promptly set out to implement the rules and directory of Seminaries under the Congregation of the Mission, patterned after the Council of Trent. In the beginning, some seminarians became dissatisfied with the new arrangements implemented by the Vincentians. In the absence of the Bishop who was in Bohol at the time, these seminarians protested to Fr. Bernardo Ybal, Vicar General and former rector of the Seminary. For the next two or three years, the discontented students left the Seminary one by one. But the patience and loving firmness of Fr. Casarramona, slowly won the full approval of the Bishop
who recognized the wise aims of the new administration. The number of seminarians increased from fifty-eight in 1868 to eighty in 1871. Among the seminarians who successfully followed the strict norms of seminary life was one who later on became the first Bishop of Calbayog: Most Rev. Pablo Singzon de la Encarnacion.

Soon, people began to notice the progress of the seminarians or Colegiales as they were called, just as the Seminary itself was known commonly as Seminario-Colegio although the students were all interns or boarding scholars. Before half a year of strict Seminary discipline firmly imposed by the new Rector, Fr. Casarramona, was over, the improvement of the Institution was noticed by the authorities and the people of Cebu. The people of Cebu, pinning their hopes on the intellectual development of their sons in the Seminary, petitioned the Bishop to open the Seminary doors to day-scholars, as well. Recognizing the importance of consultation on such an important matter, the Bishop asked the opinion of several people, particularly the Rector, Fr. Casarramona, who replied:

In my own judgement, Your Excellency, nothing is more just than to give in to that petition. On the one hand, the Seminary does not have adequate capacity to accommodate within its walls enough subjects as are necessary to provide clergymen for such an immense diocese. On the other hand, it is certain that many could be very good ecclesiastics but do not have the means to pay the fees which internship requires. To maintain free of charge all who seek to enter, would be a burden that the Seminary could not support. Therefore, I can't find another better way than the opening of classes in Latin, Spanish, Grammar, Arithmetic and Religion to externs. Besides the benefit of education which this might afford those who may not wish to follow the ecclesiastical course, it would provide the advantage of discerning the fitness and goodness of those who will seek admission as interns in order to continue their studies in the Seminary.  

Because of this recommendation from Father Casarramona and that of Father Leon Aguilar, the former Vice Rector of the Seminary, the Bishop resolved thus on May 15, 1867:

The Gobernadorcillo and the principales from various quarters of the City of Cebu have asked that classes of Latin be opened to extern students in the College-Seminary of San Carlos in this city. We have considered the report of the Director of the
Seminary and have examined the Seminary Rule which accom­panies it. We have heard the opinion of the Reverend Parish of this City, and have privately consulted with other ecclesiastical persons. Everybody has agreed on the advantage which would result to our holy Religion and to the State from the opening of classes to externs of this City or of the town of San Nicolas, as long as they can live in the houses of their parents and attend classes and other acts of piety and instruction. Furthermore since on our part, we desire as far as we can to give attention to the youth in order that they may duly be instructed in science and virtue, so we resolve that from July 1st of this year (1867) classes of Latin be open to day-scholars who live in this City or in the town of San Nicolas, in the house of their parents. They will, of course, have to observe all the Seminary Rules already revised according to the observations made by the learned Parish Priest of the City. 20

As a historian remarks, “This episcopal decree dated may 15, 1867 marks the birthday of the famous Colegio de San Carlos, the oldest Catholic College for boys in the Visayas, that in 1948 was given the status of a university as “University of San Carlos.” 21 The prestige of this College-Seminary of San Carlos of Cebu was not limited to Cebu Island alone. All throughout the Visayas, this College-Seminary was eagerly sought after.

It was Fr. Jose Casarramona who, as he did in the Seminary in Manila, compiled the Rules for the Cebu Seminary, introducing the necessary rules regarding the discipline of day scholars, especially with respect to their difference from the seminarians. Fr. Casarramona worked strenuously to leave the College-Seminary of Cebu in a fine condition. He was over-spent and time and again asked, as Fr. Velasco did in Manila, and Fr. Moral in Naga, to be relieved from the office. At last in December, 1870, he was permitted to go back to Manila as Superior of the Manila Seminary, leaving the burden of the Cebu Seminary rectorate to his successor, Fr. Antonio Farre who had arrived in Cebu on November 23 of the same year.

By that time, the Cebu Vincentian community of three priests in 1867, had increased in 1868 to four and two Brothers. In 1869 three more priests and one more Brother joined the Vincentians so that all in all, in 1870 there were in the Cebu Seminary, seven priests and three Brothers: Fr. Antonio Farre, Rector (’70), Fr. Gabino Lopez (’67), Fr. Francisco Potellgas (’67), Fr. Jose L. de Goicoechea (’68), Fr. Fernando La Canal (’69), Fr. Juan Espelt, Fr. Blas Ma. Montañes (’70), Bro. Antonio del Rio (’69), Bro. Miguel Garcia (’68) and Bro. Gabriel Tarrasa (’68).
Curiously, the first eleven priests of the four missions of Vincentians sent to the Philippines were all young and full of vigor. Fr. Velasco, the oldest, arrived here at the age of 46; six among them were in their thirties; four in their twenties. These were the missionaries who took over the Philippine Seminaries at the earnest appeal of the Bishops before 1868. They were sent by the two Provincials of the Madrid Province, Fr. Ramon Sanz and Fr. Mariano Joaquin Maller who may well be considered the Fathers of the Vincentian Philippine Mission. These two Vincentians gave to our country selected personnel chosen from among the best of the Spanish Province during the epoch of its restoration in 1851, after its suppression in 1836. The restoration under Queen Isabel II was short-lived, from 1851 to the revolution of 1868. In 1868, Queen Isabel II was forced to flee to France. She left the country in the midst again of new persecutions against the Church.

The Congregation of the Mission had been suppressed together with other religious Orders in Spain through the infamous laws of the revolution in 1836 and 1837. Many of its members were dispersed in various countries like France, United States, Constantinople, Syria and Argel. In 1851, the mission was restored again by the Concordat with the Holy See. But this restoration was short-lived; the revolution of 1868 came and the Congregation was suppressed once more. It was during these turbulent times that Fr. Ramon Sanz (1862-1866) and Fr. Mariano Maller (1866-1892) were Provincial Superiors of the Congregation in Spain, and generously sent to the Philippine missions the best members they could spare, even though Spain itself was in dire need of personnel. Time and again, Fr. Sanz testified on the sincere love he professed for the mission in our far-off archipelago.

As I have told you in my previous letters, the Mission and the Houses in the Philippines occupy a place of preference in my heart and I am ready to do anything I can for its preservation and progress. With them, (the new missionaries), I am sending you good, and capable personnel for all the various ministries.22

When the burden of his office came to be too much for Fr. Sanz, Fr. Maller was appointed Madrid Provincial. He continued the zealous policy of Fr. Sanz for the missions in the Philippines. He encouraged the priests to adapt themselves to Philippine conditions. He invested Fr. Velasco with the widest possible powers to use at his discretion. He went even further:
I am going to answer your questions. Firstly, I believe that not only it is allowed, but it seem right to offer tobacco to the persons who visit our houses. If that is the general custom, it could cause wonder and offense if this were not done. For the same reason, we offer coffee in Brazil at any time of the day.

When the revolution of September 1868 came and overthrew the Bourbon Kings, Queen Isabel II was forced to take refuge in France. The Vincentians were expelled from their residence in Madrid on October 26; but, fortunately and with prudent foresight, the 20 seminarians and 13 scholastics had been transferred shortly before to Dax, France. Fr. Maller wrote from Paris, April 9, 1869:

"Thanks be to God, we were able to save the greater and best portion of our promising youth. Now in our exile we shall be admitting new candidates so that there may not be a total interruption."

On September 21, 1870 he wrote again:

"In the midst of the tribulations which in the inscrutable designs of God have fallen upon our beloved Madrid Province, it is a great consolation for us to see preserved the Houses established in those Islands as well as in Havana, in the island of Cuba. This offers us, not only the consolation to continue in the exercise of the sacred functions of our Institute, but also to expand before us a wide field of action open to the zeal of those of our youth who will reach the sacred Ordination, until the day comes when the doors of our motherland (Spain) may be again open to us.

"Last year, from Dax where our scholastics continued their formation, we had already the pleasure of sending to that Archipelago some from among the best who, having received the sacred Orders, are now rendering their services in the various establishments."
Front view of the old Colegio Seminario de Cebu.
Most Rev. Martin Garcia de Alcocer, O.F.M., Bishop of Cebu (1886-1903). He approved the Rules or Constitutions of the Hermanitas de la Madre de Dios, founded by Fr. Fernande de la Canal, C.M. in 1888; undertook the construction of a new Cathedral, in 1891; a Casa de Socorro (First Aid Center), the first of its kind in the Philippines, founded in August 1887; and also the St. Joseph Hospital, founded on October 15, 1888. He fought for the rights of the Church on the so-called "privilegium fori"; and obtained from the Governor General a decree maintaining its vigor in the Philippines. Finally, he exposed his life to protect the city of Cebu from the ravages of the war in 1898.

Most Rev. Benito Romero de Madridejos, O.F.M. Bishop of Cebu (1876-1885). He opened in Cebu a "House of Charity" for poor indigents, at the insinuation of Fr. Antonio Fàrré, C.M. and under the care of Fr. Fernando de la Canal, C.M. in 1877. The House of Charity became later "St. Joseph Hospital". Bishop Madridejos approved the Institute of "Hermanitas de la Madre de Dios" founded by Fr. La Canal.
Brother Antonio del Rio, C.M.; (1838-1904). He worked five years in the Seminary Naga; ten years in his famous Escuela del Hermano, a preparatory school in the Seminary of Cebu; twelve years in the Seminary of Manila, and six years in the Central House of San Marcelino, Manila.

Fr. José Casarramona, C.M. (1838-1916), first Rector of the Seminario-Colegio de San Carlos in Cebu.

Fr. Francisco Jarero, C.M., (1845-1918), Rector of the Seminario-Colegio de San Carlos in Cebu after Fr. Antonio Farre, C.M., from 1879 to 1889. He was a highly esteemed Professor of Juan Gorordo, future Bishop of Cebu.
Museum of Natural History and Physics Laboratory of the College-Seminary of Cebu (1917)