

The Ivatan Mission: 1783-1983

INTRODUCTION

“Earthen vessels that hold a treasure” is how St. Paul describes men who possess and work for the faith, (2 Cor. 4:7). Indeed, like earthen vessels, these men are so frail that they can be overcome by the pangs of hunger, bad weather, huge waves, and eventually succumb to death, as happened to several Dominican Friars who worked in the Batanes Missions. This could be sufficient to discourage anyone from pursuing the apostolate in Batanes, despite their lofty aims.

However, “where your treasure is, there your heart lies”, says a biblical adage (Mt. 6:21). Could this be the insight that guided the Dominicans, particularly the Fathers of the Province of Our Lady of the Rosary, throughout three centuries of struggle and survival in the Batanes Islands?

The Ivatan Church/Mission, unknown to most of the Catholic world, has, ever since its start, been lavishly cared for in terms of personnel and priorities, almost to the extent of “being spoiled”. With its initial population of about thirty thousand¹ which through the years dwindled to today’s approximately twelve thousand, it has always been under the care of a handful of Dominicans. Today, its 98 percent is taken care of by five priests and one prelate. One priest per 1,600 souls is indeed a blessing

¹ Julio González. *The Batanes Islands*. Manila: UST Press, 1966, p. 14.

of personnel, when statistically, the rest of the country enjoys one priest for every 10,000 Catholics or more.²

What is the secret of the Ivatan Church that has made the Dominicans care for and treasure it so much for the past three centuries since the first Dominican Missionary landed there in 1686, and for two centuries since its permanent founding as a Mission in 1783? Unmindful of the great odds inherent to the climate and geography as well as of other problems, they still continue their mission work up to this day.

Indeed, from a purely human viewpoint, such situation would immediately lead one to conclude that the Dominicans are going against logic and, of course, in a very un-Dominican way.

A review of the Ivatan Mission history will contribute much to explain such a striking phenomenon.

EVOLUTION OF THE MISSION

1686-1782

The Batanes Islands, where the Ivatan Mission was founded and is settled today, could well have been visited already even before the time when the first Filipino Martyr, Lorenzo Ruiz and companions were on their way to martyrdom in Japan. For during these frequent journeys of the Dominicans to China and Japan, they had no other route except through the China Sea in which these small islands emerge from the sea like as many stepping stones from the mainland of Luzon to Formosa. And this was during the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th centuries,

² Florentino Hornedo. *Batanes Ethnographic History: A survey*. (Type-script), 163 pp. 1976, p. 1. Information taken from: The Census of 1970, indicating the population at 11,360 inhabitants (Cfr. *Advance Report No. 3, Batanes, 1970, Population and Housing of the Bureau of Census and Statistics*, Manila: pp. 8-10)

Also in Florentino Hornedo. *Laji: An Ivatan Folk Lyric Tradition*. *Unitas*, Vol. 52, Nos. 2 & 3, June-Sept. 1979, p. 196.

There are 37,980,000 Catholics in the Philippines. (Cfr. *Catholic Missionary Education Centre*, London: Holcombe House, June 1981, Map no. 9). And there are 4,433 priests — both Secular and Religious — in the Philippines (Cfr. Archdiocese of Manila. *Acts and Statutes of the Fourth Synod*, Chancery Office, October 21-22, 1979, p. 34).

the first years of the evangelization of the Philippines and of its neighboring countries.

It was in 1686 when the first Dominican Missionary, Mateo González, Vicar of the Sta. Ursula Mission in Fuga (Babuyan Islands) landed in Batanes.³ He knew about the Ivatans from the traders that frequented the Babuyan Islands for commercial purposes. Trying to expand the Fuga Mission,⁴ he made his first survey of the said islands together with Fr. Piñero. He was one of the three Missionaries the Provincial Chapter of 1686 had granted to Fr. González to man the Mission of Fuga, but not precisely to accompany him to undertake the conversion of Batanes.⁵

Finding the inhabitants' willingness to accept the Catholic Faith, Fr. González decided to leave behind Fr. Piñero, and then went back, not to his Vicariate, but to Manila to report the venture to his Superiors. The Provincial Chapter of 1688 decided to undertake in earnest the evangelization of the said islands, in view of the promising reports of Fr. González.⁶ Whether these reports and plans were feasible enough, remained to be seen in the next years.

He was given by the same Chapter another priest to help him and Fr. Piñero in the task of spreading the Gospel to the Ivatans in the person of Fr. Juan Ruiz.⁷ Unfortunately, Fr. González and Fr. Ruiz were cut short by their premature deaths, two months only after they arrived in Batanes in 1688.⁸ Some say that this was due to the unfavorable climate of the islands, but such eventuality could be linked to their fatigue and lack of proper housing facilities, good food and medicines in the islands.

³ Pablo Fernández. *Dominicos Donde Nace el Sol*. Barcelona YUSTE, 1958, p. 211; also *Misiones Católicas en Extremo Oriente*. Manila: Cacho Hermanos, 1937, p. 417; Hornedo, *Op. cit.*, (Batanes Ethnography), p. 16-17.

⁴ The Sta. Ursula Mission was founded in 1619 and Fr. Jerónimo Morer was its first Vicar. (Cfr. *Dominicos en Extremo Oriente*. Barcelona: Industrias Gráficas Seix and Barral Herms., S.A., 1916, p. 264.; González, *Op. cit.*, p. 86, fr. 55, p. 89).

⁵ *Provinciae Sanctissimi Rosarii Philippinarum. Acta Capitulum Provincialium* (ab anno 1588 ad annum 1698), Vol. 1, Manila: Typis Collegii Sancti Thomae, 1874, p. 385. The one appointed to accompany Fr. González was Fr. Francisco de Vega, but for unknown reasons, Fr. Piñero took his place.

⁶ Julio González, *Op. cit.*, p. 15.

⁷ *Acta Capitulum Provincialium*, p. 395 (henceforth ACP).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 411; also Vicente de Salazar. *Historia de la Provincia del Santísimo Rosario de Filipinas*. Manila: Collegii Sancti Thomae, 1742, p. 525.

Fr. Piñero, left once more alone, had to leave in spite of the opposition of the Ivatans. He was allowed at last to sail, on condition that he would return soon and with another religious as his companion.⁹

Fr. Piñero went to Nueva Segovia in Cagayan where he negotiated for volunteers to continue the work in Batanes. However, due chiefly to lack of personnel, he was unable to fulfill his promise of returning to his Ivatan flock.

Such initial attempt to establish a Mission there was from the very beginning recognized as something special and to be consigned in the pages of the history of the Holy Rosary Province. In the Chapter of 1690, the unconditional missionary zeal and spirit of the two missionaries who died there was upheld with great reverence.¹⁰ In spite of the Chapter's wish to continue the mission, it was explicitly stated that it be suspended for the meantime due to lack of personnel.

Thirty years had to elapse before the Ivatans could see another Dominican. In 1719, Fr. Juan Bel, Vicar of mentioned Sta. Ursula Mission in Fuga, visited the islands.¹¹ He was welcomed with warm greetings, as many of the Ivatans cried: *Taytu dana a nawara u pali a uyud namen a ichaddao* — "the Father whom we love dearly has arrived". Observing the same willingness to accept the faith, he went back in 1720 to report this to his superiors in Manila and to negotiate for personnel and material help and resources.¹²

The Provincial Chapter of 1720 authorized him to continue in addition to the Mission of Babuyan, i.e., in Fuga Island the evangelization of Batanes with the six assistants he was given: five priests and one "donado".¹³ He left the rest for the meantime

⁹ Salazar, *Op. cit.*, p. 526.; also Juan Ferrando and Joaquín Fonseca. *Historia de los Padres Dominicos en las Islas Filipinas*. (Vol. III), Madrid: Rivadeneyra, 1871, pp. 557-558; Julio González, *Op. cit.*, pp. 15-16; Florentino Hornedo, *Op. cit.*, p. 23. (Batanes Ethnographic History).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 521-528; also González, *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 527, col. 2.

¹² Domingo Collantes. *Historia de la Provincia del Santísimo Rosario de Filipinas*. Manila: Imp. de UST, 1783, pp. 371-374.

¹³ ACP, Vol. II (ad anno 1700-1798), published in 1877, pp. 130, 136. (also Ferrando and Fonseca, *Op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 255; The five priests were: Alonso

in the Babuyanes and continued his journey to Batanes with Fr. Alonso Amado.

The following year, April 1721, Frs. Francisco Mejía and José de Jesús and the "donado" arrived in Batanes. The five worked together until January of the next year 1722, when Fr. Bel had to leave once more for the Chapter in Manila.

At this stage, the first idea of transferring the Ivatans from their beloved Batanes propped up. Reasons: difficulties in communicating with Cagayan and the death of some of the missionaries; and also, evangelization would be easier and faster if done in an already established mission.¹⁴ So Fr. Bel decided to bring along Fr. de Jesús who, in turn, would take care of the Ivatan settlement in Calayan. Calayan was chosen for the settlement since there were no people living there, except for a few Babuyans. The people of the Babuyan Islands were all in the Sta. Ursula Mission in Fuga, or in the island of Camiguin.¹⁵

The year 1722 was a year of famine in Batanes. Having no provisions left, the missionaries who had been left behind decided to leave also. The first to go was Fr. Amado with a handful of Ivatans. He was followed by Fr. Mejía and the "donado" together with 28 Ivatans. This last group never reached their destination, for they all drowned in the Balintang Channel as their boat was wrecked by a typhoon. This happened on July 14, 1722.¹⁶

Undaunted by this misfortune, Fr. Bel continued his project of transferring the Ivatans to Calayan. But it was not long before the two, Frs. Bel and de Jesús, and half of the transferred Ivatans died in this settlement.¹⁷

Amado, Tomás Fernández, José de Jesús, Francisco Mejía, Vicente del Riesgo. Three were able to go to Batanes while the other two, Frs. Vicente del Riesgo and Tomás Fernández stayed behind in Fuga. Fr. Vicente, a holy religious and zealous apostle, was animated with a zeal regarding Batanes, not inferior to that of Frs. González and Bel, but he could not carry it out.); also in Hornedo, *Op. cit.*, p. 25.; González, *Op. cit.*, p. 17.

¹⁴ Hilario Ocio. *Monumento Dominicano*. Mss in APSR, Section "Ministerios", Tomo 1, fol. 137.

¹⁵ ACP, II, pp. 131-132; (The Provincial Chapter of 1722 accepted the Ministry of San Juan Bautista of Calayan with the handful of Babuyans in the island. Cfr. Ocio, *Op. cit.*, p. 118).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 162, 167.; also González, *Op. cit.*, pp. 18-19; Hornedo, *Op. cit.*, pp. 27

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 151 (where the necrologies are found); also González, *Op. cit.*, p. 20. (The probable reason for the unhealthy climate in Calayan was due to the site of the town which was on the south where fresh and healthy breezes are wanting).

The lone survivor of those who went to Batanes and now in Calayan — Fr. Amado — was found through the years to be continually toiling for the increase of the colony in Calayan with new immigrants from Batanes.¹⁸ On August 12, 1741, the Dominican Superiors and the government came to a decision that the grant of the King to transfer the Ivatans which they had been negotiating for, be modified and that it be to Cagayan instead. The site chosen was in front of Camalaniugan on the left bank of the Ibanag River in a place called Babayuan.¹⁹

The project went for a while, but barely five years passed and the settlement was half empty. The Ivatans had gone back to their native Batanes or to other places! Reasons: nostalgia of their ancestors' places and the difficulties inherent to the founding of a new town. The only means to contact them was to go back

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 178, 205, 245.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 296. The transfer of the Ivatans has been a long process, first a sole private enterprise of the Province of Our Lady of the Rosary. But its financial aspects were so heavy a burden that they had to use or ask the help of the government.

The Provincial Chapter of 1729, willing to communicate a new impetus to the Batanes Mission, made it independent from that of Babuyanes, from which it had depended until then, and assigned to it a Father so zealous and experienced as Fr. Alonso Amado. He shared with the late Fr. Bel the idea of transferring the Ivatans to Calayan, but was antagonistic to the idea of transferring them to Cagayan. The latter idea surfaced in 1731.

On July 31, 1738, a Royal Decree was issued giving a subsidy of 5,398 pesos from the Royal Coffers of Mexico for the transfer of the Babuyanes and Ivatans to Calayan. However, upon the request of the Province and in view of the decision taken by the Junta General de la Real Hacienda in Manila on June 22, 1741, the Alcalde Mayor of Cagayan, after having received pertinent instructions from the Central Government announced on August 12, 1741 to those people the order of transfer to Cagayan.

In August 18th of the same year, the Alcalde Mayor gave to the gobernadorcillos and principales physical possession of a place called Babayuan, in front of Camalaniugan, on the left bank of the Ibanag River, so that they could start a new town there.

However, when the transfer was effected during July-September of the same year, only 4,000 moved to Cagayan, 3,000 absconded themselves, as many fled to Batanes and some to Ilocos where they radicated themselves. (Cfr. Ocio, *Op. cit.*, p. 138).

Due to this mass transfer, the already established mission of Sta. Ursula (Fuga) and San Juan Bautista (Calayan) were closed. Calayan was repopulated only in 1780. It remained without Pastor until 1867 (Cfr. González, *Op. cit.*, p. 90). The former mission was gone forever. Only the Calayan Mission was reactivated in 1884, under the name of San Bartolomé Apostol in which Fr. Cresencio Polo, stationed at Itbayat Mission in Batanes, took charge (*Ibid.*, p. 89)

to Batanes, by way of Calayan, where additional Ivatans could be settling, too.²⁰

In 1754, the Mission in Batanes was open again by Fr. Vicente García who was teaching Theology in the College of Sto. Tomas, and Fr. Joaquín Martín.²¹ They went to Calayan where they found some Ivatans and Babuyans who had returned from Cagayan. Two months after their arrival, the latter fell ill and died. Fr. Garcia rushed back to Luzon and looked for a companion to make another attempt at evangelizing Calayan and then Batanes.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 296. The transferred Babuyans and Ivatans were given Royal privileges through exemptions. The Babuyans were supported by the King for five years, while they built their houses and opened ricefields. (Manuel Vélez, APSR, The "Babuyanes" Section, T. 1, Doc. 14).

The Ivatans were exempted from the same tributes for five years and in addition exempted for thirty years of personal services (cfr. González, *Op. cit.*, p. 21, fn. 10).

The Babuyans and the few Ivatans transferred to Cagayan were given an option to choose freely the place they liked most to start a new town. They opted for Babayuan, because the place seemed to be good to form their ricefields, but in reality it was unhealthy due to the frequent floods, occasioned by the swelling of the Ibanag River. As a result, they soon scattered to other towns, i.e. Aparri, Tagga, Fottol, Capinatan, Abulug, Patta, Lallo, Gattaran, Iguig and Santa Cruz de Gumpat missions. (cfr. APSR, Mss, Copia Simple, etc., 1746, doc. 395, Sec. "Babuyanes," T. 1 Doc. 4).

In the last transfer, effected by Fr. Francisco Roxano, in 1745 who personally visited the islands of Calayan, Babuyanes, Dalupiri and Camiguin — in which the remaining people were taken to Cagayan — he allowed them to select a site, and they decided for Buguey. Those who left Buguey, did so with permission (*Ibid.*, fol. 396).

There were 375 tributes in Babayuan in 1741. In 1751, there are 375 tributes or 1,342 souls of Babuyans in Buguey and Fottol. (cfr. Section "Babuyanes" T. 1, Doc. 6., Fol. 75).

Many of the people died in Babayuan because of the unhealthy place. From 1741 until 1743, 228 died while there were only 95 baptisms. They were all afflicted with pestilence, smallpox and leprosy (Cfr. Vélez, 348 T. I. Sección "Babuyanes", Doc. 14).

At the beginning of February 1742, due to successive transfers — so it seems — there were already 981 souls in Babayuan, plus 37 additional ones conducted soon after by a repentant runaway by the name of Domingo Soriano.

Due to the aforementioned reasons, people began to leave Babayuan for other places, to such extent that in 1746, only 28 tributes (about 150 souls, about 5 persons per tribute) remained in Babayuan. Some of these migrated to Iguig, others to Tagga — a place between Fottol (now Pudtol in the Apayao area) and Abulog, while 273 people chose Buguey for their future domicile. These last ones had already solicited permission in 1745 to build a church in Dao — a site not far from Cape Engaño — which since then began to be known as "Babuyanes Missions", having Buguey and Uangag as its dependencies (Cfr. APSR, Mss. "Babuyanes", T. 1).

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 373; also Ferrando and Fonseca, Vol. V, p. 585; González, *Op. cit.*, p. 23.

He found Fr. Juan Azcárraga who was then the Vicar of the Camalaniugan Mission in Cagayan and volunteered to accompany him. But in order to avoid the lack of housing facilities of the year before, to which the failure of the mission was attributed, it was agreed that Brother Francisco Ferrer, an excellent carpenter would go also with them. He would bring with him, a ready made house which he could join together on arrival in Calayan. This was in 1755.

However, the zeal of these two missionaries did not allow them to wait until the materials for the house were ready for shipment. They sailed without waiting for Fray Ferrer for fear that they loose the propitious westerly winds that would bring them to Calayan. But barely had they arrived when both got sick, and sent a word to Cagayan for a Father to administer to them the last sacraments.²² Fr. Raimundo Favón went, but got sick, too. Then Fr. José Tomás Marín answered their call for help. But, except for Fr. Azcárraga who died,²³ all would have succumbed to the same fate had they not retreated to Cagayan.²⁴ Hence, the mission was abandoned because, indeed, it was a "vast graveyard", inspite of the expressed orders of the Master General, Juan Tomás de Boxadors, who in a letter dated 1757 forbade the Province to discontinue the Batanes Mission.²⁵

By the time of this abandonment, there were already at least 15 Dominicans who had tried to evangelize the Ivatans, either reaching the islands or merely the Ivatans who were in Calayan or in the Cagayan settlements. Only two died in Batanes, while the rest died at sea or in some other places. These were the people who gave up their lives in order that with God's grace, they could plant, water and nurture the seed of faith which later on would take permanent and sturdy roots in the said islands as divine Providence really wanted it to.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 382.; González, *Op. cit.*, p. 23.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 396

²⁴ Collantes, *Op. cit.*, pp. 615-616.

²⁵ ACP, II, pp. 415-416 (These are the words of the Master General: "... illas a Provincia deseri aut relinqui non possint ullo tempore sine praevia ac speciali nostra vel successorum nostrorum licentia"... "they (i.e., the Batanes Missions) can never be abandoned or relinquished by the Province (i.e., of Our Lady of the Rosary) without the previous and special permission of Ours or of our successors". (Cfr. APSR, Mss., Section: *Maestros Generales*, T. III, Folder 4, pag. 376 (419). This letter was dated December 13, 1757 in Rome.

For many years the Ivatans remained shepherdless. They only had contacts with Christian traders, going there chiefly for commercial purposes. In 1769, Don Matías Suárez Vezino landed in Batanes and stayed there for over a month and a half. In 1770, Joaquin Melgarejo, a trader from Cagayan, took some 500 cavans of rice for Batanes.²⁶

However, the Dominicans' zeal of evangelization, mixed up with the human failures of the past attempts, did not stop them from continuing their desire to make the Batanes Catholic. Through the Provincial Council of 1771, they begged the King of Spain to support them in their desire to effect the evangelization of the islands.²⁷ After some deliberations the Alcalde Mayor of Cagayan, Señor Huelva, was ordered by Governor José Basco to send a survey team to Batanes.²⁸ Hence, on May 20, 1782, this team embarked in Aparri and arrived in Batanes on June 1st of the same year. There they asked the Ivatans with their 'Principales' if they were willing to accept the Catholic faith and the tutelage of the King of Spain — expressed in the letter of the Governor of the Philippines. With their usual willingness, they submitted themselves to the Spanish Crown.

Upon their return, Gov. Basco immediately prepared for the annexation of Batanes, while the Dominican Superiors did the

²⁶ Hornedo, *Op. cit.*, pp. 31-35, fn. 65.

²⁷ Ferrando and Fonseca, *op. cit.*, Vol. V. pp. 229-230. ("de los religiosos a las Islas Batanes y de todo lo que anualmente necesitan, o ya de que se les asignen los correspondientes estipendios a los religiosos").

See also the Archives of the University of Santo Tomas — AUST, Section of "Libros", T. III, Folders 108v-109. Here are the words of the Council: "El deseo de fomentar máximas tan del servicio de Dios y propias de la gran piedad de V. M. nos alienta a esforzar nuestras súplicas a fin de que a la Religión de Santo Domingo se le faciliten los medios para adelantar esta obra tan propia de su Instituto y fervoroso celo, dignándose V. M. de disponer se le provea ya de una embarcación para el transporte". (... the desire to promote maxims that redound so much to the service of God and so proper of the outstanding piety of Your Majesty encourages us to insist on our requests, so that the Religion of Santo Domingo be provided with the means to carry on a work so proper of their Order and fervent zeal, and Your Majesty seeing to it that they are not only furnished with a boat for the transport of the Religious to the Batanes Islands and all that they yearly need, but also that they are given the corresponding stipends.)

Also, González, *Op. cit.*, p. 25.

²⁸ The order was to carry out the Royal Cédula of His Majesty, the king of Spain, issued on 23 Aug. 1777, to place the undertaking under his royal patronage; APSR, T. 101, Ms. p. 41 ff.; González, *op. cit.*, p. 23-24.

preparations for establishing the Church — the event the latter had been waiting for a long time.²⁹

1783-1950

The realization of the Dominicans' dream came true when finally on June 4, 1783, Fr. Baltasar Calderón (Parish Priest of Asingan, Pangasinan) and Fr. Bartolomé Artíguez (Parish Priest of Aringay, formerly Pangasinan — now La Union) arrived in Batanes with government officials aboard the packet-boat *Nuestra Señora del Carmen*. After the traditional warm welcome for strangers, typical of Ivatans, the Batanes Mission was established together with the hoisting of the Spanish flag on June 26, 1783 when a huge wooden cross was planted on the plains of Basay (now Basco) — both symbols of the permanent establishment of the Ivatan Church and the dominion of Spain in the islands. Thus, this event crowned the consistent wish of their predecessors who had tried to evangelize the islands for nearly a century.³⁰

From this date onwards, the Ivatan Church began to grow both in number and organization. In 1795, the Province through its Chapter accepted the Basco Vicariate as part of its mission territory under the name of Sto. Domingo de Basco. Fr. Baltasar Fernández Calderón was its first Vicar.³¹

During the same year, the Vicariate of Ivana, under the invocation of San Jose, and its filial mission of Uyugan, under the name of San Antonino, respectively, were accepted by the Province. Fr. Bartolomé Artíguez was named its first Vicar.³²

The Mahatao Mission was made into a Vicariate in 1798, with Fr. Tomás Sánchez as the first Vicar. This was placed under the patronage of San Carlos Borromeo.³³ With this erection, all the towns in the main island of Basay had been established and assigned each a pastor.

²⁹ The letter of Gov. José Basco to Provincial Cristóbal Rodríguez is given by Fr. González, (Cfr. González, *Op. cit.*, p. 28).

³⁰ ACP, II, pp. 526-527.; also González, *Op. cit.*, p. 31.; Hornedo, *Op. cit.*, pp. 37-38.; *Dominicos en Extremo Oriente.*, pp. 265-266; Fr. Feixas, Letter to the Dominican Procurator, dated 1 August 1783; Fernández, *Op. cit.*, pp. 305-306

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 528, 532; *Dominicos en Extremo Oriente*, p. 266.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 593; also *Dominicos en Extremo Oriente*, p. 267.

The neighboring island to the west of Basay is Sabtang. This Mission was accepted and provided by the same Holy Rosary Province with a permanent pastor in 1845, under the patronage of San Vicente Ferrer. Fr. Antonio Vicente was assigned to this mission.³⁴

However, this late acceptance of Sabtang as a permanent mission does not mean that the missionaries never went there, or that there was not any Christian community in the island before. In 1785 the Sabtang mission had already been started as a mission, yet without a permanent pastor of its own. It was a filial mission of the Vicariate of Ivana. Because of the uprising of the Sabteños under Aman Dangat in 1789, the whole population was transferred to Ivana in the Batan Island (mainland) in 1791. Here in Ivana, the Sabteños would have to stay for the next 50 years, although they were permitted to go back to take care of their fields during the planting and harvesting seasons.

Two sites were selected for the Sabtang community. Those from the barrios of Savidug and Chavayan were resettled in San Félix, south of Ivana; and those from Sinakan, Malakdang, Sumnagna and other places were resettled in San Vicente, north of Ivana town proper. Such resettlement went on until 1844, when the missionaries, deemed it proper and safe to allow the Sabteños to go back to their native Sabtang, on a permanent basis. And thus in 1845, we find them having a pastor of their own.³⁵

The last mission to be accepted and given a permanent pastor was that of Itbayat, the island north of Batan Island and the biggest of the three inhabited islands. This mission was accepted by the Provincial Chapter in 1855, under the advocacy of Santa María de Mayan.³⁶ Fr. Vicente Araujo was its first pastor. Like the Sabtang Mission, the Itbayat mission was now raised to the level of Vicariate.

³⁴ ACP, III (ab anno 1802-1878, published in 1878), pp. 189, 202; *Dominicos en Extremo Oriente*, 266.

³⁵ Hornedo, *Op. cit.*, p. 51; also González, *Op. cit.*, inserted between pp. 54 and 55. (The missionaries followed the same pattern tried before in the transferring of Ivatans to Calayan and Cagayan in 1740s).

³⁶ ACP, III, p. 255; *Dominicos en Extremo Oriente*, p. 267.

Having established a mission in every town, the Ivatan Church grew slowly but surely. By the end of the 19th century, the Batanes Islands were entirely Catholic.³⁷ Since then, the Ivatan church has never been without permanent pastors except for the two years of the Revolution in 1898-1900, until the present.³⁸

Due to the separation of Church and State during the American Régime, the Missionaries could not expect financial aid from the government. But they certainly went back there in April 1900 upon the insistent request and petition of the Ivatans on the promise that they themselves would support the Friars. Hence, we see once again the Dominicans united with their Ivatan flock who have been faithful to their promise of giving their material sustenance to this day in the form of personal gifts called "limos".³⁹

The Ivatan Church was under the Bishopric of Nueva Segovia from 1686 until 1909, the year the diocese of Tuguegarao was canonically erected. From 1910 to 1950, it was under the jurisdiction of the latter.⁴⁰ Msgr. Mauricio Foley, bishop of Tuguegarao, was the second bishop to visit the Batanes Church in 1912 during the administration of Governor Egan (1910-1916).⁴¹

³⁷ In 1882, the number of 'infieles' in the islands was zero; (cfr. Hornedo, *Op. cit.*, p. 93; *Misiones Católicas en Extremo Oriente*, p. 420.; González, *Op. cit.*, p. 67.

³⁸ González, *Op. cit.*, p. 110 (where the list of the Missionaries with corresponding dates spent in Batanes are given).

"On Sept. 18, 1898, the steamship *Compañía de Filipinas* anchored in front of Ivana, where it landed a host of revolutionaries. After having hoisted the Katipunan flag in Batanes, they sailed for Aparri taking along the seven Dominicans then stationed in the islands" (cfr. Florentino Fernández, *Conquista de Cagayán por los Revolucionarios Tagalos y Padecimientos de los Religiosos Prisioneros* AUST, Mss. Sección "Folletos", T. 88, pp. 243-267).

³⁹ Hornedo, *Op. cit.*, p. 101. ("limos" is the Ivatan word for alms or gifts given to the parish priest by the Christians, which was done in turns. The gifts are usually in kind, e.g., unhusked rice, corn, eggs, chicken, firewood, etc.). Also González, *Op. cit.*, p. 74.

⁴⁰ *Boletín Eclesiástico de Filipinas*, Vol. 25, Number 271 — Jan. 1951, pp. 61-62.

⁴¹ The first bishop was that of Nueva Segovia in 1895 where he confirmed 5,000 persons in two days. (cfr. Hornedo, *Op. cit.*, p. 91); also Anastacio Idígoras, O.P., "Las Islas Batanes", *La Política de España en Filipinas*, Vol. 6, 1896, p. 259.

From 1950 to the Present

In 1950 this small and poor Mission together with the Missions of Babuyan (Fuga) and Calayan were detached from the Diocese of Tuguegarao. On November 30 of that year, by the bull "Ad faciliorem gregis" — "for the easier ministration of the flock" — of Pius XII, the islands of Batanes and Babuyanes were separated from the Diocese of Tuguegarao and raised into the Prelature *Nullius* of Batanes-Babuyanes, with the Prelate's seat in Basco, Batanes.⁴²

On 7 December 1950, Msgr. Egidio Vagnozzi — Titular Archbishop of Mira and Apostolic Delegate to the Philippines — publicly announced that the Holy See had established a new Prelature which comprised the islands of Batanes and Babuyanes.⁴³

On February 3, 1951, Msgr. Alejandro Olalia — Bishop of Tuguegarao — was named Apostolic Administrator of Batanes "ad nutum Sanctae Sedis".⁴⁴

And on 22 April 1951, Msgr. Vagnozzi — who was already elevated to the post of Apostolic Nuncio to the Philippines on 9 April of the same year — issued the "Decreto Ejecutorio" on the erection of the new Prelature.⁴⁵ This decree was put into effect on the afternoon of Sunday, 23 September 1951, by Msgr. Ricardo Jamias — Vicar General of the Diocese of Tuguegarao — since the Nuncio could not make it personally. The religious celebration held at the Basco Cathedral was attended by the Ivatans with Governor Eugenio Agudo leading them.⁴⁶

With the official erection of the Prelature, the next step was to select a Prelate to occupy the see. The luck fell on Fr. Peregrín de la Fuente, former parish priest of the Holy Cross Parish in San Juan del Monte. He was appointed on 26 July 1951, by Pius XII, with the title of Bishop of Milassa.⁴⁷ On the same date, his nomination was made public by his Excellency the Archbishop of

⁴² BEF, Vol. 25, June 1951, p. 349.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Jan. 1951, p. 61.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, April 1951, p. 246.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Dec. 1951, p. 748.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Dec. 1951, p. 763.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, December 1951, pp. 743-747; Also Florentino Castañón O.P. 'Archipiélago de Babuyanes', Mss., APSR, Section "Babuyanes", T. I, Doc. 19, p. 4; *The Sentinel*, September 23, 1951.

Manila — the late Cardinal Rufino J. Santos — to the faithful of Batanes and Babuyan.

Msgr. de la Fuente was consecrated Bishop on 29 September 1951 by the Apostolic Nuncio — Msgr. Vagnozzi — at the UST Chapel with some civil and ecclesiastical dignitaries present.⁴⁸ He arrived in Basco on 31 October of the same year, and was installed to office the following day by Msgr. Santiago Sancho — Archbishop of Nueva Segovia.⁴⁹ Thus, he became the first Prelate and Bishop of the Prelature and remained so until his death on May 14, 1966 in Basco.

Hence, the Batanes Mission was no longer a mere mission-parish territory, nor a dependent Church, but an independent ecclesiastical unit — that of a Prelature.

The seat left vacant by the death of the late Msgr. Peregrin was given to its first Filipino Prelate, Msgr. Mario Baltazar O.P., who in turn is also the first Filipino Dominican to be nominated to the rank of Prefect in the Philippine Hierarchy. He was appointed by Paul VI on 11 November 1966.⁵⁰ He took possession of his See on January 7, 1967.⁵¹ Thus, he became the second Prelate and the second Filipino Dominican to work in the Batanes Mission. The first was Fr. Pedro Traqueña (1950-1959).⁵²

It is important to note here the presence of a dedicated group of women that helped in the missionary work of the Batanes Mission, i.e., the Sisters from the "Congregación de Religiosas Misioneras de Santo Domingo". They arrived in the islands on 17

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 756-765 (The names of the ecclesiastical dignitaries co-consecrating and the civil authorities present are given in page 756, with a special mention of Don Anastacio Agan and Governor Eugenio Agudo who led the Ivatans in witnessing the celebration. The cultural program after the religious celebration held at the UST Gym was under the direction of the late Fr. Augusto Antonio O.P.); Also in *Voz de Manila*, September 30, 1951 "Solemne consagración ayer del nuevo obispo, Mons. de la Fuente"; *The Sentinel*, September 30, 1951; *Letran News*, October 10, 1951; *Santo Rosario*, published by the Apostolate of the Rosary, Vol. VI-9, No. 68, Sept. 1951, Manila: Cacho Hermanos Inc., pp. 28, 35.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 765.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 41, 1967, p. 130; Vol. 40, 1966, p. 816; *Provinciae Dominae Nostrae del Rosario. Acta Capituli*. Manila: UST Press, 1969, p. 20.

⁵¹ *Santo Rosario* (Jan.-Feb. 1967), Vol. 22, pp. 20-22, 34.

⁵² González, *Op. cit.*, p. 111 (The date refers to his stay in the missions)

May 1955. But due to difficulties inherent to such a remote mission, they left in April 1, 1970.

At present, the Ivatan Mission is well taken care of in all the Parishes by their respective Pastors, except for San Antonino (Uyugan) which remains as a 'daughter church' or "visita" under the care of the Parish Priest of Ivana. All these priests belong to the Province of Our Lady of the Rosary:

Sto. Domingo de Basco — Fr. Gumersindo Hernández — 1954

San Carlos of Mahatao — Fr. Antonio González — 1975

San Jose of Ivana — Fr. Alfredo Castañón — 1947

San Vicente Ferrer

of Sabtang — Fr. Rafael Carpintero — 1973

Santa Maria de Mayan

of Itbayat — Fr. Domingo Déniz — 1968⁵³

The Dominican Sisters of the said "Congregación de Religiosas Misioneras de Sto. Domingo" have returned to lend a helping hand in the mission work of the Batanes Church. They resumed their work in the islands on February 2, 1982.⁵⁴ They help in the Catechetical activities and parochial work as assistants to the Prelate and the Priests. Because of their limited number — three at present — their pastoral and apostolic activities are limited to the capital of Basco only.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE MISSION

The Church that was planted and has taken roots in Batanes two centuries ago, has contributed much — both to the universal church and to Ivatan culture and society. The missionary venture which was primarily and essentially a religious one, was done in a vital, in-depth manner so that it touched the very roots of the Ivatan culture. The missionaries went there as evangelizers,

⁵³ The data were given by Msgr. Mario Baltasar O.P., Prelate of Batanes-Babuyan. The dates pertain to their arrival in the Missions.

⁵⁴ Information on the Sisters was given by Sister Josefa Hontomin and Sister Pía Alcázar, both Ivatan Sisters of the said Congregation. The former was with the group of Sisters who left in 1970.

and in the process, they also cultivated the total cultural situation of the Ivatans, thus humanizing them.

To the Church

In reviewing the lives of the missionaries, we come across models and paradigms of true missionaries in spirit and in fact. In a world where the humanizing aspect is very much emphasized, we could learn much from these illustrious sons of St. Dominic in their approaches and missiological methods. They had achieved the goal of making Batanes an entire Catholic province in 1882 — barely a century after they inaugurated the permanent establishment of the mission in 1783.

Their witnessing to what they preached makes one perceive that they were indeed men of prayer, of sacrifice and 'big hearted men' — in short, real fishers of men as Christ commanded them to be. Says one writer describing the zeal of the first two missionaries: "Great were their hopes, inspired by their vigour and energy. But whether it was due to the intemperate climate or to the little care the Fathers took of themselves, paying scant attention to either sun, rain or water, the two Fathers died barely two months after they arrived in the islands".⁵⁵

Due to these exemplary lives, the seed of religious and priestly vocation began to grow in the flock they were tending. It is very striking to note that it is from this mission where the first Filipino Dominican vocation sprang forth in the person of the late Fray Gregorio Hontomin, son of the parish of San Vicente Ferrer in Sabtang. He entered the Order in 1935 at the St. Albert's Convent in Hongkong, professing three years after in 1938.

His entrance triggered the whole flow of Filipino Dominican men religious who at present is known as the Dominican Province of the Philippines. He also inspired other Ivatans to enter the convent, both male and female faithful. Thus we have a good number of professed Dominican Ivatans:

⁵⁵ Gonzalez, *Op. cit.*, p. 15, quoting Fr. Fonseca, *Op. cit.*, p. 557.

Women Religious:

Basco: Leonarda Dita, Cecilia Cantor, Josefa Hontomin, Estela Senica, Helen Cannu.

Mahatao: Alberta and Rosa Estamo, Guadalupe Cariasio.

Uyugan: Catalina Villacruzada.

Itbayat: Pía Alcázar, Tomasa de Guzmán, Paulina Gato, Julia Patimo, Visitación Ponce.

Sabtang: Bibiana Hontomin, María Gabotero, Salomé Hontoria, Reginalda Aumentado, Paula and Monserrat Elesterio⁵⁶.

Men Religious:

Basco: Bro. Raymundo Bayaras.

Mahatao: Bro. Bonifacio Mergal.

Ivana: Fr. Reynaldo Adalid.

Itbayat: Fr. Ermito de Sagon.

Sabtang: Fr. Wilfredo de León, Fr. Alfonso Loreto.

Among the remnants of the Ivatan settlement in Cagayan, there were two who entered the Order. They are Fr. Orlando Aceron, and his sister Violeta, who joined the "Congregación de Religiosas Dominicanas de Santa Catalina de Sena".

On the laity, the missionaries of old organized a group of women who came together in houses called BEATERIOS, to serve both church and society. They were probably founded by Fr. Fabián Martín in the 1850s. They have been of great help to the missions especially in the maintenance of the church and the teaching of catechism to children. And of course, the many religious organizations that give life to the Ivatan Church and add beauty to the whole church in general, trace their origin from these missionaries. These are the Third Order of St. Dominic, Hijas de María, Corazón de Jesús, and other similar organizations.

⁵⁶ All these women Dominican Religious belong to the "Congregación de Religiosas Misioneras de Santo Domingo".

To Society

The contributions of the missionaries to Ivatan society are of vast proportions. We see the same missionaries acting as engineers, architects, farmers, writers and the like. It is important to jot down here the names of some representatives who excelled in these fields:

Fr. Baltasar Fernández Calderón (1783-1788), one of the two missionaries who inaugurated the permanent establishment of both civil and ecclesiastical societies in Batanes in 1783, selected the site and built the would-be Cathedral in Basco. He wrote the first dictionary of the Ivatan dialect in manuscript form, the "Catecismo" in Ivatan, and "Relaciones" — an account of his voyage to Batanes in 1783.⁵⁷

Fr. Nicolás Castaño (1798-1823) revised and added new terms to the Spanish-Ivatan dictionary prepared by Fr. Calderón and his co-author Fr. Francisco de Paula (1787-1799). He authored also the first book to be printed in the Ivatan dialect entitled "Catecismo de la Doctrina Cristiana".⁵⁸ He improved the already existing roads built by his predecessors and the courthouse in Ivana where he was assigned. He built the bridge in the middle of the town which up to this day is still in perfect condition.

Fr. Antonio Criville (1806-1813) is known for having mastered the dialect's idioms and phraseological terms. He wrote an Ivatan grammar which is preserved in manuscript form.⁵⁹

Fr. Fausto Cuevas (1814-1817) inspite of his limited stay in the mission is likewise remembered to have become a master of the Ivatan dialect. He transcribed and improved the hand-written dictionary of Fr. Castaño.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ *Dominicos en Extremo Oriente*, p. 335. (The date given after each name pertain to the span of time they stayed in the Ivatan mission); also González, *Op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 336.

⁵⁹ *Dominicos Donde Nace el Sol*, p. 343.; González, *Op. cit.*, 63.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

To this galaxy, Fr. Alejandro Ubide (1831-1844) also belongs. He wrote a number of manuscripts, which for a long time were used by the faithful in their life of prayer and devotional practices. He probably was the man who surveyed and chose the present sites of the barrios in which the Sabteños were to settle after their 50 years stay in the town of Ivana — being the Vicar of Ivana during the Sabteños' return.⁶¹

Another engineer, builder and writer priest was Fr. Fabián Martín (1844-1878). He improved the church and convent of Ivana; he constructed the church, convent and school in Uyugan and the bridges in San Antonino (Uyugan) and San Vicente (north of Ivana). The latter is still in perfect condition to this day. He worked for the transfer of the hamlet of Huhmuren and its inhabitants to the town of Ivana. He also excelled in mastering the dialect which enabled him to correct and rearrange the doctrinal homilies of his predecessors. He translated a number of written materials, namely: *Resume of Sacred History*, *The Visits to the Blessed Sacrament* and *The Glories of Mary* (written by St. Alphonsus de Liguori), *The Meditations* (by Fr. Granada), *The Unusual Cases in Confession*, *Moral Maxims*, *The Sermons from Advent to the Fifth Sunday after Easter* (by Fr. Planas), the *Novenas* to: St. Dominic, The Holy Child, St. Joseph, Our Lady of Sorrows, The Blessed Souls; and the *Daily Prayers*. A unique contribution of the same Father was the foundation of the BEATERIOS, already mentioned above.⁶²

Fr. Mariano Gómez (1883-1912) is still remembered to this day by the Ivatans as the zealous missionary who managed to go back there after his imprisonment in Cagayan by the Katipuneros, inspite of his bad health. He was an expert in the seas, braving the treacherous channels that separate the islands in order to perform his ministry, specially in Itbayat which did not have a permanent pastor at that time. He is also the person responsible for the improvement of the breed of cattle in the islands by importing an Australian ox for the purpose.⁶³

⁶¹ González, *Op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 64; Hornedo, *Op. cit.*, p. 75.

⁶³ Hornedo, *Op. cit.*, p. 97

Undoubtedly, these men have really contributed to the progress of the Church and the Ivatan culture. Following such exemplary witnesses and true apostles, the more recent and present missionaries are to be placed side by side with them, perhaps not in achievements, but in the same interest for the betterment of the Church and the Ivatans.

Fr. Julio González (1929-1981) was the first missionary to have spent more than 50 years of his priestly life in the missions (particularly in Mahatao). He was the first to write a book about the Batanes islands which "has been planned along the lines of the twin program of culture and evangelization".⁶⁴

Fr. Florentino Castañón (1931-1971), an energetic missionary, wrote some documents about the Babuyan and Batanes Missions. He was the first missionary to step in the Calayan Mission after it was made a part of the Prelature in 1951, while concurrently assigned in Basco. He died at his parish of Basco on March 18, 1971.

Fr. Alfredo Castañón is the oldest of the remaining priests in the mission. He is responsible for the organization of an electric cooperative which supplies the town of Ivana with electricity. He has resided there for thirty five years.

Fr. Gumersindo Hernández and Fr. Antonio González are both notable experts in the dialect. The former is known for his being a renowned preacher attested by his being always invited to give sermons during town fiestas. He has also translated the entire Mass Readings for the three year cycles. The latter, inspite of his being a 'neophyte' in the mission, could go along with the youth. He is responsible for the Bible Reading Center in Basco, where his students in St. Dominic's College have access for research works in their theology classes. Other youths interested about religion can also avail of the center's facilities.

The other two, Fr. Domingo Déniz and Fr. Rafael Carpintero are both great builders. Fr. Déniz, the parish priest of Itbayat, built the church and the convent without hiring any surveyors,

⁶⁴ González, *Op. cit.*, p. 3. (Fr. González died at the UST Hospital on March 10, 1981)

architects or engineers to do the job. He did all this by himself with the assistance of his flock. In the same way, Fr. Rafael in his parish in Sabtang, renovated the convent and the BEATERIO. He is at present renovating the church.

And last, but not the least, is the Prelate himself — Msgr. Mario Baltasar who opened a college there on July 8, 1968 — barely a year after he took possession of the Prelature. St. Dominic's College is the only private owned school in the whole province and to this date, the only college.

CONCLUSION

As we go over the evolution and development of the Ivatan Mission, we clearly perceive the reason why the Dominicans — especially the Fathers of the religious Province of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary — treasure so much this small and poor mission. It is, indeed, their treasure, now their only mission territory in the Philippines, and the only mission ground where they can continue to exemplify the missionary zeal that their predecessors brought to the Philippines four centuries ago.

Their initial endeavors of trying to evangelize the Ivatans by transferring them from their beloved Batanes to Calayan, and afterwards to Cagayan, proved to be the greatest mistake and failure which resulted to many losses in all aspects. The inevitable return of the natives to Batanes was a clear sign that Providence wanted a Church to be established in Batanes and within the Ivatan community. And the missionaries did not fail to read and heed that sign of God. As a consequence, they are now reaping the fruits of their countless hardships through the contributions of the same mission.

The reasons for the presence of a good number of Priests in Batanes are the difficulties inherent to the climate and geography of the islands. The pastor of Ivana or Basco (mainland) could not readily answer to the calls of spiritual need coming from the islands of Sabtang and Itbayat, which are both separated by treacherous channels, passable only during April, May, June.

The Dominican "earthen vessels" who brought "treasure" to the Ivatans confronted many difficulties, even death, with a courage which they drew from such treasure where their heart now lies. They were battered by huge waves, many times tortured by going without food or sleep, harassed by the strong winds and the piercing cold of the rain — they were spared nothing except defeat. As a result, the Ivatans themselves have become the earthen vessels of that same treasure. Will that treasure remain in and be nurtured by the Ivatan earthen vessels? This question can only be answered by the present missionaries there in Batanes and by the Ivatans themselves.

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