

The Sacred Heart Seminary of Palo (Leyte): Under the Diocesan Clergy (1969-1994)*

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This article covers the years 1969 to 1994 of the educational history of Sacred Heart Seminary, Palo, Leyte. The era from 1944 to 1969, or better still, the “silver period” of pioneer work by the SVD’s, is over, and these missionaries thought that the diocesan clergy, now come of age, was ready to continue the herculean task of forming young men for the diocesan priesthood. This, however, as the diocesan priests would later discover, was too formidable a challenge. The measly resources notwithstanding, they were to prove themselves fit for the task. With the tools in their hands, the diocesan priests were gearing themselves up for the delicate job entrusted to them by the Church which, at the time was undergoing tremendous transformation.

1969: The “Take-over”

The take-over of the diocesan priests for the seminary administration happened in a gradual fashion. As early as the school year 1967-1968, the phasing in of the local clergy began to be felt when young priests —all alumni of the seminary— joined the seminary teaching staff. They were Fathers Bartolome Pastor, Cecilio Sipaco, Pablito Tantoy and Ramon Salazar.¹

By the school year 1968-1969, the last year in the seminary for the SVD Fathers, a diocesan priests were already occupying some key

* See previous article on the Seminary’s First Twenty-Five Years (1944-1969) in *Philippiniana Sacra* Vol. XXXII, No. 95 (May-August, 1997), pp. 265-298. (Ed.)

¹ Cf. “Administration and Faculty,” in *Stella Maris* [*StM*], (1968), 4-6.

positions in the seminary administration. Father Vicente Lora was the prefect of studies, Father Filomeno Bactol was the procurator, and Father Hermenegildo Adolfo, the assistant prefect of the minors.² Father Galo Montaña came in as professor.³

It was in the academic year 1969-1970 when the take-over of the diocesan clergy happened in full force. For the first time in the history of Sacred Heart Seminary, its priests-alumni were taking the cudgels in the seminary administration. Father Cipriano Hadlocon became the rector. His staff included Fathers Galo Montaña as vice-rector, Alpiniano Villamor, spiritual director, Vicente Lora, prefect of studies, Filomeno Bactol, procurator, Aresio Astorga, prefect of discipline, majors, and Frater Salvador Dumas, prefect of discipline, minors. Fathers Jaime Segun and Pablito Tantoy were with the staff during the first semester.⁴ Apart from their offices, these Fathers were assigned the role of professors, even as they were assisted by lay members of the faculty, one male and seven female.⁵

Thus began a new epoch. This time it was the local clergy's turn to address the recurrent issues in seminary administration: approaches to formation, faculty development, library, finances, and so on. Slowly, too, the twenty-five year old seminary was entering into an interesting period of contemporary Church History, in the so-called, "sound and fury of renewal."

Changes in Administration

In 1969 Msgr. Manuel Salvador⁶ of the Archdiocese of Cebu was appointed new Bishop of Palo, taking the place of Bishop Teotimo

² Cf. Administration and Faculty, in *St M* (1969) 8-10.

³ RBA-MS, Ms. 1.2.2.5, p. 2. "RBA-MS" refers to the manuscripts personally compiled by this author.

⁴ Cf. Administration and Faculty, in *StM* (1970) 8-9.

⁵ Ibidem; also see M. L. PANTA, "A Short History of Sacred Heart Seminary," in *StM* (1970) 6.

⁶ Bishop Salvador, who was born on January 7, 1925, is a native of Dalaguete, Cebu. He was ordained priest on March 21, 1953, then Auxiliary Bishop of Cebu on December 3, 1966. His appointment as Bishop of Palo was on October 21, 1969. See *Annuario Pontificio Per L'Anno 1970* (from hereon, "AnPont"), TPV, Vaticano 1971, p. 353.

Pacis, who was transferred to the Diocese of Legazpi.⁷ Among his early moves was the appointment of new faces to beef up the yet-fledgling local seminary administration. Msgr. Esteban Justimbaste was appointed Rector. Joining him were Fathers Leonardo Medroso as vice-rector and prefect of the majors, Alejandrino Parilla as vice-prefect of the majors, Oscar Lorenzo as prefect of studies, Antonio Adre, spiritual director of the minors, and Fernando Almadro, assistant prefect of the minors. The rest were "old hands," having been in the staff the previous year or two: Fathers Filomeno Bactol, procurator, Aresio Astorga, this time appointed prefect of the minors, and Galo Montaña, spiritual director, majors.⁸

Problems and Concerns

The take-over of the diocesan clergy was not without difficulties and problems. Bereft of foreign financial support, to which the SVD Fathers had easy access, the seminary was now left alone to fend for itself. Finances were put in the red, a problem that the seminary would have to contend with through the years. This factor alone was enough to affect the other aspects in the administration: salary for teachers, honorarium and stipends for the Fathers, budget for the library, repair and maintenance of the house, food, among others.

Bishop Salvador had one solution in mind: to send the college seminarians back to Cebu. He was in agreement with the other suffragan bishops to have one regional seminary for seminarians of the Cebu ecclesiastical province. So during the school year of 1971-1972, the first and second year college seminarians enrolled at San Carlos Seminary-College in Cebu. The third and fourth year classes were left behind in Palo, since the plan being was to phase out the college and to leave the seminary with just the high school department.

⁷ Pacis' appointment as Bishop of Legazpi was dated May 23, 1969. He resigned on June 4, 1980, and from thence retired quietly to his dear Vincentian family (De la Goza writes that Rome's response to Bishop Pacis' resignation letter came in January 1981 yet). He died while celebrating mass on July 8, 1984; see C. BRANSOM ET AL, "Philippine Episcopology" IV, in *Boletín Eclesiástico de Filipinas* 65 (1989) 671; also see R. DE LA GOZA, CM, - J. MA. CAVANNA, CM, *Vincentians in the Philippines 1862-1962*, p.581.

⁸ Cf. Administration and Faculty, in *StM* (1971) 10-12.

Despite the wholesome intention and good motivation of the bishop and the seminary Fathers, this move failed to materialize. "I heard that regionalism was heightened, [a thing that led to] the breakdown of discipline and the lowering of the standard of education," noted Bishop Medroso, recalling his stint as a former member of the seminary staff.⁹ The bishop was referring to the seminarians' (who came from various provinces in Visayas and Mindanao) banding themselves by areas of origin or by proximity of culture — natural groupings that usually resulted in the formation of clique-groups oftentimes hostile to one other. As these clique groups were sorely affecting the seminary's community spirit and morale, the Palo seminarians were pulled out of the seminary in Cebu the following school year, and were sent back to Palo. The college department, which was in danger of being closed, was in full operation once more.

Another issue that concerned the bishop was faculty development. The Department of Education perceived the need for the Fathers to earn more credit units in pedagogy in order to qualify as teachers in a private but government-recognized school like the seminary.¹⁰ To the mind of the government, the Fathers' classical education in the seminary, however rich, was yet wanting of its pedagogical component. To address this problem, the priests were required to attend basic courses in Education like, *Principles and Methods of Teaching, Curriculum Development, Evaluation and Measurement, and Philippine Educational System* —courses they never heard of during their college years in the seminary.

THE SEVENTIES: THE "SOUND AND FURY" OF THE RENEWAL

The seventies had the seminary —like all other seminaries in the world— experiencing the aftermath of Vatican II. All of a sudden there was a new spirit and, concomitant to it, new demands. A mutation was taking place, or so it seemed. Even in a remote and unknown section of the Church like Palo, Leyte, there was this feeling of change, of seminarians being less docile and pliable than they had been before the Council.

⁹ Bishop Medroso's Letter to this author, dated November 14, 1994, p. 3.

¹⁰ The Philippine government requires a minimum of 18 units in Education to qualify for a teaching job.

The Ferment and the Expression

This "liberal attitude" as it would later be called, would be reflected in the seminary's annual, the *Stella Maris*. Seminarians "let off-steam," as it were, their own thoughts of the current issues, both secular and sacred. The editorial of the 1971 issue of the *Stella Maris* signaled that '*times have changed*'. "Years ago," it said, "no 'paragon of Christianity' glowered more lustrously than the priest himself living with inert goodness." "These days," the editor continued, "his handwaves of blessings which used to be the fount of consoling graces, have come to be reviewed as subtle guises of opportunism."

The editorial pointed out the manner of life deemed as proper for a priest during these changing times. The priest "has to understand the modern world, feel its problems, and speak its language... He cannot anymore be a silent witness to injustice and oppression... He must stop being cold to the sufferings of the people, cease to be just inertly good... and so retrieve their confidence, or face the explosion of that hostility to total rejection... The pulpit has descended from the altar to the people. The need is for real action — alive, active and concrete Christian."¹¹

In the 1972 issue of the *Stella Maris*, the seeds of "democracy," or of this fermenting character sown at Vatican II, was felt all the more as seminarians expressed in print their critical views and observations regarding seminary formation. "New waves of forces have changed the entire atmosphere surrounding the seminary formation more profoundly than in any other times," the editor pointed out. "The strong sense of the past which somehow dominated the seminary formation is slowly vanishing." Then there were "subtle alterations in the methods of training."¹²

This upheaval was a worldwide phenomenon. A new breed was emerging caught on instantaneously in almost all campuses. Jerome Costibolo wrote his own version of the new generation in his article, "The Angry Breed," where he described what makes the "seminarians

¹¹ [C. CINCO, JR.], "Editorial. Quo Vadis, Padre?" in *StM* (1971), 7.

¹² [C. DE VEYRA], "Editorial. An Introduction to the Priest-Alumni," in *StM* (1972), 2.

of the modern era." This is the generation of seminarians, he said, who "revolt in silence and view developments with a wary eye... [They] are hankering for a meaningful training that will meet the needs of the day." Further, he blamed the seminary's tendency to dwell in the past. Were it not for this, he said, "these commendable guardians of God's chosen would now be well on their way to providing an education [that is] in keeping with the times."¹³ Another seminarian even — and forthrightly — put in his own piece of mind on Church issues like celibacy, priestly identity, on "Jesus Christ Superstar," the giddy phenomenon of the seventies. Looking at the teaching of metaphysics in the seminary with a wary eye, he argued that "Metaphysics. . . is based upon the thinking of men whose intellectual actuations were rooted in medieval realities." He admitted that reason, as a spiritual power, is permanent, but "the conditions which determine the mode of reason do change, and with them, the quality and extent of our knowledge." In conclusion, he says, "metaphysics, for whatever truth it possesses, will not survive as a credible science, if it permits itself to bog down in its own intransigent absolutism."¹⁴

As Justimbaste and Aruta report it, this liberal attitude did not remain in the intellectual plane. By this time, the seminarians were sporting long hair, wearing sandals, and enjoying greater freedom of movement everywhere.¹⁵ Once, the prefect of discipline had a "Grievance Corner" fixed in one section of the house to allow seminarians vent their comments, suggestions, criticisms of any kind. The result was a deluge. Posted were the seminarians' complaints in almost all aspects of seminary life: their dissatisfaction with the food, their criticisms against one or the other seminary Father, their desire for a better equipped library, their demand for more modern laboratory facilities, and all other things that used to be taken for granted, if not talked in whispers, in the past. This certainly annoyed the administration that, at one point, the office of the procurator, in answer to the seminarians' ever-increasing howls, reported to the last detail the seminary's drained finances, as well as the back accounts of many a seminarian.

¹³ J. COSTIBOLO, "The Angry Breed," in *StM* (1972), 29.

¹⁴ M. PANTA, "Thoughts on the World at Large," in *StM* (1972), 27-28.

¹⁵ E. JUSTIMBASTE-J. V. ARUTA, SHS: "Fifty Years of Grace," in J.V. ARUTA (ed.), *Jubilate! Sacred Heart Seminary, 50 Years of Grace.*, p. 35.

On Socialization

The presence of lady members in the faculty roster was also part of the seminary's aim to develop among seminarians mature relationships with women. This exposure to the "female aspects" of life had already been addressed by the SVD Fathers towards the last years of their work in the seminary. Father Gil Cañete, who entered the seminary in 1968, reminisces his student, if not pubescent, days: "Mercifully, girls in our second and first years were no distraction because many of us thought there was only one sex! The lay teachers of the distaff side were ma'ams, not dames. It was in the third year... I mean the awakening... [when] we began to tease and harass the poor ladies with our adolescent rowdiness... I don't think malice was boosting all those misdemeanors in the classrooms. We probably wanted attention, because deep inside we had questions on our physical make-up which only women could answer."¹⁶

It was in 1972 when the seminarians presented a play, "The Death of a Dream." For the first time in its history, young ladies took part in the stage presentation and shared lead roles with the seminary actors. In the same production seminarians tied up with the female students of the Assumption Academy of Tanauan and formed a polyphonic choir.¹⁷ It had been quite a time since the public had been benefited with a stage play produced by the seminary. The most memorable ones were in the fifties and the sixties yet, when the seminarians presented, among others, "Everyman," "Faust, the Prince of Darkness," "I Confess," "The Blue Ghost" and "Dust on the Road." This time, in the 70's, the public was slowly taking notice of a changing aspect in the seminary life. All these, in the name of socialization.

Such was the *état d'affaires* of the seventies. The seminarians were impatient to push towards new shores. Their fresh idealism urged them to cry and demand for almost anything: for academic excellence, for involvement in the "outside world," for adjustment to new trends. In one word, for change. How did the seminary fathers respond to this "clarion call"?

¹⁶ RBA-MS, Letter of Father Gil Cañete to this author, dated November 17, 1994, Ms. 1.2.1.2, p. 1

¹⁷ "The Year in Brief," in *StM* (1972) 34.

New Approaches to Formation

Changes in seminary policies and orientation were inevitable. Earlier in 1971, barely over a year after the final ratification by Pope Paul VI of the *Ratio Fundamentalis*, the seminary Fathers were already taking the provisions of this Basic Plan at heart. Msgr. Esteban Justimbaste, the seminary rector, admitted in 1971 that “the Seminary and Seminarians of the 70’s are no longer what they used to be ten years ago. The changes of attitudes and concepts in the socio-economic and even in the moral and religious fields postulate new approaches and techniques in pedagogy and character formation as confirmed in the *Ratio Fundamentalis*.”¹⁸ Father Bactol echoed the same line of thought: “The Church has undergone a tremendous transformation. Whether we like it or not, we have been a part of that change. Along the line of seminary training, we have seen a massive transformation. The intellectual and the spiritual life and discipline of the seminarians have been recast... in order to bring our students abreast with the moving times.”¹⁹

Thus began an “open-door policy” to formation. For instance, where before the strains of classical music like that of Tsaikowsky and Bach were the only ones heard, contemporary tunes started to fill the seminary air; periods of *magnum silentium* were reduced; parents, relatives and friends of seminarians whose visits were strictly regulated, could already come to the seminary at more frequent intervals; dialogue and communication between seminarians and the fathers became more habitual. At the bottomline was a gradual discarding of the old view that “a vocation can best be nourished by sheltering it away from the wicked and corrupt world.”²⁰ The seminarians must face the world and become involved in its struggle.

New Administration

School year of 1972-1973 saw a resuffling of seminary officials. Msgr. Justimbaste was reassigned to his former post in Carigara. Father Bactol became the director of Holy Cross Academy in Carigara,

¹⁸ E. JUSTIMBASTE, “Rector’s Message,” in *StM* (1971).

¹⁹ F. G. BACTOL, “Postscript,” in *StM* (1972), p. 10.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

which, at time, was in total ruins after a fire razed it to the ground. Father Almadro left for Manila for further studies, and Father Adre was appointed assistant parish priest in Burauen. Left behind was Father Oscar Lorenzo, who, midway through the school year, became the rector. Appointed to the seminary were Fathers Benjamin Bacierra (who, until this time, was doing graduate studies at the De La Salle University in Manila) as prefect of discipline, Benjamin Gobenciong as spiritual director, Hermenigildo Adolfo as professor and assistant prefect of discipline. Joining the staff were two RVM Sisters, Sr. Ma. Aurea Ledona, the seminary procurator and Sr. Ma. Victoria Bibera, as Math and Spanish teacher. The latter, who had a master's title in education, subsequently occupied the position as the high school principal.²¹

Under the rectorship of Father Lorenzo which lasted until 1975, three more seminary fathers were appointed: Father Domingo Matiga in 1973,²² and Fathers Salvador Dumas and Isidoro Villarino in 1974.²³

It was also around this period when alterations were made in some names of positions. Thus, the Prefect of Discipline has from thence been called, the Dean of Students; the name, Prefect of Studies, varies according to departments: the Dean of Studies for the college department, and the Principal for the high school. The term, majors, which usually referred to the college seminarians, and minors, for the high school seminarians, by common usage disappeared. The terms, college seminarians and high school seminarians have come into more frequent use, so were college and high school, to distinguish the two departments. The word, special class,²⁴ fell into disuse, as these seminarians were incorporated into the departments they enrolled in.

On June 14, 1973, Msgr. Cipriano Urgel, hitherto Bishop of Calbayog, was installed as the fifth bishop of the Diocese of Palo

²¹ Cf. "Administration and Faculty," in *StM* (1973) 3-5; since then the RVM Sisters have been helping the seminary both in administrative and teaching work.

²² Cf. "Administration and Faculty," in *StM* (1974).

²³ Cf. "Administration and Faculty," in *StM* (1975) 4-6.

²⁴ This refers to the group of seminarians who had put in years of schooling outside and entered the seminary midway through the course. They were required to do an accelerated study of Latin before getting incorporated into a regular class.

during the solemn rites held at the Palo Cathedral.²⁵ Bishop Urgel was a former director of a diocesan school prior to his episcopal ordination, and, as a bishop, labored with the poor in the Diocese of Calbayog.²⁶ These twin experiences — the academic and the pastoral — of the new ordinary would from hereon exercise a great influence in the seminary formation.

The Seminarians and the “Protest Culture”

The mid-seventies were of exceptional turmoil. Social, economic and political conditions of the country were at their nadir point, while massive street rallies and demonstrations were at their heights; the “defense of the poor and the oppressed” was a constant outcry. In the seminary classes were spiced with newsbriefs and commentaries about the political situation; a resource person from outside, be he a layman or a religious, would be invited to give a lecture on relevant themes; newspapers and magazines were daily must-read items to keep seminarians abreast with the issues of the day. Robert Doller, now a lawyer — who entered the seminary around the time when Martial Law was declared — has this to say of his seminary experience during those turbulent years:

“I was still too young then to comprehend the meaning of such phrases as the ‘New Society’, ‘democratic revolution’ and ‘human rights’. I didn’t even know the real meaning of the value of freedom which many seminarians in their senior years were shouting for. But I remember riding one day with the seminary Fathers to the airport to send off a visiting priest from Manila whose brief stay with us was a well kept secret, lest, the elder seminarians claimed, the government would hear of his whereabouts and pick him up... Riding with an apparently very important visitor thrilled me, but what struck me most was the man himself: his simplicity... his dedication to help the down-trodden, and his courage to stand up for just causes...”²⁷

²⁵ Msgr. Urgel was born in Hindang, Leyte on September 26, 1918; ordained priest on March 17, 1945; consecrated Bishop of Calbayog on June 12, 1962 and, eleven years later, was appointed Bishop of Palo on April 12, 1973. See *AnPont Per L’Anno 1977*, TPV, Vaticano, 1977, p. 405.

²⁶ Cf. R. AGUILOS, “On Palo’s First Archbishop: Guessing God’s Ways Right,” in *StM* (1983), 29.

²⁷ R. DOLLER, “In My Time,” in J. V. V. (ed.). *Jubilate!*, cit., p. 62.

Simply put, there was an orientation towards critical awareness of the present realities. Socio-political issues merited discussions, reflections, and more importantly, action. "The seminary's priorities then were all geared toward fighting poverty," this ex-seminarian-turned-lawyer continues. "In fact, alleviating poverty was our only concern."²⁸ On several occasions seminarians engaged in open and formal debates among themselves or with students from other schools and colleges outside. During the seminary week festivities, when seminarians would be divided among themselves into competing teams, themes of the celebrations reflected the pervading socio-political air. For instance, the 1972 seminary week celebration carried the theme, *PagReKa*, an acronym for *Paglaum, Rebolusyon, Kauswagan* (Hope, Revolution, Unity), and the seminarians were divided into teams that bore the names, *Radicals*, *Moderates*, and *Rightists* — nomenclatures that rang a familiar bell during those exciting times in the Philippines.²⁹ Oratorical and extemporaneous speech contests during the "Literary Nights" seminarians were occasions for seminarians to describe, comment on, and criticize these realities. In their annual retreat in November of 1974, the retreat master, Father Bart Pastor, the diocesan pastoral action director at the time, spiced the traditional meditation conference-type formats with group sharing and reflection, group dynamics and, towards the end of the retreat, an evaluation of the seminary policies.³⁰ It was to the mind of the seminary fathers that seminarians should not only develop and master their communication skills; they should likewise form a critical mind, and relate all their studies to a deeper understanding of themselves and their surroundings, and in this case, their community and their country.

Cultural and Literary Attempts

The evolving patterns of seminary life, however, was not all "fire and fury." Somewhere in-between were attempts to develop the seminarians' literary skills. Seminarians themselves were aware that the golden age of prolific literary writers among them had passed. Even the *Stella Maris*, the seminary's literary medium, had long

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 63.

²⁹ Cf. SHS "Periscope," in *StM* (1973), 25.

³⁰ Cf. R. AGUILOS, "Happenings," in *StM* (1975), 30.

ceased to be issued quarterly, and was reeling off the press only once a year. To solve the imminent drought of talents, seminarians formed literary clubs and organizations.

In 1970, they formed the *LitArts Club* composed people with inclination and interest for literary work, language and art. Every month the members issued a newsletter called, "The Gleam"; they sponsored essay writing, poetry and drawing contests, collected stamps, and held exhibits.³¹ The club, however, lasted only two school years. Still in 1970, "The Helians," organized by a group of college seminarians, held their "debut" by way of a cultural presentation.³²

In 1973, a year after the proclamation of Martial Law, the publication of a school newsletter was revived. This time it was called *Periscope*, published monthly. But since it was under the Martial Law regime, even a mimeographed publication of eight to twelve pages was under government scrutiny. Each time *Periscope* came off the press, it always had to bear the stamp of approval by the Department of Information. It would not take long before the newsletter would fizzle out. By 1976, the publication died a natural death. In the early part of 1974 a group of seminarians became the founding members of a regional science club which decided to publish a bi-monthly science newsletter to be circulated around the participating schools of the region. Launching Pad, as this science newsletter was called, became a venue for the students' science-related articles and research outputs, only to lay defunct after a couple of publications. The students were more interested in concerns other than newsletter writing. To the seminarians, however, it was not so much the publication that mattered, as to the experience of having worked with students from other schools. Socialization was a password among seminarians; a work-experience of this nature was, therefore, more than welcome.

It was also about this time, in 1974, when another organization, KITA Organization, was formed. The group's objective was to keep the cultural and the literary flames in the seminary a-burning, especially during that period of cultural inactivity.³³

³¹ See "Organizations," in *StM* (1970), 41.

³² Cf. M. Panta, "Insight 1970-71," in *StM* (1971), 41.

³³ Cf. R. AGUILOS, *Happenings*, cit., p. 30,

In 1977, another group emerged, and the members called themselves, *The Forerunners*. They committed themselves to reading at least one good book a month and each member was to make an oral reading report during the club meeting. Then they installed a huge bulletin board in one section of the house and posted a potpourri of literary items: poems, articles quoted from magazines, short stories, essays, and the like. For want of a name to describe these literary outputs, they simply called the corner, Loose Leaf, Random Pages. This way, the "literary movement" was again catching on in some small measure.

Meanwhile, the publication of the *Stella Maris* continued. Until the present writing, this has become the bumper crop of seminarians who have the flair for writing, and whose literary talents needed an "institutional recognition." *Stella Maris* has been that institution.³⁴

Further Changes in the Administration

School year 1975-1976 had the seminary with a different administrative staff. The rector, Father Lorenzo, now assigned to Ormoc parish, was replaced by a "seminary returnee," Father Bactol, after the latter's three-year stint as director of Holy Cross Academy in Carigara. Father Silas Florencio became the dean of students of the college department. Completing the roster were Fathers Salvador Dumas, dean of students, high school department, Isidoro Villarino, college spiritual director, Florencio Gerones, high school spiritual director. Father Aluino Estalilla moved in as a member of the teaching staff. Sr. Ma. Victoria Bibera remained as the high school Principal.³⁵ A slight reshuffling of priests' pastoral assignments in the diocese likewise affected the seminary Fathers the next school year. Father Dumas left for a post outside the seminary. Father Raul Kempis was appointed procurator.³⁶

³⁴ An attempt at reviving the publication of monthly newsletter was made in the school year 1978 when the seminarians published "The Cardinal." It went on for a couple of years then fizzled out once more. Again in the early eighties, "The Cordial" the letterhead of the late sixties, reeled off, only to be discontinued. It reemerged in the nineties.

³⁵ Cf. "Administration and Faculty," in *StM* (1976), 6-8.

³⁶ Cf. "Administration and Faculty," in *StM* (1977), 8-10.

When Father Bactol went on a study leave, Father Andres Villarante was appointed the seminary's acting rector. The other fathers who figured in the roster were Father Wilfredo Alejan, as high school dean of students, Father Isidro Arroyo and Reverend Deacon Jerome Costibolo as faculty members.³⁷ By the end of the decade, Fathers Vicente Purgatorio and William Antillon joined the staff, while Father Leonardo Medroso, now the parish priest of Palo Cathedral, taught subjects in philosophy.

Faculty Development

The issue on faculty development actually arose at the early part of the local clergy take-over. The bishop immediately addressed the situation by sending priests to the university to study. The priests, though, did not remain in the seminary long enough, and were assigned to other posts in the diocese. Further, the seminary, being an educational institution recognized by the government, needed administrators with the requisite academic qualifications. Strictly speaking, the government required school principals, college deans and college teachers to have masteral degrees, or at least, have earned a sufficient number of units toward a master's title. To qualify for a teaching position in high school, the teacher needs a bachelor's degree in education, or at least, any college degree with 18 units in education. It was in the school year 1978-1979 when the seminary fathers, after having earned the sufficient number of credits in education, took and passed the National Board of Examinations for Teachers. It was supposed to be a start of a practice for priests who would later on be assigned to the seminary. For whatever reasons there were, this was discontinued.

Notwithstanding this deficiency in pedagogical training among the seminary fathers, their background in humanities and theological education was in no way lacking. Those who formed the administration and faculty in the seventies were alumni of the seminary college department between the years 1956 to 1965, inclusive, when thomistic philosophical education was at its height, and when a heavy stress was laid on classical languages like Latin, Spanish and Greek, and litera-

³⁷ Cf. "Administration and Faculty," in *StM* (1978), 4-6. Rev. Costibolo had just completed his theological studies at the St. Mary's Seminary and University, Baltimore, Maryland, USA; at the time he joined the faculty, he was preparing for his priestly ordination.

ture. They were products of the “classical age,” so to speak, of the seminary’s academic history.³⁸ As to their theological training, a good number of those seminary Fathers from 1969 to 1979 were holders of a licentiate degree in Sacred Theology at the University of Sto. Tomas Central Seminary. One had a master’s degree in philosophy.

The priests’ sustaining effort to remain in the seminary did not prove longer than expected, however. Owing to the situation of the diocese, many seminary fathers had to be pulled out, and were given pastoral assignments. A worse scenario happened when others left for the bigger city never to come home. Further in 1975, the UST Central Seminary revised its theological course of studies. From the four-year theology program, the curriculum was extended to five years, adding one more year for a student to earn a two-pronged academic title, which is both an ecclesiastical degree in theology and a civil degree in religious education (the latter being Master in Higher Religious Studies). In effect, after earning a bachelor’s degree in theology in the third year, oftentimes, the seminarians and priests-to-be would remain in the seminary for a year more. Afterwards they left for the diocese to prepare for their sacerdotal ordination but did not return to finish their licentiate. There actually have had been attempts since 1977 by some priests to finish the course. But the concerns in the priestly ministry had precluded them from completing their studies.

Meanwhile, the seminary solicited the services of religious sisters to help out in the seminary administration.³⁹ There was a time from 1977 to 1979 that the seminary had a religious sister for a college dean, in the person of Sr. Ma. Amada Titong. The presence of a religious sister or two in the seminary campus started to change the seminary profile and character. Apart from putting in the needed

³⁸ Says Bishop Medroso in his letter. “The intellectual level of the students and graduates of the seminary [was] very high. This I attribute to several factors. The screening system of the seminary [was] rigid. It [admitted] only of students who could go through the abstract, systematic and philosophical offerings of the seminary. The few that were finally admitted [were] homogenous in their interest and capacity” (Bishop Medroso’s Letter cit., pp. 1-2).

³⁹ That was the time when Sr. Ma. Victoria Bibera, RVM, came to be the high school principal. The other RVM Sisters to become the high school principal are mentioned as follows: Sr. Ma. Rufita Jardin (1979-1982), Sr. Ma. Carmela Aberilla (1982-1987), Sr. Ma. Francisca Lalic (1987-1988), and Sr. Ma. Connie Pineda (1988 to the present). See RBS-MS, Ms. 1.2.2.5, pp. 11-13.

female aspects in a male-dominated world like the seminary, there, too, was a gradual acceptance of non-priests cutting their teeth at seminary administration. Subsequently, sisters belonging to other religious congregations came to help in the teaching apostolate in the seminary: the order of *Notre Dame* (OND) in 1976, and the Order of St. Francis (OSF) in 1978.

It was during his rectorship when Father Bactol received a scholarship grant by the CEAP-Misereor⁴⁰ Foundation for a training in educational management at the De La Salle University, in Manila. After a fourteen-month training, and with a master's degree tucked up in his sleeves, Fr Bactol returned to the seminary for the school year 1978-1979 to carry out his newly-acquired expertise.⁴¹

The Academic Curriculum

Meanwhile, the academic program of the seminary during the first half of the seventies went with the usual pace and pattern, even as the curriculum followed basically the same design.

High school education faithfully followed the general high school program of the government. Additional subjects were Latin and Religion which were offered in all year levels in high school.⁴² Spanish was taught in the fourth year high school. On November 23, 1973, the seminary high school graduating students joined the rest of the students all over the country in taking the National College Entrance Examinations in order to gain admission to any college in the country.

⁴⁰ CEAP stands for "Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines", a corporate body of all Catholic schools in the Philippines.

⁴¹ Three more priests in the diocese enjoyed the scholarship grant offered by the CEAP-Misereor Foundation: Aluino Estalilla, who finished in 1981, Wilfredo Alejan, in 1983, and Ramon Aguilos, in 1986. The sending of priests for further studies formed part of the five-year development plan proposed by Father Bactol: that priests be sent to school so that they "acquire the necessary techniques, knowledge and skills in pedagogy; and so that they can earn degrees and qualification for teaching, thereby improving the standard of instruction in the Sacred Heart Seminary." See F. G. BACTOL, *Five-Year Development Plan for Sacred Heart Seminary, Palo, Leyte, 1978-1983*, Unpublished Master's Thesis, De La Salle University, Manila, 1978, pp. 85-86.

The college curriculum remained essentially the same. Philosophy continued to be the major field, with the basic disciplines in scholastic philosophy as the major areas for study: Logic, Epistemology, General Ethics, Metaphysics, Cosmology, Rational Psychology, Cosmology and Theodicy. History of Philosophy was offered in two semesters. There were two education courses: History of Education and Educational Psychology. Theology courses included Apologetics and Survey of Theology. Obligatory courses required by the government formed part of the design: Economics, Taxation and Land Reform, Jose Rizal's Life and Works, Philippine Constitution, Mathematics, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, and Physical Education. A strong emphasis in the study of languages was still in force. English and Latin continued to enjoy as four-year length courses, or eight semesters, although Spanish subjects were reduced to two years. Greek was still a required subject, and was taken in two semesters.⁴³

When the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports proposed some revisions in the academic curriculum for all colleges and universities in the Philippines, the seminary course of studies underwent some minor, but significant, changes. For one thing, the seminarians were already required to undergo the ROTC, a course they had been exempted from for years. Statistics, another course in Mathematics was added to the curriculum; *Pilipino*, the study of the Philippine language and literature, became a mandated course. Then there was that government requirement for all students to undergo what was the Youth Civic Action Program (YCAP), a service-oriented undertaking before receiving a college diploma.

The appointment of Sr. Amada Titong to the college deanship effected more definite curricular changes. At a time when the seminary was bereft of educational experts among its roster, the religious sister, who held a doctorate in educational administration, was the person qualified to take a harder look at the seminary course of studies. In reorganizing the courses, there were a myriad of things to be considered. First were the obligatory courses, or those required by the government. As the Philippines was still under Martial Law, the government was imposing upon all colleges schools courses that were aligned with government-related programs, like Family Planning and Population Education, Youth Civic Action Program, and Green

Revolution. As a compromise, these courses were incorporated in other disciplines. The preponderance of these government-required subjects greatly affected the seminary's major field — Philosophy. Hence, instead of the long-established custom to make some philosophy subjects as five-unit courses, they were reduced to three, to give way to these government-required courses. A particular feature in the revised curriculum was the addition of more teacher-training courses as electives, the aim of which was to expose the seminarians into the methods and principles of teaching and to prepare them for a more effective teaching apostolate.

The curriculum began its implementation in the academic year 1979-1980, and would take more than a decade before it would undergo another major revamp. Through these years, however, some descriptive titles would have to be altered, especially after 1986 when the political situation of the country had changed. In effect, courses closely allied to the programs of the old regime were rendered irrelevant and were scrapped from the course of studies.

There also arose problems in the teaching of Latin. Even priests assigned to teach these courses felt themselves incapable of handling Latin literature to the seminarians. There was a dearth of textbooks. The issue was resolved by altering some of the Latin's descriptive titles. The course on Livy was changed to "Survey of Latin Literature," and Horatian poetry became "Ecclesiastical Latin."

To end this section, it might be well to cite a portion of Gil Cañete's letter to this author, as he looks back at his college years, which were way within the first half of the seventies:

"My college years [were] a big transition. Then, I began to think independently, upheld the principles I thought were appropriate to my chosen calling and reject the pseudo ones. It was exciting to be addressed, 'Brother', and to don the cassock. Philosophy became the stuff by which life can become sensible; it was at this point that I became hooked to the philosophy of St. Thomas when, after reading his biography in a retreat, I saw the simplicity, the symmetry of his humble yet brilliant life, set against an age of breathtaking intellectual splendor — the Middle Ages... I became a fan of the period. I devoured Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson, both brilliant commentators of Medieval Philosophy. They really knew Scholasticism from the inside. That was what attracted me to the Scholastics... I imagined myself

living in the 11th and 13th centuries chopping distinctions after distinctions and blasting to smithereens the objections of our theses. Our philosophy instructor had a way of casting a spell on us with his down-to-earth meanderings and up-to-heaven abstractions. I had philosophy for breakfast, lunch and dinner..."⁴⁴

The Latter Half of the Seventies: Varied Patterns

By the mid-seventies new thrusts, new attitudes towards academic formation started emerging. While the order of the day was generally followed, the class schedules at times gave way to out-of-classroom and off-campus activities. In five years time, from 1975 to 1980, the seminary went through variegated themes and experienced sudden shifts of emphasis and orientation.

Pastoral Orientation

First, the seminary shifted towards pastoral orientation, perhaps, in an attempt to sober down the fiery and fermenting concept of "social awareness" of the first half of the decade. "A seminary training that places great weight solely on the spiritual-intellectual dimension," opined Cañete in his editorial in 1976, "does not satisfactorily meet the demand for socially responsible priests. An updated program then has to be structured with equal accent in the social role or priests."⁴⁵ Towards the end of 1975 to February of 1976, the apostolate work was in full swing. Seminarians went visiting prisons and hospitals. With the help of the religious sisters, new methods of teaching catechism were developed. A barrio mission was organized by Father Silas Florencio in Barangay San Juan, Sta. Fe, Leyte. There seminarians conducted weekly seminars and Bible services, and made house visits.⁴⁶ This predilection for an apostolate-oriented policy was accordingly based on a developing concept of the priesthood. The ideal priest was no longer perceived as one like "Bernardo Carpio straddling between two opposing worlds: the sacred world of God

⁴⁴ Father Gil Cañete's Letter, cit., pp. 2-3.

⁴⁵ V. L. CAÑETE, "Editorial," in *StM* (1976), 5.

⁴⁶ E. JUSTIMBASTE-J. V. ARUTA, o.c., p. 36; see M. ESPINA, "Johnny Goes to Mission!," in *StM* (1976), 48.

above and profane world of man below," said Father Bactol.⁴⁷ In keeping with the mind of the Church, seminarians must live with the strong conviction that a priest is a man for others. In the same breath, however, the rector cautioned his seminarians of the over-emphasis on social involvement: "We are of course not unaware of the stresses and tensions that this social involvement has generated which," he clarified, "resulted in identity crisis and in the loss of many vocations to the priesthood."⁴⁸

Spiritual Renewal

Consequently, —and like a sudden change of gears— in the next school year, 1976-1977, a call for "spiritual renewal" was issued. Explained Father Bactol, "We cannot commit the Church mission to the dimensions of simply temporal projects. Her aims cannot be reduced to a man-centered goal... otherwise she will have no authority to proclaim freedom in the name of God, and she will loose her fundamental meaning."⁴⁹

This change of theme did not necessarily mean change to an altogether new idea of formation. It was a mere shift of stress to the dimension of the spiritual. Even as early as 1974-1975, seminarians had already been experimenting with new methods of prayer, celebrating liturgical and para-liturgical services with "more original" formats.⁵⁰

Commenting on the spiritual formation of that period, Gil Cañete writes, "[It] was adjusted to fit the contemporary mind-set... [It] was basically God-oriented, not human-oriented. That meant we prayed because God was responsible for us, not that we were responsible for God. So mass [was] reset to evenings from early mornings, rosaries [were] private or common, and it did not make any difference."⁵¹

⁴⁷ F. G. BACTOL, "Rector's Message," in *StM* (1976), 4.

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

⁴⁹ F. G. BACTOL, "Rector's Message," in *StM* (1977) 6.

⁵⁰ V. L. CAÑETE, "Pastoral Orientation and Liturgy," in *StM* (1975); see G. G. URBINA, "The Seminary: Towards a Deeper Spiritual Formation," in *StM* (1977), 11, 48.

⁵¹ Father Gil Cañete's Letter, cit., p. 3.

The stress of the program, then, lay on personal responsibility. The seminarians were to approach the spiritual exercises, not because they were hammered down with the house rules, but because of personal convictions and lived faith.

Manual Labor

In the school year 1977-1978, when Father Villarante was the acting rector, he urged the seminarians to appreciate the value of work. "Manual Labor" was chosen as the theme of the year.⁵² It was a year marked with frequent excursions to the fields. Armed with no less than sticks and spades, bars and bolos, seminarians wrestled with the soil and terrain. Seminary schedule was also readjusted to allow more time for *opus manuale*. Where before household chores (fondly termed, *opus*) were done only on Thursdays, these soon became a daily task shortly before sports time in the afternoon — something unpleasant to seminarians who would have preferred shooting baskets at the courts to scrubbing floors or cutting grass in the fields.

Intellectual Training

When Father Bactol returned from his graduate studies in Manila 1978, there, too, was a "return" of emphasis to intellectual development. It was no longer enough for the priest to have faith, he said, he had to be able to articulate it.⁵³ The constant change of emphasis in orientation and thrusts in policies left the intellectual climate in the seminary with so much to be desired. Seminarians, exhausted from their pastoral work outside the seminary, became less interested in academic work. The library was wanting of books. The curriculum needed a thorough review. The priests assigned to the seminary as professors needed further academic and pedagogical training to meet the necessary demands in education and formation.

Four decades back when the seminary was established, and when the fathers got into their serious business, stress on the intellectual training was intense. Through the years, however, especially after Vatican II, newer concepts of seminary formation were brought to the

⁵² Ibidem; cf. F. PEÑARANDA, "Happenings," in *StM* (1978) 22.

fore and had been allowed to be experimented. There was a digression to other dimensions of seminary training, even at the expense of the seminarians' intellectual formation. With the return of emphasis to this latter, at least, and in theory, seminary patterns had come into "full circle."

These ever-changing patterns in the seminary, and with all the sudden shifts of emphasis year after year, made seminary life look like a kaleidoscope, the 1978 *Stella Maris* editor commented later.⁵⁴ But it would be in view of these "patterns," so called, and the lessons of those "experimentations" in the past, that the fathers would map out future "strategies and plans," as it were, with regards to priestly formation.

THE EARLY EIGHTIES: THE AGE OF "BACK TO THE BASICS"

The close of the seventies ushered in a "new age," the simmering down from all the ferment, thrill and excitement of the seventies, and the veering back towards the "primordial values" of seminary formation. It is interesting to note that, as the seminary was moving into the eighties, it was ushering in a renewed appreciation of the "old."

Together the seminary Fathers pooled a concerted effort at bringing back the traditional concepts of strict discipline in all aspects: academic, spiritual, pastoral and moral. Enough of all these trial-and-error methods of experimentation. All this "much ado" for new ways found not solutions, but more and bigger problems. A "back-to-the-basics" — a renewed disposition to the tried-and-tested ways of the old — became the seminary's battlecry.⁵⁵

The Administration

The administration line-up consisted of persons each having a background and experience peculiarly his own, but in some measure contributed to the shaping of the "formation outlook" of the eighties. There was the rector, Father Bactol. Aside from his recently-acquired degree in school administration, there was his tested experience to

⁵⁴ R B. AGUILOS, "Editorial. An Introduction to the Graduate," in *StM* (1978), 7.

⁵⁵ Cf. J. G. M. DIAZ, "Editorial. Seminary Training Towards a Definitive Pastoral Work," in *StM* (1982), 7.

formation apostolate. He joined the staff in 1968 and had held various positions. His three-year stint as a school director did not estrange him from the seminary apostolate, but instead brought him closer to the more detailed aspects of school management.

Then there was Father Villarante, the seminary's acting rector in 1977-1978, and subsequently, the college spiritual director. As one of the pioneer seminarians of Sacred Heart Seminary, his experiences of those first years gave the community an intimate peep into the episodes of seminary life in the forties and the fifties. Tying up with him was a classmate, Father Aluino Estalilla, who, in 1981, returned to the seminary after completing his graduate studies in school management. As vice-rector and dean of students of the college, Father Estalilla enforced the rigors of strict discipline, a style that echoed the regimen of the SVD's of old.

Adding youth and vigor to the team were three newly-ordained priests: Fathers Virgilio Cañete, Manuel Damayo and Manuel Salarda. Fathers Cañete and Damayo actually came in 1979 as seminarians who had completed the basic courses in sacred theology and, while waiting for their ordination, were given teaching loads in the seminary. Fathers Cañete and Salarda were both classmates in high school. They entered the seminary in 1968 when, Father Gil himself says, "the Church was reeling under the aftershock of the changes brought about by Vatican II," the age of transition.⁵⁶ Father Damayo, on the other hand, became a seminarian in 1972, when all these changes in seminary policies were at an upswing.

Together they formed that close-knit crew that shared each others' resources in molding the minds of these future priests. How they synchronized their varied background, views and experiences is a story by itself. Nevertheless, theirs was a team that restructured the seminary vision, "took on its old characteristics,"⁵⁷ and carried that spirit onward till the second half of the decade.

Under the rectorship of Father Bactol, which lasted until 1985, there was a continuous turn-over of staff members. Those who came in later to replace the ones assigned to the parishes were Fathers

⁵⁶ G. CAÑETE, "Backward Glances," in J.V. ARUTA (ed.). *Jubilate!* o.c., 58.

⁵⁷ E. JUSTIMBASTE-J. V. ARUTA, o.c., p. 38.

Ramon Aguilos and Nicolas Valeriano in 1982, Bienvenido Ebcas in 1983, Romeo Salazar and Gilbert Urbina in 1984.⁵⁸

The teaching staff was a motley of priests, religious sisters and lay persons. The priests⁵⁹ usually were assigned to teach philosophy subjects. The sisters, who had had trainings in pedagogy, taught various courses, and one took charge of the catechetical program. The lay persons, all of whom had professional training either in education or in social or natural sciences, taught in their own field of specialization.

The Revised Seminary Regulations

The refocusing on discipline in seminary formation was spelled out in the 1978 edition of the student handbook that was prepared by the Fathers, and approved by the bishop.⁶⁰ It was the revised version of the *Vademecum*, the manual on seminary regulations used by the community more than a decade earlier. "When a young man decides to enter the Sacred Heart Seminary and is admitted," says Bishop Urgel, "he is expected to strive for the priestly vocation... Such a noble vocation can be formed only in an atmosphere which guarantees deep spiritual development and thorough training in character."⁶¹ The bishop's statement keyed the spirit and mission that the community would have to follow: that the seminary is a seminary only for boys and young men who have expressed aspirations for the priesthood, and that, they are to submit themselves to a rigorous training and discipline for that seed of vocation to grow and bear fruit.⁶² In his message Bishop Urgel urged the seminarians and their parents to read the handbook carefully, and directed them to sign an agreement "to support and to abide by those regulations of our seminary."⁶³

⁵⁸ "Administration and Faculty," in *StM* (1983), 13; (1984), 6-8; (1985), 7-10.

⁵⁹ The priests who taught in the seminary on a part time basis from 1980 to 1985 were Fathers Medroso, Astorga, Bacierra (who all taught philosophy subjects), and Rafael Pepito (music).

⁶⁰ RBA-MS, Ms. 1.2.3.5.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 1, 7.

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 3.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

The handbook described the principal aim of the institution in this manner: "[It] offers a complete high school program and four years of college education major in philosophy. It aims to give good and talented Catholic boys and young men who desire to become priests a thoroughly religious, classical, contemporary, philosophical and theological education to make them worthy priests of God and Holy Mother the Church."⁶⁴

The manual issued guidelines on student behavior during religious activities and academic functions, in community areas like classroom, the library, refectory and dormitory; regulated student organizations and publications; delineated which co-curricular activities were to be engaged in by the students, or how posters or similar literature were to be posted. It encouraged the value of work, or opus manuale, and acknowledged the necessity of recreation; considered vacation a part of seminary formation, it being an opportunity for a seminarian to come in contact with friends, relatives and new people. It had rules on reprimand, suspension and dismissal from the seminary, apart from those promulgated by the Ministry of Education and Culture.⁶⁵

Red-Letter Events of the Decade

The period between 1979 to 1987 were reckoned as years of pride for the seminary. Within a span of eight years three alumni-priests were elevated to the episcopacy. An article labeled the period as a time for "golden harvests from the SHS vineyard."⁶⁶

The Bishops-Alumni

First in line was Msgr. Salvador Modesto of Carigara, Leyte, who was appointed auxiliary bishop of the Diocese of Dumaguete and titular of Margo on December 28, 1978.⁶⁷ Shortly before his epis-

⁶⁴ Ibidem, p. 5.

⁶⁵ Ibidem, pp. 9-21.

⁶⁶ I. PETILOS, "The Story of Three Bishops," in J. V. V. ARUTA (ed.). *Jubilate!* cit., pp. 84-91.

⁶⁷ Ibidem., pp. 84-85. See also Bishops Modesto's letter to this author, as cited. He entered the seminary in 1948 up to 1951, and then went to UST for his Philo-

copal consecration on May 3, 1979, he honored his alma mater with his presence during the commencement exercises held in the seminary where he was the commencement speaker and main celebrant at mass. At present he is the auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of San Carlos.

Close to his heels in 1981 was Msgr. Filomeno Bactol, who at the time of his appointment was the seminary rector. Also from the town of Carigara, he was consecrated at the Palo Cathedral on October 15, 1981 as auxiliary bishop of Palo and titular of Germaniciana. Even after his consecration, he remained the seminary rector until 1985. On November 29, 1988, the date of the creation of the Diocese of Naval, he received his appointment as its first bishop, the position he still holds at present.⁶⁸

Msgr. Leonardo Medroso, on the other hand, was serving as Rector of the Cathedral and the vicar general of the archdiocese when he was appointed bishop of Borongan. His consecration was held in his hometown, Ormoc City, on March 17, 1989,⁶⁹ and took possession of the diocese in April of the same year.

Palo Elevated to an Archdiocese

Still another memorable event during the decade was the elevation of the diocese of Palo as an archdiocese on November 15, 1982. Bishop Urgel, the incumbent bishop, became its first Archbishop. As a Metropolitan See, the new archdiocese has as its suffragans the dioceses of Calbayog, Catarman and Borongan (Naval was added to

sophy and Theology. He was ordained a priest in 1958. At the time of his appointment to the episcopacy, he was the parish priest of Hilongos, Leyte, of the Diocese of Maasin. Also cfr. *AnPont Per L'Anno 1991*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana [LEV], Città del Vaticano 1991, p. 881. Bransom offers the following data about Bishop Modesto: born in Carigara, Leyte on March 10, 1930; ordained priest March 22, 1958; appointed Titular of Margo and Auxiliary Bishop of Dumaguete December 28, 1978; appointed Auxiliary Bishop of San Carlos on June 25, 1988; see C. BRANSOM ET AL, *o. c.*, p. 842.

⁶⁸ Ibidem, pp. 86-88. Bishop Bactol entered the seminary in 1957, and was ordained priest on April 6, 1968. See also *AnPont Per L'Anno 1990*, LEV, Vaticano 1990, p. 442.

⁶⁹ Ibidem, pp. 89-91. Bishop Medroso entered the seminary in 1951, ordained a priest on March 30, 1963. See also *AnPont. Per L'Anno 1990*, LEV, Città del Vaticano 1990, p. 100.

the ecclesiastical province when it was created diocese in 1988 and canonically erected in 1989). The canonical erection was held on February 14, 1983 during a solemn rites officiated by Archbishop Bruno Torpigliani, the Papal Nuncio to the Philippines.⁷⁰

MID-EIGHTIES: THE EXPANSION

It was during the rectorship of Bishop Bactol when, in 1983, the construction of the new college building started. In less than a year's time the building took its final shape. At the start of the school year 1984-1985, the college seminarians moved into their new home. At long last, after almost three decades, the division between the college and the high school became even more distinct.

In the middle part of 1984, Archbishop Urgel appointed his auxiliary bishop, Msgr. Bactol, parish priest of Sto. Niño parish in Tacloban while retaining his post as the seminary rector. These dual positions, however, found him shuttling between two points: in Tacloban for his pastoral work, and in the seminary for his administrative and teaching jobs. Soon, the concerns in the parish became more demanding giving him less time for seminary affairs. So Father Gil Cañete, the vice-rector and dean of students of the college department, took over as the rector in an acting capacity.⁷¹

During the commencement exercises on March 31, 1985, Father Jerome Costibolo took his oath of office before Archbishop Urgel as the new rector of the seminary.

New Administration

Father Costibolo would bring in newer thrusts and emphases in formation. No one thought, however, that the graduation ceremony held in the seminary in 1985 and during which Father Costibolo was installed as the new rector would have some ominous undertones. It was Archbishop Urgel's last. Less than a month after, on April 22, the good archbishop succumbed to a heart failure. Bishop

⁷⁰ E. JUSTIMBASTE-J. V. ARUTA, *o.c.*, p. 38. The erection of Palo as a Metropolitan. See is in JOHN PAUL II, Apost. Const. *Ad Fidelium Christi* (15.XI.1982), in AAS 74 (1983), 359-360.

⁷¹ Ibidem.

Bactol, who was Archbishop Urgel's vicar-general, was appointed Apostolic Administrator. Eight months later, Msgr. Pedro Dean, the incumbent bishop of the Diocese of Tagum, was appointed archbishop of Palo, and took possession of the archdiocese on December 13, 1985.⁷²

During the school year 1986-1987, and with Fr Costibolo at the helm, the organizational structure of the seminary varied slightly. The rector was now assisted by two vice-rectors, one for administration, and the other for academics. The vice-rector for administration enjoyed priority over the academic vice-rector since it was the former who assisted the rector in the administrative affairs of the seminary. The other vice-rector, on the other hand, absorbed the duties of the academic dean stipulated in the 1978 Student Handbook: "[he] executes, carries out and implements the general academic policies approved by the seminary. In carrying out his functions [the academic vice-rector] coordinates with the [deans of students]."⁷³ The offices of the deans of students and spiritual directors for each department, the high school principal, and the procurator remained in place. The latter two positions were held by religious sisters.⁷⁴

The Priest-Moderator System

Right at the first year of Father Costibolo's rectorship, the fathers employed on an experimental basis a modified administrative

⁷² *50 Years: A Commemorative Album*, Archdiocese of Palo, Palo 1987, p. 25; the bishops who governed the diocese from 1937 to the present are featured on this page. See also *AnPont Per L' Anno 1991*, LEV, Città del Vaticano 1991, p. 498: the new archbishop, Msgr. Pedro Dean, is from Calbayog City, Samar. He was ordained priest on November 30, 1956, consecrated Bishop and Titular of Tuccabora on January 25, 1978. He was bishop of Tagum from October 11, 1980 until his appointment as Archbishop of Palo on October 12, 1985.

⁷³ RBA-MS, Ms. 1.2.3.5., p. 6.

⁷⁴ See "Administration and Faculty," in *StM* (1987) 7-11; in this issue, the following priests figured as members of the Administration: Jerome Costibolo, rector; Virgilio Cañete, vice-rector for administration, and dean of students, college department; Ramon Aguilos, vice-rector for academics, and dean studies, college department; Nicolas Valeriano III, spiritual director, college department; Tirso Dolina, dean of students, high school; Romeo Salazar, spiritual director, high school; Jose Glenn Diaz, director, pre-college department; Sr. Ma. Carmela Aberilla, RVM, principal; Josephine V.

system. They would later call it as the Priest-Moderator System, a formation style that was meant to slowly do away with the traditional set-up of "one-for-all," or one dean of students and one spiritual director for the entire student body. A priest in the administration took charge of the over-all (i.e., the human, spiritual and intellectual) formation of one class. However, the traditional roles of the dean of students and the spiritual directors were retained, although this time, they were to serve as coordinators of the activities in their respective departments. The rationale of this rather new system was based on the desire of the administration to establish a more personalized contact with each seminarian. It was expected that by this method, the seminarians would be given the opportunity to relate with their formators in an atmosphere of openness and trust, and that they would see in a more positive way the discipline as part and parcel of their formation.⁷⁵

For two successive school years, the Fathers hanged on to this new concept. Soon, problems arose with regards to the over-all duties of the deans of students and spiritual directors, on the one hand, and the priest-moderators on the other. The Fathers desired for clear demarcation lines of the priests' roles as direct formators to the class of which they were in charge. By 1987 the issue remained unresolved and the seminary fathers were back to the more defined roles of the deans of students and spiritual directors in the traditional system.

The Pre-College Department

As early as 1973 there already emerged a phenomenon in the enrollment in Sacred Heart Seminary: a marked increase of high school graduates from outside entering the seminary. But this trend, so the Fathers observed, had affected the formation in the seminary, at least in the academic dimension. The administrators noted that "seminarians coming from outside schools could not insert themselves easily into the mainstream of seminary life."⁷⁶ They particularly noticed

⁷⁵ R. S. B. AGUILOS, *Profiles and Correlates to Spiritual Attitudes of Seminarians: Implications to Seminary Formation in Two Minor Seminaries*, Unpublished Master's Thesis, De La Salle University, Manila 1986, pp.138-139. The new seminary program was essentially patterned after the experience of the Pope John XXIII Seminary of Cebu.

⁷⁶ "The SHS Pre-College Formation Program: A Profile," in *StM* (1987), 24.

the students' difficulty of learning the languages especially Latin, compounded by their difficulty of learning other subjects. "We were getting products from the public schools," recalls Cañete, "[and] we got many of those unfortunate students. In the 80's we had college seminarians who could not even spell! This was unthinkable in the 70's..."⁷⁷

To address the deplorable situation, the seminary Fathers toyed with the idea of opening a pre-college department.⁷⁸

In the school year 1986-1987 the Seminary opened this new feature in the formation. Fourteen young men composed the pioneer batch of pre-college seminarians. Completing the family were three seminarians-on-regency and Reverend Jose Glenn Díaz, their formation director. For a starter, the seminarians were housed at the vacant "Home for Retired Priests" located at the back of the high school building. All year round these young men were seen, along with their director, sprucing up the whole place and its surroundings. The almost daily sight of seminarians clearing the ground, landscaping the area and refurbishing their new home was reminiscent of the first years of the seminary four decades earlier.

The pre-college department is now in its twelfth year of operation. The program consists of a one-year formation period, laying emphasis on prayer, study and work. Since the whole year is meant as an orientation to the seminary college life, the seminarians undergo a non-credit academic curriculum. They study an accelerated course in Latin. They are taught the basic Christian doctrines and are given an intensive verbal and written proficiency training in the English

⁷⁷ Father Gil Cañete's Letter, cit., p. 4.

⁷⁸ Pre-College seminaries started sprouting in the early 70's and were meant as substitutes to the high school seminaries, which had long been dissolved in many dioceses. Seminary formators deemed it wise to open this program in view of the candidates from ordinary private and public high schools which offered no religious and spiritual formation programs to their students, and whose academic standards left much to be desired. Cf. EPISCOPAL COMMISSION FOR SEMINARIES (abbreviated from hereon as ECS), *1980 Philippine Program for Seminaries*, CBCP, Manila, 1980, nn. 76-80.

language —academic knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary for the rigors of college training ahead.⁷⁹

Other Priests in the Seminary

Father Costibolo's term as rector was short-lived, however; the archbishop assigned him the office of the archdiocesan chancellor. "Being assigned to the seminary as your Rector was a grand surprise for me," said he in his farewell message to the seminarians, "Being reassigned to another job after only a year and nine months was a grander surprise still."⁸⁰ Taking his place was Msgr. Benjamin Sabillo, who, at the time was fresh from his studies in Spiritual Theology in Rome. He held the position until 1991.

Fathers Cañete, Valeriano, Aguilos, Salazar, Opiniano, Dolina and Díaz were already in the seminary when the new rector came. The other priests who came to the seminary as formators at varying periods during Sabillo's rectorship are listed as follows: Fathers Manuel Ocaña, Lester Avestruz, Winston Margate, Pedro Tiguelo, Alex Compas, Ananías Merida, Hector Villamil, Isagani Petilos and Edgar Macalalag.

Listed as part-time professors were Msgr. Estanislao Abarca, Msgr. Benjamin Bacierra and Father Joseph Caesar Diamante.⁸¹

Academic Policies

Around this time, a manual on the academic policies was issued to the college seminarians. It outlined the academic life that the seminarians were to follow, listed the academic courses in college, explained the grading system used in the department, and spelled out specific rules in conduct during academic functions.

⁷⁹ The other dimensions in formation, i.e., spiritual, character and personality formation, are spelled out in the article. The SHS Pre-College Department has its own policies for order and discipline; see RBA-MS, Ms. 1.2.3.3.

⁸⁰ J. C. COSTIBOLO, "Rector's Message," in *StM* (1987) n.p.

⁸¹ See RBA-MS, Ms. 1.2.2.5, pp. 6-7.

The summary of the college curriculum showed no substantial change ever since it was revised in 1979.⁸² Philosophy, as a core subject, was basically thomistic in character, but with History, Educational Psychology, Special Ethics, Population Education, Family Planning as adjunct courses. English was still studied for eight semesters, beginning with communication arts, essay and essay writing, Philippine literature, Speech, English and World literature, and a course work on William Shakespeare. Theology, which spanned the entire college years, was divided into studies in Church history, the documents of Vatican II, survey of religious thoughts, introduction to ecclesiology, and the sacraments of the Church. Social sciences included an introductory course in sociology, a course on the works of Rizal, on Asian civilization, Philippine history, government and constitution, world history, studies in Filipino psychology, and economics. The study on positive sciences is reflected in the three-semester course in Mathematics, and a four-semester course in Natural Sciences with laboratory. Foreign languages, apart from English, were Latin and Spanish. The six-semester work in Latin covered syntax, the orations of Cicero, the poetry of Vergil and ecclesiastical Latin. Spanish was studied for four semesters, beginning with grammar, composition and a study of selected Spanish writings. The other courses were Filipino grammar and composition, education subjects and music.

The grading and examination periods per semester were reduced to two: mid-terms and finals. At the end, and upon completion of the academic courses, the seminarians took a comprehensive examination, both written and oral.⁸³

Following the policies on decorum and conduct revived by the administration in the early part of the decade, the manual strictly enforced the wearing of clerical attire during class hours. A teacher had the right to send anyone without the proper uniform out of the classroom.⁸⁴ Classroom prayers were recited at the beginning and at the end of each class hour. English was the medium of instruction in almost all classes, and the speaking of the regional dialects (like Waray-Waray and Cebuano) was highly discouraged.

⁸² RBA-MS, Ms. 1.2.2.2, pp. 1-3.

⁸³ Ibidem, p. 4.

⁸⁴ Ibidem, p. 7

THE SEMINARY IN THE 90'S

Towards the end of 1991, Msgr. Wilfredo Alejan took the reins as Msgr. Sabillo became parish priest of Dulag. The new rector was not treading on an unfamiliar ground. Having been assigned to the seminary back in the late seventies, and, having been a school director prior to this new post, he certainly knew the ropes of the trade.

The Seminary Staff

During the school year 1992-1993, the following priests composed the seminary staff: Fathers Alex Compas as vice-rector for administration and finance, Filomeno Borgueta as academic dean, Hector Villamil, the dean of students, college department, Oscar Florencio, spiritual director, college department, Edgar Macalalag, spiritual director high school, Isagani Petilos, dean of students high school, and Ananías Merida, director, pre-college. Sr. Connie Pineda was the principal.⁸⁵

The following school year, a slight reshuffling of positions took place. Father Dennis Inocando became the dean of students of the college, and Father Virgilio Manaog came in to become the director of the pre-college department.⁸⁶

School year 1994-1995 started with a slight change. With Father Florencio out on a study leave, Father Manaog replaced him as the college spiritual director, and Father Erlito Maraya became the pre-college director.

Close to the end of 1994, barely three years since he took over as rector, Msgr. Alejan was appointed parish priest of Alangalang at the same time Episcopal Vicar for Eastern Leyte, and Superintendent Catholic schools in the archdiocese. Upon leaving for a new post, he entrusted the care of the seminary to the seminary vice-rector for administration, Father Alex Compas. Father Alex Opiniano, Msgr. Alejan's successor to the rectorship, was at the time wrapping up his masteral studies in philosophy at the University of Sto. Tomas.

⁸⁵ Cf. "Administration and Faculty," in *StM* (1993) 9-11.

⁸⁶ Cf. "Administration and Faculty," in *StM* (1994), 16-19.

Father Opiniano took the reins at the beginning of the school year 1995-1996.⁸⁷

Revision of the College Curriculum

Up until 1992, the seminary had been implementing the curriculum designed and approved in 1979. In 1989, the seminary Fathers, in a mini-workshop, thought it was already opportune to evaluate the college academic program in view of the present exigencies in formation. It took three years, however, before the new curriculum came into shape. By April of 1992, the Department of Education, Culture and Sports approved the program. In the school year 1992-1993 the phasing in began with the first year college. It reached its full implementation in the school year 1995-1996 (the time of this writing), when all year levels were already operating under the new program.⁸⁸

The present plan of studies has retained the nature of the academic program in all seminary colleges in the Philippines, i.e., that of being a classical arts program.⁸⁹ In view of the requirements for entrance to theology, the students, at the end of the course, achieve a bachelor's degree in classical arts, major in philosophy.

The general areas of study include Philosophy, Humanities, Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Religious and Theological Studies, Communication Skills and the added professional component, Pedagogy.

Philosophy still remains as the area of concentration, and the basic disciplines in thomistic philosophy are studied. However, new philosophical courses have been added: Symbolic Logic, Philosophy

⁸⁷ Cf. "Alangalang Gets Msgr. Alejan as its new Pastor," in *Chancery Bulletin* 1 (1995/2), 2-3. As of writing the following priests form the seminary staff: Alex Opiniano, rector; Edgar Macalalag, vice rector for administration; Ronel Taboso, high school dean of students; Raymund Mazo, high school spiritual director; Dennis Inocando, college dean of students; Pedro Tiguelo, college spiritual director; Sammy Alvero, dean of studies. On December 1, 1996, Msgr. Opiniano was installed as Papal Chaplain.

⁸⁸ RBA-MS, Ms. 1.2.2.2, 7 pp. This write-up was submitted to the DECS upon application for approval of the seminary's updated curriculum. Also cf. the Dean of Studies' communication to the Regional Director, DECS Region 8, dated April 14, 1992, Ms. 1.2.2.1.

⁸⁹ ECS, o.c., pp. 160-163.

of oriental religions, and a seminar type course work on any contemporary philosopher. At the same time, the study on history of Philosophy has been restructured, divided into four separate courses: Ancient, Medieval, Modern and Contemporary.

The study of humanities is reflected in the study of social sciences, especially psychology, sociology and economics, and the study of Philippine, English, Afro-Asian, and World literature. The course work on William Shakespeare, which had been a special subject for several decades, has been incorporated in the English literature course to give way to other important and more recent literary works in Asian and African cultures. Music appreciation occupies four semesters. The theological knowledge of Christian faith, or Religion, is studied for six semesters, two-semester less than the previous eight. It begins with a study on the basic Christian doctrine, the documents of Vatican II, and an introduction to the Bible. This study is enriched by a training in catechesis, and an actual classroom experience in the nearby public elementary schools. English as a second language is taught in all semesters. Two semesters are devoted to grammar and composition, one in research methods, and one (which is a new course) in theater and mass media. The other courses are more devoted to literature studies. Latin has been reduced to a four-semester work, concentrating in grammar and composition. Spanish is taken for one whole year.

The new component in the 1992 curriculum is the inclusion of more education courses where the seminarians undergo eighteen credit hours in pedagogy. Thus, at the end of their college education, the graduate becomes educationally qualified to teach in any government-recognized high in school the country.

Another feature in the revised plan of studies is the modified version of the comprehensive examinations (formerly known as, *solemnis disputatio*, afterwards has been simply called, *revalida*) which takes place at end of the philosophy course. In the written examinations the students answer questions which are comprehensive in nature taken from the eight major disciplines in philosophy (Logic, Epistemology, Metaphysics, Theodicy, Rational Psychology, Ethics, Cosmology and History of Philosophy). The oral examinations, on the other hand, is an exposition of a philosophical research done by the student during the last two years in college. The student's

research output comes in the form of a baby thesis which he defends before a Board of Examiners.⁹⁰

The Sign of Maturity: The Theology Department

This article cannot end without mentioning a phase so significant in the history of the Palo seminary, or for that matter, the archdiocese. It is the establishment of the theology department.

The idea of establishing a theology seminary came at a time of crisis. Ever since the seminary produced its college graduates in 1952, the diocese of Palo was sending its theology students to the faculties of theology in Cebu and Manila. Even after Palo became an archdiocese in 1983, Cebu continued accepting seminarians from her former suffragan diocese. Soon, however, enrollment in the Cebu seminary swelled to full capacity that it was constrained to refuse admission of products of seminaries outside its metropolitan see. In 1987 eight of the Palo seminary's college graduates, who were preparing for their theological training, suddenly found themselves without a theology seminary to go to. So, they were compelled to go on "forced regencies," while others took up some college courses in other colleges and universities.

It was not only Palo that was affected; the entire Waray-Waray speaking region —or practically the whole metropolitan province— was. "Some seminaries [of dioceses belonging to the region] tried to remedy the situation by putting up their own formation houses," writes Justimbaste and Aruta, "[but] without much success. As a result, many vocations were lost."⁹¹

On March 22, 1988, a handful of benefactors, seminarians and priests from the nearby parishes gathered at the northeastern end of the seminary compound to witness the laying of the cornerstone of the theologate. Five months later, on August 3, 1988, the theology department opened its doors to 29 pioneers coming from the four dioceses of the metropolitan province. The blessing of the building took place three days later, on the Feast of Our Lord's Transfiguration.

⁹⁰ Cf. RBA-MS, Ms. 1.2.3.2, pp. 6-7.

⁹¹ E. JUSTIMBASTE-J. V. ARUTA, o.c., p. 39.

Archbishop Dean, the metropolitan archbishop of the province presided, the celebration and was assisted by the other bishops of the province: Bishops Leonado Medroso of Borongan, Maximiano Cruz of Calbayog, Angel Hobayan of Catarman, and Filomeno Bactol, auxiliary bishop of Palo.⁹²

Msgr. Benjamin Bacierra, who was with the administration of Sacred Heart Seminary in the seventies, and until then the parish priest of the Parish of St. Jude Thaddeus, Tacloban City, was appointed rector. Two other Fathers who completed the pioneer team were Fathers Romeo Murillo as spiritual director, and Joseph Cesar Diamante as procurator.⁹³

At the beginning the theology seminary was simply named, "Sacred Heart Seminary, Theology Department." By 1989 Archbishop Dean finally decided to make it an entirely separate entity, and named it, "St. John Evangelist School of Theology."⁹⁴

CONCLUSION

The seminary from 1969 to 1994 had come a long way from the pioneering years of the forties, and then the "classical years" of the fifties. It manifested some early signs of the modern seminary era in the years prior to the departure of the SVD Fathers, but everything came in avalanche shortly after the takeover of the local clergy. In an effort to effect changes stipulated by Vatican II, the local clergy plunged headlong into new approaches and techniques in pedagogy and character formation as confirmed in the Basic Norms for Priestly Formation.

These years can be summed up as a period of experimentation, implementation and adaptation. The seminary suffered some set-

⁹² Ibidem, p. 39. In the case of the seminarians from the archdiocese of Palo, they took up short courses at the St. Peter's College in Ormoc City, while at the same time honed up their pastoral skills at St. Peter's and Paul's Parish (Ormoc).

⁹³ Cf. "Administration and Faculty, St. John the Evangelist School of Theology," in *StM* (1989), 9.

⁹⁴ The Theology Department has its own history to reckon with. This author has opted to reserve its historical account in a separate article.

backs, went through a crisis, experienced the highs and lows associated with change and transition, only to “sober up” or “simmer down” in the latter part of the eighties.

A definite sign of development and maturity is the establishment of the theology department which, in its ten-year history, is now showing vital signs of growth.

God writes straight in crooked lines. The experiences of the past, many of them even bordering on the bleak, have become the seminary's lessons in life, and are summons to set things aright. There were glowing achievements, too. Whichever way, the task now rests on the present seminary formators. May they make meaning out of everything that had happened. Only then may they gear themselves up for another long journey. □

St. John the Evangelist School of Theology, Leyte