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The Schools of Tagudin

Carlos Desmet

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Notes & Comment

The Schools of Tagudin

The municipality of Tagudin was incorporated into the sub-province of Lepanto-Amburayan, part of the Mountain Province, on March 15, 1907. The following November the first group of Immaculate Heart of Mary fathers arrived at Cervantes, the capital of the subprovince. It was from Cervantes that they spread out to the different parts of the Mountain Province, which had been assigned to them as their mission field. In March 1909, Father Carlu was appointed parish priest of Tagudin.

The mission of Tagudin had been founded as early as 1586. The first missionary, Fray Matias Manrique, O.S.A., was appointed in 1590, and from that time Tagudin was administered by the Augustinians, who took up their residence either at Tagudin or in the neighboring towns of Santa Cruz, Santa Lucia or Bangar. It seems that for almost two centuries these mission stations were part of one mission territory without clearly defined boundaries. Only in May 1809 did Tagudin acquire a resident priest. The last Augustinian friar left Tagudin in January 1898, and diocesan priests took over the spiritual care of the parish. They were Fathers Norberto Tamayo, Juan Resurrección, Raymundo Quilup, Cosme Abaya and Quintia Donato, who succeeded each other until the arrival of Father Carlu. None of them joined the Aglipayan schism. This uninterrupted ministrations of good and loyal priests may account for the fact that Tagudin has always been strongly Catholic; the census of 1960 shows that Tagudin counted 18,040 Catholics against 151 non-Catholics apportioned to three different denominations.

As soon as Father Carlu took over the parish of Tagudin, he resolved to open Catholic schools. He appealed to the Missionary Canonesses of St. Augustine, and on June 21, 1910 four sisters led by Mother M. Louise landed on the beach of Tagudin. They took up their abode in the old Spanish *convento*, where the sisters still

reside, and the day following their arrival, they opened a dispensary where a great number of people flocked for treatment and medical advice. On July 4th, classes were opened with 255 pupils in attendance. Four weeks later the enrollment had increased to more than 300.

The vacation months of April-May 1911, brought the sisters in contact with the people of the barrios. An extensive campaign for the fulfillment of the Easter duty had been planned by the fathers. Two sisters went out to a barrio every day of the week, going from house to house inviting the people, men and women, to attend the meeting in the evening and prepare themselves for a good confession and Easter Communion. This was done in two barrios at the same time during a whole week, and at the end of the week the priests went to the barrio, heard confessions and the following day celebrated Holy Mass and distributed Holy Communion, to many for the first time in many years.

At this first contact with the barrio folk, the sisters were greatly impressed by the generous hospitality offered to them, but more so by the almost general ignorance of the main points of the Catholic faith and the almost total neglect of religious practice. To remedy the situation it was decided to open a school in four barrios. The barrios of San Miguel and San Pedro were of easy access from the town; two other barrios, Pudoc and Pacac, across the delta of the Amburayan River, were accessible only during the dry season, for during the rainy months, the swollen waters of the Amburayan prevented regular sessions to be held, and these schools had only a precarious existence. The schools of San Pedro and San Miguel had a more vigorous life, and are still in operation to-day. But how poor was their beginning! Every morning the sisters went to the barrio, where at the sound of the bell, the children gathered around a log under the shadow of an acacia tree. Some children found a place on the log, others sat in front of it: sister distributed books, paper and pencils, and the class began. At noon recess, the sisters were accommodated in the house of the *teniente del barrio* where they took the lunch they had brought with them. When the afternoon session was over, the sisters collected books, paper and pencils, wrapped them carefully and stored them in the house of the hospitable *teniente* until the following morning. At the approach of the rainy season, and because the number of pupils had increased, classes were held inside some houses of the barrio until a decent schoolhouse could be erected, at first of light materials: some wooden posts, *sawali* walls and a grass roof. Later the first schoolhouse was replaced by a good concrete building with galvanized iron roofing.

The educational work of the sisters was generally appreciated not only by parents but by the leaders of the community and edu-

cators. It happened that in 1913, the government funds appropriated for the public schools of Tagudin were insufficient to cover the expenses entailed by the six public barrio schools of the municipality. The incumbent superintendent of public schools had no alternative but to close all the barrio schools or to turn them over to the sisters, whose devotion and ability he had observed. Father Carlu accepted the proposition of the superintendent, and so it happened that for many years thereafter the barrio schools of Tagudin were managed by the sisters, helped by a number of lay teachers.

In the meantime the sisters' central school was growing; around the sisters' convent additional buildings were erected. In June 1922 St. Augustine's High School opened with a first-year general course, and the first graduating class bowed to the public at the commencement exercises of March 1930. The enrollment in the present school-year, 1963-1964, is 1314 in the town school and 1496 in the barrio schools. The faculty is composed of two priests, 4 sisters and 60 lay teachers.

The lay teachers' salaries constitute a heavy financial burden on the mission of Tagudin, a burden generously shared by the good sisters. During the decade 1947-1957, the operating expenses of the Tagudin Catholic schools totalled ₱554,572.15, itemized as follows: teachers' salaries, ₱427,894.00; building expenses (after the war school houses had to be repaired or even rebuilt), ₱72,772.74; miscellaneous expenses, ₱53,905.41. The total income from tuition fees and other sundry sources was only ₱233,973.49. The difference of ₱320,598.66 was covered by funds solicited by the fathers and the sisters of Tagudin. The years from 1958 on saw a steady increase in expenses equivalent to 40% on the figures given above, with no corresponding increase in income.

We may now ask what the Catholic school system of Tagudin has contributed towards the Catholic life of the community. The casual visitor to Tagudin on a Sunday morning will be impressed by the large crowd that he meets in the center of the *población*. This is due not only to the market that is held there on Sundays, but also to the regular attendance at Mass. There are every Sunday four masses in the morning and one in the afternoon, and at the first three masses, the spacious church is filled to capacity, while at the 8 o'clock mass and at the afternoon mass the attendance is quite satisfactory. This is a happy contrast to the poor mass attendance in the year 1909, when father Carlu succeeded in gathering barely 200 worshippers at Sunday mass.

It must be noted that at present one-third of the children living in the town receive a Catholic education, and in the barrios two-thirds of them attend the Catholic schools. In all the schools, religion is part of the curriculum, and is taught every day during one period

in every class. Every Saturday, the children of one or two barrios come to confession and receive Holy Communion the following Sunday morning in the parish church. The pupils of the town have their monthly confession and communion on the occasion of the first Friday. Some of them come also to confession in the interval and are frequent or daily communicants.

Towards the end of every school year there is an interscholastic catechetical contest, oral and written, among all the elementary classes. This stimulates the zeal of the teachers and the application of the pupils. Weeks before the date set for the contest one sees groups of children, catechism in hand, between or after class hours, repeating together the questions and answers, questioning each other and memorizing the prayers. As the children come to town for the contest and for Sunday mass and the reception of the Sacraments, parents or elder brothers and sisters accompany them, and so there is no doubt that the Catholic schools are instrumental in bringing the barrio folk to church.

The present Holy Father remarked recently in an address "that love of Christ and a religious sense taught to children at a tender age help them to resist any crisis. Religious crisis will be for them development, progress, victory and deepening in Christ, the son of the living God." These words are surely applicable to the people of Tagudin, who always, throughout life, retain something from their early training.

When young couples present themselves to the parish priest for betrothal, previous to their marriage, he can tell at once who had attended Catholic schools. There is an immense difference between them and those who had not, with respect to the practical knowledge of their religion, and a good understanding of the duties and responsibilities of the married state.

With regard to the practice of religion, the incumbent parish priest, who has just made a survey of the barrios, classifies them into three groups: those where the only school is a Catholic school, the barrios having a public school and a Catholic school, and those that have only a public school.

Mass attendance is most regular in the barrios where there is only a Catholic school; in some of them the Easter duty is fulfilled by 80% to 95% of the women, and by 70% to 85% of the men, and all marriages are performed in the church. In the other barrios, more non-canonical marriages are celebrated; mass attendance is not so regular, and with respect to the Easter duty, 70% to 80% of the women and 50% to 60% of the men are faithful in the barrios with a Catholic and a public school, while in the barrios with only a public

school 40% to 50% of the women and 10% to 20% of the men perform their yearly confession and communion.

With respect to religious vocations, the parish of Tagudin is blessed in having given more than three-score of sisters to several congregations established in the Philippines. Some of them have even been sent to foreign missions. Unfortunately vocations to the priesthood have not kept pace with those to the sisterhoods. This might be partially due to the long years of seminary preparation, the cost of which is a heavy burden on poor families. At Tagudin the majority of the people are little farmers or share-croppers and tenants, while the parish priests, because of the heavy expense of their schools, have been unable to help possible candidates for the seminary. Another cause of the scarcity of vocations to the priesthood might be a certain lack of training in the home. It has been observed that many parents, especially among the well-to-do classes, have adopted the Spanish attitude towards the care of their children. The girls are always kept under strict supervision, while growing boys enjoy more liberty, and in many cases, parents are even afraid to reprimand them, when they begin sowing wild oats. Girls are accustomed to live under discipline, while boys may find it hard to bend under the rule of a seminary. There is, however, a brighter prospect for the future: a few boys are in minor and major seminaries, and we pray that they might persevere and add a new luster to the crown of the Tagudin schools.

A final word on the valuable contribution Tagudin has made to the christianization of the Mountain Province. It was after the first World War that an intensive expansion of missionary activity took place, beginning in the early twenties. Whenever missionaries opened a new mission, it was only natural that they should appeal for help to their confreres laboring in the Catholic communities of the lowlands. In answer to such appeals, many generous boys volunteered as catechists. They accompanied the fathers on their missionary tours and even took their place in remote settlements, sowing the good seed of the gospel in every nook and corner of the extensive Mountain Province. Even young ladies enrolled as catechists or class teachers in the mission schools and played their invaluable part in the conversion of the pagan tribes. By their gentleness they gained the confidence of the womenfolk and opened up for them the way to conversion. The first catechists were only elementary graduates; later, high school graduates or even college men and women, but all of them knew their religion and were possessed with a conquering zeal and an ardent desire to share with their pagan brothers the great privilege of being Christians. Laborers of the first hour, they are the unsung pioneers who laid the groundwork of Christianity and civilization upon which have been founded the flourishing missions of the Mountain Province.