

Genesis of the Roman Catholic Church in the Fifth District of Camarines Sur: Basis for a Supplemental Material in Local History

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ABSTRACT

Roman Catholic Church involvement can be seen in all aspects of human activity. It shows how visible the Church gets involved in religious, social, political, cultural, and educational development. This qualitative-historical research was focused on determining how the Roman Catholic Churches in the six (6) Municipalities of the district came into existence. The research was backed up by interviews and observation and analysis of existing related documents. Results of the study showed that most of the oldest Roman Catholic Churches in the Fifth District of Camarines Sur were built in 1578; made of nipa and bamboo and that all of these Churches were destroyed by fire which resulted to the construction of concrete Churches which have already been improved in the present time. The Roman Catholic Churches in the Fifth District of Camarines Sur which were built during the Spanish period contributed much to the development of the district in terms of Cultural, Social, and political aspects. As a result, a reference material in teaching local History was made to address the dearth of instructional materials in teaching history from grade school to graduate education.

Keywords: Roman Catholic Church, Political Development, Significant Contributions, Cultural Development, Social Development, reference material.

RATIONALE

Undeniably, churches played a major role in the history of the Philippines, (De Pra 1989). The reason why you can see a lot of old churches of Spanish Design in any part of the Philippines. People in the Philippines during the pre-Spanish era were a great believer of gods and goddesses. So the Spaniards were able to successfully colonized the country upon introducing Christianity. Giving high regards to the Catholic Churches and the Friars. Friars then were given the authority to rule a society, a community. In other words, Friars/Priests became an instrument in manipulating the Philippine Society. The interference of the Friars/Priests headed to the disagreement of the churches and states. This is the primary reason why the inviolability of the separation of church and state became a Constitutional provision from the Malolos Constitution up to the present 1987 Philippine Constitution. In response to the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) mission, which is to develop and promote the Filipino national culture and arts and to preserve Filipino cultural heritage as embodied in Republic Act No. 7356 of 1992 (Mendoza 2015). The researcher being a professor in history is trying to unravel her curiosity on how the oldest Churches built during the Spanish Period in the different municipalities in Rinconada including the City of Iriga took part in the history of the place. Especially the events and the development that took place in the History of Rinconada after the construction of the churches along cultural, political and social development. Hence, this study.

Objectives

This study aimed to determine the historical development of the first Roman Catholic Churches in the

history of Rinconada, the fifth district in Camarines Sur and developed a supplemental material in teaching local history.

Specifically, it intended to find out the following

1. The historical background of the first Roman Catholic Church in Baao, Bato, Buhi, Bula, Nabua and Iriga City.
2. The significant contributions of these Churches to the history of Rinconada along: a.) cultural development, b.) social development, and c.) political development.
3. To come up with a reference material in teaching history based from the findings of the study.

The Setting



Figure 1. Map of Camarines Sur

Camarines Sur (NSO 2018), (Tagalog: Timog Camarines) is a province in the Philippines located in the Bicol Region in Luzon. Its capital is Pili and the province borders Camarines Norte and Quezon to the north, and Albay to the south. To the east lies the island province of Catanduanes across the Maqueda Channel is the largest among the six provinces in the Bicol both in terms of population and land area.

Its territory includes two cities: Naga, the lone chartered city, is the province's and the region's religious, cultural, financial, commercial, industrial, and business center, while Iriga, a component city, is the center of the Rinconada area and Ri?kon?da Language. Lake Buhi is where the smallest commercially harvested fish can be found, the Sinarapan (*Mistichthys luzonensis*).



Figure 2. Map of Rinconada (5th District of Cam. Sur)

In an interview with Mr. Frank Peñones, he said the name Rinconada came from the Spanish word *Rincon* which means Corner. Looking at figure 1, which shows the map of Camarines Sur, Rinconada District can or the Fifth District of Camarines Sur can be found at the corner of the map. Rincoanda is composed of Six (6) Municipalities (Baao, Balatan, Bato, Buhi, Bula, Nabua) and Iriga City.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher used qualitative research which explores and provides deeper insights of the study (Tenny S, Brannan JM, Branna GD, 2022). This gathers participants perceptions and experiences through interview and observation, backed up by document analysis. The interview was personally conducted by the authors by visiting the churches. The assigned Parish Priests were the key informants of the study.

Identification of the Oldest Churches built in Rinconada (Fifth Congressional District of Camarines Sur) was made first. Followed by the collections of documents relative to the historical background of the 7 Churches being the subject of the study. Then the key informants in every municipality were identified.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based from interviews conducted and document analysis done, it was found out that mostly of the oldest Roman Catholic Church in the Fifth District of Camarines Sur were built in 1578; made of Nipa and bamboo and that all of these Churches were destroyed by fire which resulted to the construction of a concrete Church which were already improved in the present time. These Churches are: Saint Bartholomew Parish in Baao, Camarines Sur; Parish of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Balatan, Camarines Sur; Saint Francis of Assisi in Buhi, Camarines Sur; Mary Magdalene Parish, Bula Camarines Sur; The Most Holy Trinity Parish, Bato Camarines Sur; Holy Cross Parish of Nabua Camarines Sur and Saint Anthony of Padua Parish, Iriga City.

Saint Bartholomew the Apostle, Baao, Camarines Sur. In 1590, Fray Pedro Bautista, the Father of the Franciscans in the Philippines, made along journey to the Bicol Region where he founded several villages, the encomienda in Baao is among them. Seven years later, in 1597, while attempting to plant seeds of Catholicism in Japan, the founder of Baao was martyred there along with other Catholic Missionaries. Prior to Baao was a barrio of Bula. In 1684, the church of Baao was then made of nipa and bamboo was transferred from Layoan to a site by the meeting point of rivers Langday and Bahay but was destroyed by strong typhoon after a decade. Another construction began in 1720 until 1731 when the parish was transferred to where it is presently located. In June 1811, a strong typhoon was recorded to have devastated the town and in October of the same year, a strong earthquake ruined the bell tower of the church. Significant to the history of the Philippine Catholic Church, it was in this parish where Jorge I. Barlin was born in 1850. Barlin entered priesthood and later on June 19, 1906, became first Filipino Bishop. In September 6, 1971, a great fire destroyed the church and convent of the parish of St. Bartholomew. The tremendous challenge and enormous task was accepted by Rev. Msgr. Rafael Imperial despite external pressures. The parish recovered and flourished further.

Parish of our Lady of Perpetual help, Balatan, Cam.Sur. The Parish was created in November 1954, after Barangay Siramag was separated from the Municipality of Nabua. The first parish church was made of light materials, and as such, it later destroyed by strong typhoon. In the succeeding years, the growing number of Catholic population and their spiritual needs, demanded a bigger and spacious edifice of a church. Rev. FR. Tobias Bongon, organized the Parish Pastoral Council and together made a five-year program to build a new parish. The Parish

church was completed during the term of Rev. Fr. Dioscoro Ibanita who was assigned in Balatan in 1994. Fr. Ibanita did not focus on physical structure alone, but even made the endeavor beneficial to spiritual

growth of the parishioners.

Parish of the Most Holy Trinity. Parish records chronicle shows that Bato was founded as municipality on February 15, 1753. The inclusion of this data in the parish documents only proves that the parish has been established prior to 1753.

However, it was only in 1784 that the parish church of Bato was dedicated to the Most Holy Trinity when Fray Gines Antonio Fernandez was the parish priest. The parish covers ten barangays, six of which lies along the shoreline of th Lake Bato, while the remaining four are situated in the upland.

St. Francis of Assissi, Buhi, Camarines Sur. The parish in Buhi was established in 1605 with Fray Antonio Mendez, OFM, as the first parish priest. That time, the parish was still an irregular and with no permanent resident curates until the early 1700s. By 1620, as the chronicles of Fray Antonio Lallave reveals, Buhi had around 1,200 Catholic converts. In 1680, Fray Simon Salamanca, OFM, built the firsts church which was made of light and semi-permanent materials. He dedicated it to the patronage of St. Francis of Assissi. In 1730, the first church of Buhi was destroyed by fire. Fray Jose Cerda, OFM, undertook the construction of a bigger church built of stronger materials. In January 1853, Fry Antonio Guadalajara, OFM, undertook the construction of a roads linking Buhi and Iriga and taught the natives how to cultivate abaca. He also granted ownership of the image of Nuestra Se?ora de Salvacion to Joroan, Tiwi, for the sum of 75 pesos, 50 pesos for the image and 25 pesos for the bell. By the end of the Spanish Colonial regime and taking over the country by the Americans, the administration of the parishes was passed n to the secular or diocesan priests.

Parish of Saint Mary Magdalene, Bula, Camarines Sur. The Parish of St. Mary Magdalene was established as a mission station in 1578 by the Franciscan missionaries. It was later elevated into a parish, mainly due to the increase in population of the original settlement. The parish community of Bula is dependent on agriculture as its main source of living. Most of the residents are engaged in rice and coconut farming. The Parish runs Bula Parochial school which has been in existence 2002.

Holy Cross Parish, Nabua, Camarines Sur. Prior to 1571, there was not own named Nabua. What existed then where individual and settlements know as "Rancherias". In 1571, a group of Sapaniards under captain Andres Ibarra and the Gaustininan Friar Fray Alonzo Gimenez was sent to explore the place paritcularly Lupa, which had its chieftain, Datu Panga from Borneo. Fray Alonzo built an altar in Lupa and the first mass and baptism were held there. Near Lupa were other settlements called Antacudos, Caobnan, Binoyoan, Sabang and Bula. In 1578, the Missionary Expedition composed of Franciscans arrived. They build a bigger church in Antacudos over the oldbamboo and nipa mission chapel and enshrined the Holy Cross there- the same Cross and Fray Alonzo installed in his makeshift Chapel. A year later, the church gutted by fire. A bigger church was built in 1579. However, a strong typhon visited Nabua in 1611 and destroyed the church again. A new church was built under the parish priest , Fr. Alonzo Jarague. In 1687, when Don Lope Rauerao was assigned Captain, he waived payment of taxes for 12 years to prepare the erection of a larger and permanent church of Nabua.

The site was transferred to a much higher grond and in 1698 a stne church took its palce under the direction of Fray Heretofore. In 1811, another devastating earthquake occurred and destroyed the main entrance of the church and the belfry bringing the huge bells crushed down to the ground. In 1861, the incumbent Captain, Don Domingo Zu?iga completed the project initiated by his immediate predecessor, Don Domingo Manzano of fabricating a cross made by pure silver to replace the wooden one installed in the church in 1578. Side by side with the age old icons in the church; the silver Holy Cross in one of the irreplaceable treasures of the town. The church was unroofed by a typhoon in 1875 and repaired in 1878. The belfry was damaged in 1850 but repaired in 1890 and 1894. In 1970, typhoon Sening brought considerable damage to the church which resulted to a full scale renovation. On May 2, 1978, the newly renovated church was

inaugurated and blessed by no less than the Archbishop of Manila, His Eminence Jaime Cardinal L. Sin.

The Parish Rectory had a facelifting and the church was improved through installing stained glass window and floor tiles during the term of Msgr.the Porta Sancta Zosimo Ma. Sa?ado. The Holy Cross Parochial School has been opened, and a higher and bigger belfry near the church was constructed to accommodate comfortably the Easter Angels. During the Jubilee year, the Porta Sancta was constructed and Blessed.

Parish of Saint Anthony of Padua, Iriga City. The spread of the Gospel in Iriga City started in the year 1578, when the place was just a barrio of Nabua. The Parish and town were established in the year 1683. The original chapel, dedicated to St. Anthony of Padua was destroyed by the fire of 1585. For some reason or another, every time a reconstruction of the church reaches completion, fire would consume the edifice until the year 1841 when Fray Tomas de Alfafara led the construction of a parish church with bricks and stones as materials.

Iriga owes its existence to the missionary enterprise launched by the Franciscans in the last decades of the sixteenth century during which the friars did not only sow seeds of faith but laid the foundation for the rise of the distinctly Hispanic culture which prevailed in the town for more than three hundred years.

Iriga enjoyed prosperity even I the early days of colonization Most chronicles carrying descriptions of the town had positive impressions not only of the scenic view of tis locality, but of the presence of Basic amenities which insured a more convenient life. Later, the parish church became Parroquia y Santuario Archidiocesano de San Antonio de Padua, Iriga City.

There has been significant progress in the churches' physical structures as of this time. The structures weren't improved because they were destroyed by fire, but rather because they felt the need for the church buildings to be expanded, renovated, and roofed to provide the devotees comfort and pleasant atmosphere during Masses. Undoubtedly, the majority of Filipinos, particularly the Bikolanos, are devout Catholics who make church attendance a priority on Holy days and on Sundays.

The Roman Catholic Churches in the Fifth District of Camarines Sur which were built during the Spanish period contributed much in the development of the district.

CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

The *Catholic faith* and *language* are the most crucial components, and has great influence to Bicol culture specifically in the fifth district of Camarines Sur, the Rinconada area. In Philippine society, the Spanish language continues to play a significant part in Spanish Culture. It was revealed during the interview, that a Filipino who can speaks fluently in Spanish is a person who belongs to the elite group of people in the society or among the intellectuals.

Another important influence of the Church during the Spanish period is the *celebration of fiesta*. It is considered as one of the most alluring features of Filipino culture which has been inextricably woven into Bicolano culture. You can see almost every family in Camarines Sur who joyfully and extravagantly celebrates fiesta in every towns, barangays and municipalities. And this is evident not only in the Bicol region but all through out Philippines.

As mentioned in Sunstar (2016), the Philippines they say has the most number of celebrations or feasts to commemorate an event. Because of the influence of the Spanish and its friars usually fiestas are celebrations for patron saints. The Philippines being a religious nation, all puroks, barangays, towns,

municipalities have their patron saints, and there are fiestas always in honor of these saints. The fiesta is for thanksgiving for blessings bestowed upon the people and the area. Fiestas are always causes for gatherings and celebrations and Filipinos love fiestas. And what comes with celebrations, food of course. The lechon, the roasted pig, is a highlight feature served during a fiesta.

To add, not only fiestas are being celebrated but birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, baptismal and a lot more are being celebrated too with fun. This is just a manifestation that Filipinos like the Spanish elite before are fond of merrymaking. That is their way of relaxing.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT.

Social development is about improving the well-being of every individual in society so they can reach their full potential. The success of society is linked to the well-being of each and every citizen (gnb.ca 2009).

One of the most evident and tangible influence of the Roman Catholic Church in Bicol on social development are the catholic and exclusive schools, like the Unibersidad de Sta. Isabel. Construction of exclusives schools before and Catholic schools were also evident in the Fifth Congressional District of Camarines Sur like La Consolacion College in Iriga City, Saint Bridget School in Buhi, Camarines Sur, and Sta. Monica Academy in Baao.

Education is vital to social development. It is through education that barriers between the rich and the poor are being removed. As mentioned in gnb.ca (2009), developing society requires investing in its people. In order for every citizen to pursue their ambitions with dignity and confidence, barriers must be removed. It involves rejecting the notion that those who are poor will always be that way. It focuses on assisting individuals as they progress toward self-sufficiency.

As experienced by the researchers, education will help you improved lives only if you deal with it properly. It will bring difference in your life from before.

Apart from the formal school, there were some bicolanos who were taught of doing art like painting, locksmithing and even baking. The love for art of the Bicolanos was sharpened during pandemic. Based on observation, the Filipinos have proven their resiliency during the pandemic. Many have lost their jobs because of the pandemic but the people were able to surpass it by engaging themselves in baking and art works like painting. Which in turn became their source of income up to this time.

Therefore, improving ones life and societal development is not limited to attending formal education but also dependent on the people's perspective of how their life should be. Valuing ones life will lead you to a progressive family and society.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

Leonard Binder(PD view.officeps.live.com) referred to Political Development as “changes in the type and style of politics. He attributes the following five characteristics to political development: change of identity, change of legitimacy, change of political participation, change of distribution, change in the degree of administrative and legal penetration into social structure and out of the remote regions.

The political development in this study refers to change of identity. With change of identity, Binder means changes from the religious to ethnic and from the parochial to the societal. This is the kind of political development being referred to in this study. From the time these churches were built in Rinconada, it also coincides with the birth of the style of governing. In other words, church has significant role in the political development of the different municipalities in Rinconada. As the churches were built, the birth of pueblos

in the Fifth Congressional district of Rinconada became evident. These pueblos includes the municipalities of Baao, Bato, Buhi, Bula, Nabua and City of Iriga in which each has a unique origin, a unique history on how this towns came into existence. The construction of Local government offices adjacent if not beside or near the Church is also a manifestation of how influential the church was during the Spanish period.

According to Bauzon (1991), there were three (3) main reasons of Church involvement in politics: First, the moral aspect of politics. Politics is a human activity. It may cause harm and offended people and at the same time may benefit people. It can lead to grace or to sin. Second, because the Gospel and the Kingdom of God call the Church to political involvement. Third, because the mission of the Church of integral salvation involves the political sphere.

Therefore, churches in the fifth district of Camarines Sur play a significant role in the the political development of the different municipalities in the district.

As to how these churches developed can be found in the supplementary reading material that the researchers were made which is the output of this study.

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