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The Superior Normal School for Women Teachers in Manila 1893-98

SISTER MARIA CARMEN

A survey of studies on educational development in the Philippines reveals an occasional and, very often, a vague reference to the Superior Normal School for Women Teachers in Manila at the close of the last century. Was the school actually established? How and for how long a time did it function? Can it claim a place in the history of education in the Philippines?

The political disturbances during the closing years of the Spanish regime and the subsequent establishment of American rule in the Islands account, to a large extent, for the existence of diverse views and opinions regarding this educational center. The first attempt at an inquiry about this institution was made by the First Philippine Commission in 1899.¹ In later years, Dr. Encarnación Alzona² and Father Evergisto Bazaco, O. P.,³ both historians of note in the Philippines, tried to investigate the matter further. However, in the *Report of the Philippine Commission* as well as in Alzona's and Bazaco's histories of education in the Philippines, the information given is, as a whole, limited to citations from the Royal decree that created the School and the Regulations by

which it was to be governed. No attempt has been made to inquire into the actual implementation of the aforementioned legislation. Blair and Robertson, too, give the translation of the Royal decree of March 11, 1892, the Royal order approving the Regulations, and the Regulations of the Superior Normal School for Women Teachers in Manila with some footnote explanations in *The Philippine Islands*.⁴

Aside from these passages, very little, if anything, is known about this school. It is the purpose, therefore, of this study to bring to light one of Spain's last efforts to respond to the appeals of Filipino leaders for educational reforms in the Islands, and to give to this institution its rightful place in Philippine History.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Why was the Superior Normal School for Women Teachers erected? On December 20, 1863 a Royal decree was promulgated ordering the establishment of separate primary schools for boys and girls in every town of the Philippines.⁵ Hence, there arose a need for women teachers. The Royal decree prescribed that these schools be conducted by certified teachers. Since there was no normal school for women as yet, those who aspired to teaching positions had to pass an examination before a board of examiners on the subjects taught in primary schools.⁶ The majority of the candidates for this examination were prepared by the Municipal School for Girls in the City of Manila and by the various convent schools, such as La Concordia and Santa Rosa.⁷ In 1875 a normal school for women was established in Nueva Cáceres, but it was exclusively for the young women of that diocese.⁸ However, the advantages offered by this normal school in the training of women teachers decided the Spanish government to open a similar institute in Manila to prepare women teachers for girls' primary schools all over the country.⁹ Thus, on the 11th of March 1892 a Royal decree was issued creating the Superior Normal School

for Women Teachers in Manila under the direction of the Augustinian Religious of the Assumption established in the Royal School of Santa Isabel in Madrid.¹⁰

Why was this institution confided to the Religious of the Assumption? The Congregation of the Assumption was founded in Paris in 1839 by Mother Marie Eugénie de Jésus (Anne-Eugénie de Brou),¹¹ who died in the order of sanctity in the monastery of Auteuil, Paris, on March 10, 1898,¹² and whose process of beatification is actually under examination before the Roman Curia. The main work of the Religious of the Assumption is the Christian education of young girls. The foundress saw in the society in which she grew up that the great evil of her times came from a learning in which faith had no part.

As long as the scientific and literary education of a young girl is not permeated by Catholic dogma and by the teachings of Faith, and if Christian life does not become the nourishment and the very atmosphere of her soul, she will be the scourge of the family and of society, and the fruit of this false science for her will be death.¹³

The realization of the urgent need of rebuilding in Christ this portion of society that was sadly drifting away from its God inspired her to form a teaching congregation of nuns who, by means of an enlightened and a profoundly Christian education, should seek to introduce the seeds of a spiritual rebirth into society and family life by implanting in the minds and souls of young girls the knowledge and the love of Jesus Christ.

In 1876, at the request of King Alfonso XII, the Assumption Sisters assumed the direction of the Royal School of Santa Isabel in Madrid.¹⁴ The Queen, María Cristina, was the staunch protectress of all the houses of the Assumption in Spain, but very particularly that of Santa Isabel, of which she was mother, benefactress and friend. The royal family had a special affection for Mother Marie Célestine who was the Superior of Madrid from 1877 to 1894, and who, at the death of the foundress, became the second Superior General of the Congregation.¹⁵ The

queen regent was a frequent visitor at Santa Isabel, and it was during one of these visits that she first broached the project of a normal school for women teachers in Manila to Mother Marie Célestine. The Spanish government had for a long time contemplated the creation of this school, and now that this project was about to be realized, she wished the Religious of the Assumption to assume its direction. Mother Marie Eugénie saw the immense possibilities for good in this distant mission and readily acceded to the queen regent's desire. As early as September 1890 negotiations began for the foundation in Manila.¹⁶

FOUNDATION AND GROWTH

On November 13, 1892 a group of Sisters composed of Mother Marie du Perpétuel Secours who was the Superior, Sr. M. Alipia, Sr. María de la Cruz, and Sr. M. Celedonia sailed from Barcelona on board the steamer *Isla de Panay* for the Philippines. After a comparatively short voyage they reached Manila about the middle of December. A small house in the district of San Miguel had been prepared to receive them, and a few days afterwards, December 18, Mass was celebrated for the first time in their temporary convent. They remained in this house until May 1893 when they transferred to a rented three-storey building on Anda Street behind the College of San Juan de Letran. Another group of Sisters that left Barcelona on March 31, 1893 on the same vessel, *Isla de Panay*, arrived in Manila on May 4: Sr. M. Antonia, Sr. Ana Teresa, Sr. M. Inés, Sr. Loreto, Sr. M. Florentina, Sr. M. Angélica, Sr. M. Juana, Sr. M. Guadalupe, Sr. M. Nieves, Sr. M. del Carmen, Sr. M. Odilia and Sr. M. Custodia. A *Te Deum* was solemnly sung at the Cathedral upon their arrival, after which they were received by Archbishop Nozaleda in his palace.¹⁷

With the personnel almost complete and with a fairly adequate house in which to start their work, the Sisters began the immediate preparations for the opening of the

Normal School. From the very start, both the ecclesiastical and the civil authorities lent their valuable cooperation to this undertaking. They did all that was in their power to minimize as much as possible the innumerable difficulties that generally accompany any foundation.¹⁸

On July 2, 1893 the school opened with an approximate enrollment of a hundred students, most of whom were from Manila and the nearby towns.¹⁹ This was the first official superior normal school for women authorized to prepare and to graduate teachers for the girls' primary schools of the whole archipelago. In view of the fact that there was a pressing need of women teachers, the General Division of Civil Administration empowered this Normal School to give examinations to students who had taken liberal courses elsewhere and who wished to become elementary teachers. This permission, however, was limited to the first two years of the school's existence, that is, the academic years 1893-94 and 1894-95.²⁰ Thus, even before the end of the third school year 1896-97, the Superior Normal School for Women Teachers had granted several Elementary Teacher's certificates, mostly to students from the different schools of the Sisters of Charity. Elementary teachers who wished to become superior teachers had to take the fourth year course in the Normal School. The first recipient of the Superior Teacher's Certificate granted by this school was Susana Revilla, who not long after, opened a school of her own.²¹

The Normal School was first housed in the building on Anda Street during the years 1893-94 and 1894-95. But the steady increase of students called for a better school plant. Early in 1895 the present site of the Convent of the Assumption on Herran and Dakota Streets was bought by the Congregation from a Filipino priest, Father Tico. Plans for the construction of a suitable edifice that would house both the Normal School and the Boarding School were immediately laid out. On the 19th of March 1894, Msgr. Bernardino Nozaleda, Archbishop of Manila, laid the cornerstone of the future convent and school at a solemn ceremony attended by representatives of the

ecclesiastical and the civil authorities of the city. The building was completed the following year, and on May 30, 1895 the Sisters took up residence in their new convent in Malate.²²

The School continued to grow until the year 1896 when it suffered a setback with the outbreak of the Philippine Revolution. Almost all the students went home a few days after the Cry of Balintawak. Only a handful remained in each class. To cite an instance, the third year class which had started out with one hundred and fifty students in 1894 was reduced to seven. These seven were the first and the last graduates of the four-year normal course at the Assumption. They were Florentina Arellano, Dolores Guerrero, Margarita Miguel, Emilia Sacramento, María Santillán, Rosa Sevilla and a Spanish girl whose name cannot be recalled. Their graduation was advanced a fortnight, about the middle of March 1898, on account of rumors of a possible war between Spain and the United States.²³ A month later, the Spanish-American War was declared. The hostilities that followed the Battle of Manila Bay, May 1, 1898, made reopening of classes impossible. Early in June of the same year, the Religious of the Assumption were recalled to Europe, and thus, the Superior Normal School for Women Teachers in Manila came to an abrupt end.²⁴

ADMINISTRATION

Although the Superior Normal School for Women Teachers in Manila was conducted by the Assumption Sisters, it was a government institution, and as such, its administration and the instruction given therein were subject to minute regulations and close supervision. The members of the faculty were all appointed by Royal order through the Minister of Colonies. With the exception of the professor of religion and morals who was a priest, all the professors were Religious of the Congregation of the Assumption and graduates from the normal schools of Spain. Their annual compensation was fixed according

to law. The school equipment, the admission of students, their attendance, the examinations, the awarding of prizes, the maintenance of discipline, and the school finances were likewise regulated by the State.²⁵

This Superior Normal School was created for a double purpose. It was to serve as a teacher training institute and as a model school. Upon graduation, its students were expected to be adequately prepared to assume the direction of girls' primary schools. Consequently, the program of studies was calculated to provide the future teachers with an ample cultural background as well as with a knowledge of and experience in the use of the teaching methods most conducive to the all-round development of the child. Two kinds of teacher's certificates were granted: an Elementary Teacher's Certificate on the completion of three years, and a Superior Teacher's Certificate on the completion of four years.²⁶

The plan of studies adopted was that of the normal schools of Spain with the necessary adaptations.²⁷ For the first and second year, the curriculum included the following subjects: religion and morals, Spanish grammar, elocution, arithmetic, penmanship, general geography and that of Spain and of the Philippines, history of Spain and of the Philippines, hygiene and domestic science, needlework, geometry, physical education. The same subjects were given a further development in the third year with the addition of courses in pedagogy, the natural sciences and practice teaching. The fourth year was devoted to a more extensive treatment of all the subjects studied during the three previous years with two slight modifications—elementary literature was added, and geometry was eliminated; in its place, the students were given a course in designing for needlework.²⁸

A study of the program for the competitive examinations for teaching positions in the primary girls' schools of the first class reveals to a certain extent the scope given to the aforementioned subjects.

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Scope</i>
Religion and Morals	Christian doctrine, elements of Sacred Scripture and ethics.
Spanish Grammar	The parts of speech—their use and relation to one another, syntax, sentence structure, spelling.
Arithmetic	The fundamental operations, the metric system, fractions, the decimal system, ratio and proportion, interest.
Geography	Elementary astronomy, physical and political geography.
History	Political developments in Spain from its earliest days to the Bourbon dynasty; Spanish exploits in the Philippines.
Needlework	Hems, seams, backstitch, hemstitch, mending, patching, cross-stitch, scalloping, embroidery in <i>batiste</i> or <i>piña</i> .
Geometry	Lines and the figures they form, with a view to designing them and to determining their area and volume.
Pedagogy	A resumé of general psychology, educational psychology, principles of education, principles and methods of teaching. ²⁹

The teaching methods employed discouraged the traditional rote memory system prevalent in almost all the girls' schools of that time in the Philippines. Lectures, discussion, and laboratory work were extensively used. Every effort was made to develop the students' power of thinking, reasoning, and organizing, and thereby enable them to deepen and enlarge their knowledge by themselves in later years.³⁰ The value of material aids to teaching was recognized. The school had a well-furnished library. The geography and history classes were provided with globes and colored wall maps and charts. There was a complete collection of zoological, botanical and mineral

specimens for the study of natural history, and a well-equipped physics laboratory.³¹ The government provided funds for this purpose. Each year the directress could petition the government for the amount she deemed necessary in this regard. For example, on June 27, 1894 it is recorded that the *Intendencia General de Filipinas* authorized the release of the amount of ₱2,000 solicited by the directress of the Superior Normal School for Women Teachers in Manila to complete the equipping of the said school.³²

Being a teacher-training institution, the third and fourth year students were given an opportunity to acquire teaching experience in a Municipal School for girls attached to the Normal School. This municipal school, generally referred to as the *Escuela Práctica*, was opened only in 1895 when the Normal School was in its third year and had transferred to its new establishment in Malate. There were about sixty pupils in this school. The third and fourth year students practiced teaching under the supervision of either the Directress, Sr. María de la Cruz, or the Secretary, Sr. M. Alipia, during the last five months prior to their graduation. It is interesting to note that the lessons given by these student teachers were supplementary; the municipal school pupils had their lessons with their regular teachers as usual.³³

The students' achievement during the school year was closely followed up by the professors. There were no weekly or monthly tests, but a certain period of each lesson was set aside for recitation. Professors were required to submit a monthly report of their students' progress both in studies and in conduct. This report was posted on the bulletin board, thus rendering the pupils responsible for their scholastic standing and their deportment.³⁴

The general appraisal was made at the end of each school year. The students had to pass an examination on each of the subjects they had taken during the year. The greater part of these examinations was oral. After each examination, the Board of Examiners graded the

students: *Sobresaliente*, *Notable*, *Buena* or *Suspensa*. In spite of having been examined every year, students had to take the *reválida* on the completion of the elementary and the superior course to obtain their diploma.³⁵

Prizes were awarded annually for outstanding scholastic achievement: for the undergraduates, a *matrícula de honor* which entitled them to a full scholarship, and for the graduates, a *Título de Honor y de Gracia de Maestra de Primera Enseñanza Elemental* and a *Título de Honor y de Gracia de Maestra de Primera Enseñanza Superior*. Aspirants to these prizes had to pass a competitive examination. Only students with a grade of *Sobresaliente* in all the subjects were eligible for the competitive examination for the *matrícula de honor*. The examination was oral; the questions were written on the blackboard, and the contestant who answered first and correctly was awarded the prize. In the case of the *Título*, the aspirant must have had completed the *reválida* for elementary or superior teacher with a rating of *Sobresaliente* in all the examinations. This distinctive title was awarded to the best contestant. An exception was made for two of the graduates of 1898, at the request of the directress. Florentina Arellano and Rosa Sevilla were both awarded the *Título de Honor y de Gracia de Maestra de Primera Enseñanza Superior*, because both completed the four-year normal course with the grade of *Sobresaliente* in all the subjects of the four courses and in all the exercises of both *reválida*: for the elementary and for the Superior Teacher's Certificate.³⁶ Soon after the American occupation of the Philippines, when General Antonio Luna put out his revolutionary paper *La Independencia*, Florentina Arellano and Rosa Sevilla were the only two women included in its staff which counted such literary figures as Fernando María Guerrero, Joaquin Luna, Cecilio Apostol, Salvador V. del Rosario, Mariano V. del Rosario, Clemente José Zulueta, José Abreu, Epifanio de los Santos and Rafael Palma.³⁷

CONCLUSION

It is difficult to evaluate the contribution of an educational center whose life span was limited to five years, and whose sphere of influence was restricted to a few by reason of distance and of political developments in the country. However, it can be said that in spite of these adverse circumstances, the Superior Normal School for Women Teachers in Manila played a pioneering role in the field of women's education in the Philippines.

When the Superior Normal School began to send out its graduates, teaching came to be considered as a dignified profession for women. Graduation from the normal school was deemed a social distinction . . . She (the teacher) was looked upon as the best educated woman of the community.³⁸

The Directress, Sr. María de la Cruz, sought to instil in the minds and hearts of her students a deep appreciation for the teaching profession and a keen realization of their responsibility as future molders of the youth of the land. She quickly saw in the Revolution of 1896 something more than a mere rebellion. Eventually, Spain would have to relinquish its hold on the Islands.

Who knows whether this war that is fast assuming national proportions, will change the political status of your country? If that should happen, I shall be obliged to go. Bear in mind, therefore, that it is you who will take our place. Be ready to shoulder with your countrymen the new responsibilities you will have to face.

Yours is the primary task of forming the character of the young girls so that the Filipino women of the next generation, imbued with a deep sense of nobility, may be fired with an enthusiasm for higher endeavors and a firm determination to carry through their lofty ideals for God and country.

As Normal graduates, you should initiate this movement. Stay together, unite and help each other in propagating the true Faith and the virtues essential to the advancement of your people.

Set up a high ideal for the future of your country, and prepare yourselves to do all that is within your

power to open up a new path that will lead to the happiness and glory of your race.

Ward off that excessive shyness and timidity that hold back the full realization of your ability and strength.

As long as your women remain indifferent or resigned to what they deem as inevitable, your progress in the fulfillment of your national aspirations will be hampered. Intensify your endeavors and give all that you are capable of for the good of all that you hold dear in life.³⁹

These timely counsels given at a series of conferences to the graduating class by Sr. María de la Cruz some months prior to their departure, were carried out, almost to the letter, by the class of 1898. In the words of Mrs. Rosa Sevilla Alvero, "they took root, blossomed, and bore fruit."⁴⁰ As early as 1900, even before peace had been completely restored in the country, Doña Rosa launched the Instituto de Mujeres, the first Filipino school for women.⁴¹ Among her first collaborators were four of her companions at the Normal School: Florentina Arellano who became the Instituto's Vice-Directress, Emilia Sacramento, its Dean of Discipline, Susana Revilla, its Secretary and, later, Acting Directress during Mrs. Alvero's absence, and Dolores Guerrero.⁴² Two years after the establishment of the Republic of the Philippines, July 4, 1948, our government officially acknowledged Mrs. Rosa Sevilla Alvero's invaluable service to the country by awarding her the Medal for Merit as

Pioneer educator, indefatigable social leader, ardent lover of Filipinism, leader in the feminist movement, patriot . . .⁴³

Established in 1893, the Superior Normal School for Women Teachers in Manila witnessed during its five years of existence two of the most momentous movements in the annals of Filipino struggles for freedom—the Revolution of 1896 and the American invasion of 1898. These political circumstances prevented it from rendering greater service to the country. Nevertheless, it succeeded in preparing and inspiring a chosen few to initiate the noble

task of educating our young women for a free Catholic Philippines.

¹ *Report of the Philippine Commission to the President* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1900), Vol. II, pp. 253-60; 287; 458; 469-70.

² Encarnación Alzona, *A History of Education in the Philippines 1565-1930* (first edition; Manila: University of the Philippines Press, 1932), pp. 81-93.

³ Evergisto Bazaco, *History of Education in the Philippines* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Press, 1939), Vol. I, pp. 301-09.

⁴ Emma Helen Blair and James Alexander Robertson, *The Philippine Islands* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1907), Vol. XLVI, pp. 160-210.

⁵ *Real decreto estableciendo un plan de instrucción primaria en Filipinas*, 20 de Diciembre de 1863, art. iii, reprinted by Daniel Grifol y Aliaga, *La Instrucción primaria en Filipinas* (Manila: Tipo-Litografía de Chofre y Compa., 1894), pp. 1-7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, art. xi.

⁷ Philippine Commission, *Census of the Philippine Islands 1903* (Washington: United States Bureau of Census, 1905), Vol. III, pp. 615-16.

⁸ *Decreto del gobierno general constituyendo en escuela normal de maestras de primera enseñanza el colegio de Sta. Isabel en la ciudad y diócesis de Nueva Cáceres*, 9 de Junio de 1875, reprinted by Grifol y Aliaga, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-40.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹⁰ *Real decreto creando en Manila una escuela normal de maestras a cargo de las Religiosas Agustinas de la Asunción establecidas en el Real Colegio de Santa Isabel de Madrid*, 11 de Marzo de 1892, published in the *Gaceta de Manila*, 8 de Junio de 1892.

¹¹ *Les Origines de l'Assomption* (deuxieme édition; Tours; Imprimerie A. Mame et Fils, 1903), Vol. I, p. 278.

¹² *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 532.

¹³ *L'Esprit de l'Assomption dans l'éducation et l'enseignement* (Tournai: Imprimerie Desclée et Cie., 1910), p. 32.

¹⁴ *Les Origines . . .*, Vol. IV, pp. 373-77.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 389.

¹⁶ *Annales de Santa Isabel* (unpublished manuscript, Madrid, 1890).

¹⁷ Testimony of Sr. M. Nieves and of Sr. M. Loreto, former members of the faculty of the Superior Normal School for Women Teachers in Manila; at present in the Convents of Santa Isabel, Madrid and of Málaga respectively.

Annales de Santa Isabel (unpublished manuscript, Madrid, 1892-93).

¹⁸ *Misiones Católicas en extremo oriente* (Manila: Cacho Hermanos, 1937), p. 68.

¹⁹ Testimony of Sr. M. Nieves and of Sr. M. Loreto.

²⁰ *Gaceta de Manila*, 7 de Mayo de 1893.

²¹ Testimony of Mrs. Rosa Sevilla de Alvero, one of the graduates of the Superior Normal School for Women Teachers in Manila; founderess of the Instituto de Mujeres.

²² Testimony of Sr. M. Nieves and of Sr. M. Loreto.

²³ Testimony of Mrs. Rosa Sevilla de Alvero.

²⁴ Testimony of Sr. M. Nieves and of Sr. M. Loreto.

- ²⁵ *Reglamento de la Escuela Normal Superior de Maestras de Manila*, published in the *Gaceta de Manila*, 7 de Junio de 1892.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, tit. I, cap. i.
- ²⁷ "Escuelas Normales" *Enciclopedia universal ilustrada europeo-americana* (Barcelona: Hijos de J. Espasa, editores, n. d.), Tomo XXXII, pp. 121-25.
- ²⁸ Report cards of Rosa Sevilla.
- ²⁹ *Gaceta de Manila*, 8 de Septiembre de 1893.
- ³⁰ Sor M. Cuenca, R. V. M. "Felices Reminiscencias," *Past and Present*, February 13, 1939, p. 14.
- ³¹ Testimony of Mrs. Rosa Sevilla de Alvero.
- ³² *Gaceta de Manila*, 10 de Septiembre de 1893.
- ³³ Testimony of Mrs. Rosa Sevilla de Alvero.
- ³⁴ Sor M. Cuenca, *loc. cit.*
- ³⁵ *Reglamento*, tit. IV, cap. iv.
- ³⁶ Testimony of Mrs. Rosa Sevilla de Alvero.
- ³⁷ Fely I. San Andres, *Woman of Molave* (Manila, 1948), p. 14.
- ³⁸ Encarnación Alzona, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
- ³⁹ Rosa Sevilla Alvero, "Kung bakit ako ay naguing ako," (unpublished memoir), pp. 165-66.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 167.
- ⁴¹ *Loc. cit.*
- ⁴² "Foundation of the Assumption in Manila," *Past and Present*, 1939, p. 9.
- ⁴³ Citation accompanying Award of the Medal for Merit to Rosa Sevilla Alvero, July 4, 1948, reprinted by Fely I. San Andres, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
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