BEATERIO DE LA COMPAÑIA DE JESÚS  
THE LIFE OF THE BEATAS DURING THE PHILIPPINE 
REVOLUTION (1896 – 1899)

Introduction

Mother Ignacia del Espiritu Santo is a major figure in the growth of Christianity to maturity among the Filipino people. Having spent several years in studying and teaching History, as well as investigating the surviving historical documentation concerning the early Beaterio, which came to be known today as the Congregation of the Religious of the Virgin Mary, simply RVM Sisters, in connection with the historical process with a view to her possible beatification, I have come to be more and more deeply impressed at the extraordinarily innovative and creative character of her contribution to the Philippine Church and Society in the face of all the obstacles which the prejudices and circumstances of her century placed in her way.

Historians are called to work of filling in the gaps of that history and of digging to give us an idea, with the help of the RVM Sisters, in attempting to carry on the work of their Foundress in new ages and conditions. The details of whose life remain so tantalizingly hidden from us, as laity, in large part much of their work has been hidden and humble, but for all that, not of less value to Church and country.

I came to have a deeper understanding about Mother Ignacia and her Beaterio way back 2001 when the core group for our undergraduate thesis writing divided into three groups. I worked on my undergraduate thesis alone within two months prior to our graduation, and as if a miracle had happened, my feet brought me in the Mother House of the RVM which was located in N. Domingo, Quezon City. I was blessed to met Sr. Ma. Nicetas Dael, RVM whom had given me some reading materials about their congregation and had introduced me to their archivists Sr. Maria del Carmen, RVM and Sr. Isabel Fulache, RVM. I am honored that Sr. Consuelo Alvino, RVM guided me in my paperworks and prepared me through a mock thesis defense.

My connection with the RVM Sisters prospered when I became a high school teacher of Social Studies at St. Mary’s Academy of Sto. Niño in Meycauayan, Bulacan and when I became as one of the Aspirants for the Religious Formation Year 2004-2005. I thought it all ended when I left them and entered as Postulant of the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena – Philippines, Religious Formation Year 2005-2006. For almost seven years, I never thought that I will be presenting a paper today before you about the first Filipino indigenous congregation founded by a Filipina.

I would like to take this opportunity to share with you the humble beginnings of her Beaterio which was truly a God’s gift from a Filipino, for the Filipinos and for the Catholic Church as well.
This paper was originally written as a requirement of the subject “The Philippine Revolution 1896-1897” under the Master of Arts in History at the University of the Philippines. As a student of history, I am not presenting the spirituality of the Foundress, however, I am presenting the social relevance of the Beaterio, especially the early beatas’ sacrifices which became a legacy of the present Congregation of the Religious of the Virgin Mary.

Moreover, this paper aims to answer the following questions:

1. Who is Madre Ignacia del Espiritu Santo?
2. How did she establish the Beaterio de la Compañía de Jesus?
3. How does the Philippine Revolutionary War (1896-1897) affected the lives and missions of the beatas and the Beaterio?

The relevance of this topic primarily serves as an eye-opener for every Filipinos that even there is the separation of church and state in our constitution, the spirit of nationalism, valor and deep faith are the main elements to respond to the call to the “service of the fatherland” and the “service of the Divine Majesty.”

Mother Ignacia del Espiritu Santo and the Founding of the Beaterio de la Compañía de Jesus

Mother Ignacia del Espiritu Santo was born, lived and died during the Spanish colonial era in the Philippines. Her birth date is unknown, but record shows that she was baptized in the Church of the Holy Kings in Parian on March 4, 1663 by the Dominican missionary Fr. Alberto Collares. Padre Pedro Murillo Velarde confirms the statement that Ignacia was 21 years old in 1684. Ignacia was the eldest and the sole surviving child of Maria Jeronima, an yndia, and Jusepe Iuco, a pure Chinese immigrant from Amui (Amoy), China, who was converted to the Catholic faith in 1652 and resided in Binondo, Manila.

When Ignacia was 21 years old, she was faced with the need to choose a state of life wherein her parents wanted her to marry. However, Ignacia does not want to disappoint her parents and because of having a call deep within her, she sought counsel from Fr. Paul Klein, S.J., which gave her the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. After a few days of solitude and prayer, “Ignacia was inspired by God to remain in the service of the Divine Majesty and she resolved to live by the sweat of her brows” (Murillo Velarde, 809). She left home and brought with her only a needle and a pair of scissors. She started to live alone in the house located at the back of the Jesuit College of Manila, in Calle Sta. Lucia. Her life of prayer and labor attracted other yndias who also felt called to the religious life but could not be admitted into the existing congregations at that time. Mother Ignacia accepted these women into her company and the first community was born. They
became known as the *Beatas de la Compañía de Jesús* because they frequently received the sacraments at the Church of St. Ignatius, performed many acts of devotion there and had the Jesuit fathers for their spiritual directors and confessors.

Mother Ignacia concentrated her life on the suffering Christ and tried to emulate Him through a life of service and humility. She prayed earnestly to God and performed penances to move God to have mercy on them. Her spirituality of humble service was expressed in her capacity to forgive, to bear wrongs patiently and to correct with gentleness and meekness. This spirituality was manifested in peace and harmony in the community, mutual love and union of wills, witnessing to the love of Christ and the maternal care of the Blessed Mother.

This spirituality sustained the *beatas* in their moments of difficulties especially during times of extreme poverty (*suma pobreza*), when they even had to beg for rice and salt and scour the streets for firewood. The *beatas* continued to support themselves by the labor of their hands and sometimes received some financial help from pious people. In all these, they did not cease to thank God and to trust in divine providence.

Their growing numbers called for a more stable lifestyle and a set of rules. Following the spirit of St. Ignatius, Mother Ignacia exhorted themselves to live always in the presence of God and to develop great purity of heart. She also emphasized charity in the community which was dedicated to the Blessed Mother. In defining her style of leadership, Mother Ignacia drew inspiration from the Blessed Virgin Mary and was manifested through the rules which were written for their guidance.

Mother Ignacia gradually realized that the *beaterio* was called by God not only to a life of prayer and penance but also to apostolic service. They admitted young girls as boarders who were taught Christian doctrine as well as works suitable to them. Mother Ignacia did not make any distinction of color or race but accepted *indias, mestizas* and Spaniards as *recogidas*. The *beatas* were also involved in retreat work and helped the Jesuit Fathers by preparing the retreatants to be disposed to the Spiritual Exercises.

Mother Ignacia prepared and submitted the 1726 Constitutions\(^8\) to the Archdiocesan office for approval. After the approval was given in 1732 by the Fiscal Provisor of Manila, Mother Ignacia decided to give up her responsibility as superior of the house and lived as an ordinary member until her death. Fr. Murillo Velarde saw this as a great sign of her humility, showing that she had no desire to command and control. In his belief, she was a “true valiant woman” who overcame the great difficulties which she met in the foundation from the beginning to the end. She was “mortified, patient, devout, spiritual, zealous for the good of souls.”

A few months before her death, the Archbishop initiated a process of securing Royal Protection for the *Beaterio*. Mother Ignacia died at the
age of 85 on September 10, 1748. She was buried at the Jesuit Church of St. Ignatius. At her burial, she was honored by the presence of Spanish officials, lay and ecclesiastics. Her coffin was borne by Spaniards. She died without knowing the response of the Spanish King but her long life in the beaterio must have taught her to trust in the providence of God. Little did she expect that the beaterio would become a congregation and continue to exist until today, more than 300 years after her death. This congregation, now known as the Religious of the Virgin Mary, is a living testimony to her life as God’s handmaid who opened the door of religious life to native women in the Philippines. She proved that God is the God of all peoples, of whatever color or race.

The Royal Protection granted in 1755 guaranteed the safety of the beatas but it did not recognize the beaterio as a community of religious women. It was ordained to remain as a pious association. The beatas, faithful to the spirit of their foundress, Mother Ignacia, continued to live the religious life even without being officially recognized as such. The expulsion of the Jesuits in 1768 was another blow to them. They lost their spiritual guides but they continued to enjoy the solicitude of the Archbishop of Manila and other Churchmen. In the spirit of Mother Ignacia, they lived by the sweat of their brows and persevered in their service of God through education and retreat work. Despite attempts by the Governor-general to change the nature of the beaterio, they remained true to the vision and charism of Mother Ignacia and survived the dark years.

The growth of the beaterio into a Congregation and its response to the apostolic challenges of the times show the vitality of the spirit of Mother Ignacia. Indeed, her lamp continues to shine as her daughters courageously strive to respond with zeal to the call of mission in different contexts. The Story of the Congregation that has grown from the small Beaterio of Mother Ignacia continues to unfold as it bears witness to the enduring vitality and strength of the foundation, the spirituality of Mother Ignacia.

**The Beaterio in the Philippine Society**

For all the usefulness of the Beaterio de la Compañía de Jesus to the social welfare of Philippine society, the colonial system became its main obstacle to the attainment of the fullness of the vision of its Foundress. To all purposes, its members lived in the consecrated evangelical life, but juridically it remained a pious institution.

In 1896, the native yndios dramatically articulated the severance of his chain to Spain by the symbolic tearing of his cedula tax and the taking up of his primitive weaponry against the oppressor. Manila had to be protected from the rebels by an increase of the military.

The political developments in the Philippines towards the end of the nineteenth century that culminated in the revolution of the colony against Spain in 1896, and the eventual turn-over of colonial power to the Americans in 1898 had their particular effects on the first indigenous religious community descended from the Servant of God, Mother Ignacia. Her radical vision to “seek and do the will of God” has disposed her followers to be always open to do what God wanted of them.
The outbreak of the Philippine Revolution in 1896 and the consequent proclamation of the first Philippine Republic under President Emilio Aguinaldo provided the beatas with the opportunity to express their identification with the national cause through direct service.

I. War Effects on the Manila Beaterio

On May 13, 1897, the Beaterio superior, Madre Ma. Chavas Antonio addressed a letter to Manila Archbishop Bernardino Nozaleda requesting permission to vacate the Beaterio because of some inconvenience suffered in the neighborhood wherein enlarged number of occupants in the former Jesuit establishment across the street became a Spanish barracks since the expulsion. The Archbishop’s approval for the permission was dated the following day. There must have been some repercussions in the community when the permission was made public, after four days, Madre Ma. Chavas Antonio humbly retracted her words since she had “not sought sufficient advice” for it. A month later, the Commander of the Spanish cuartel solicited permission from the Archbishop to expropriate the Beaterio since the quarters of the increased soldiery were most inadequate. There is no record of the Archbishop’s action regarding this matter.

II. The Beatas and the Army of the First Philippine Republic

In 1898, another element entered into the revolution: The Spanish – American War. Filipinos bid for the self-determination first against colonial Spain and then against the United States occupation forces, became the occasions for the Beatas’ call to another mission.

Dewey’s fleet in the Pacific made short work of Spanish forts in the Marianas and the Philippines was next in the strategy. The American forces under Admiral Dewey had entered the scene of conflict, and Manila was blockaded from the sea to press to Spanish government to surrender. About mid-April, it was during the heat of these hostilities that the beatas in Manila were ordered by Archbishop Nozaleda to evacuate for their safety to the neighboring town of Malabon. The first Red Cross center they worked in was in the Barrio of Concepcion.

They stayed at Malabon for eight months, at the end of which ordered to move to Malolos came. Then they chose to move to the nearby town of Paombong and to Hagonoy. One of their members being a relative of General Gregorio del Pilar, they were readily received and protected in the area. Even during these periods of stress, the beatas found expression for their apostolic orientation. In the two months that they lived in the town of Paombong, they opened school for the little children and they taught them. They also took the initiative to gather the townspeople for devotions and liturgy inspite of the warfare that surrounded them.
The revolutionary government converted the Parish Convent of Barasoain into a hospital and here the Sisters served. As the tide of war continued to turn against the Filipinos, they retreated further North. Throughout these insecurities, the beatas were fortunate to have respect and assistance of the revolutionary army. When the Spanish forces had surrendered to the Americans and the forces of Aguinaldo were then considered insurgents by their erstwhile allies, it was to the native beatas that the beleaguered Filipino leaders turned for medical services to their wounded.

When General Emilio Aguinaldo begun his retreating trek across the central plains of Luzon, he asked for some madres to serve the wounded, five professed and one novice volunteered: Sor Efigenia Alvarez, who was named Superior, Sor Braulia de la Sta. Cruz, Sor Rafaela Dolores, Sor Isabel Halili (an old Sister), Sor Martina Gonzalez and Sor Maxima Martinez.

From Malolos, the Sisters rode with the wounded on carts drawn by carabaos. They moved to San Fernando, Pampanga where they received the assistance of some women of the town. From San Fernando, the next move was to Arayat, a journey where tool all of three days through grass and swamp lands. The next move took them to Pangasinan, delaying in the town of Tayug until the swollen Agno River was made passable after the rains. In Bayambang, Pangasinan, the novice Sor Maxima Martinez died and was buried at the Catholic cemetery. From Pangasinan, they retreated next to La Union with the American forces hard on their heels.

The volunteer beatas shared the retreating Philippine army soldiers the hardships and deprivations encountered, vicissitudes of the war, caring for the wounded, walking or riding in carts through the wilderness. The wounded soldiers arrived in stretchers carried on the shoulders of their companions or dragged in carts. As they moved, some of the wounded had to be left in the towns. The beatas not only served as nurses but assumed as well the cleaning, cooking, washing and bandage-making for the hospital. They organize the women of each town they passed to provide medical supplies and services.

III. War Effects on Mission Beaterios

The outbreak on the 1896 revolution was soon felt in Mindanao. The revolutionary government attempted to rally the whole archipelago against the Spaniards. Leaders were sent to Mindanao to organize the revolt and overthrow Spanish authorities. The threat of American invasion caused the withdrawal of Spanish forces from many forts and resulted in an easier takeover by the revolutionaries.
The Jesuit Superior of the Mission in Tamontaca was notified of the orders for withdrawal of the Spanish contingent. Without the protection of the army, Fr. Salvador Viñas, S.J. thought it imprudent to remain in Tamontaca, and evacuated the *beatas* as well as *niñas recogidas*\(^{13}\) from the orphanage and some 60 families journeyed to Zamboanga. They joined the Zamboanga community where they were accommodated in the Parish Rectory of Tetuan. The *libertos*\(^{14}\), which were under their care, were distributed among the families who wished to hire them as servants.

On April 20 1899, the two communities, a total of seven professed sisters and three novices under the Superior of Zamboanga, Sor Clara Ramirez and the Superior of Tamontaca, Sor Luisa Domingo, boarded the ship San Pedro for Manila. While Sor Agapita Domingo\(^{15}\) was accompanied by three professed and one novice.

In Butuan, the Jesuit missionaries underwent such ill treatment of search, confiscation of property and imprisonment. Father Francisco Nebot, writing to his Provincial Superior on October 1, 1899 mentions that the madres of the *beaterio* who were teaching in Butuan, shared in the Jesuit’s sufferings. Their house having been searched and their door guarded.

There is no record of the *beatas* from the communities of Dapitan, Dipolog, Lubungan and Surigao having evacuated. One may assume that since, at least with the case of the two mission houses, most of the members were natives to the place, there was less of the insecurities experienced by the Manileñas of the Tamontaca and Zamboanga *beaterio*.

**IV. Restoration of Peace in the Country and A Life in the New Order of the Beaterio**

Peace was re-established in April 1900 and the war veterans returned to their homes, the Sisters to the *Beaterio*. Back at the *Beaterio*, Mother Efigenia resumed her post as Secretary and Procurator of the house. The reunited Superiors of the Manila and Mindanao *beaterios* realized that a new order was dawning on the country and for the daughters of Mother Ignacia del Espiritu Santo. They must face them and they must also regulate and adapt their way of living as to be continuously relevant witnesses to the religious life in the church. A new challenge awaited them as the pioneers in the religious life for women of their race and they set about answering the call.

From the solitary *Beaterio de la Compañia* in Manila, the disposition of *ancilla domini* became their legacy from the Servant of God, Mother Ignacia del Espiritu Santo, they likewise, “rose in haste” to respond to the call to the “service of the fatherland” and the “service of the Divine Majesty.”
Memoirs of Madre Superiora

In an interview, Mother Efigenia gave on the occasion of her Golden Jubilee in 1934. She recalls the scene of their last evacuation:

“The panorama was splendid, the running water nearby of crystalline purity, but we were under no condition to enjoy them; we were slaves to our fears of falling into the hands of the enemies who were getting closer every minute.”

On the episode of the life of Mother Efigenia, Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo himself comments 36 years later at her Golden Jubilee celebrations, August 9, 1934:

“...esta grabada la eternal gratitude a Vuestra Rev. por vuestros desinterados y meritorios servicios... sin que Vuestra Rev. tuviese jamas en cuenta las grandes dificultades que se presentaban a su santa mission, cuyo primordial objeto era consolara los heridos y enfermos revolucionarios con vuestros cuidados y consejos cristianos que acrisolaron vuestras virtudes religiosas.”

“Imprinted in our hearts is our eternal gratitude for your unselfish and meritorious services in cooperation with the members of the Red Cross extended toward the disabled revolutionaries. You paid no heed to the great difficulties met in your mission of alleviating the pains and the wounded, and the Christian counsels you lavished on our men revealed your religious virtues.” (Ferraris)

Conclusion

This paper, BEATERIO DE LA COMPAÑIA DE JESUS: THE LIFE OF THE BEATAS DURING THE PHILIPPINE REVOLUTION (1896 – 1899), presented the life, virtues and fame for Holiness of the Servant of God, Mother Ignacia del Espiritu Santo, through the works of her daughters among the Filipino community and the Catholic church. However, for us, laity, and as Filipinos in general, opened many avenues for further study and deepening, not only of our faith but of our sense of historicity and nationalism.

The spirituality of the Foundress has been transmitted throughout the early beatas and the sisters of the present day Congregation. This calls for a deeper translation of the congregation’s apostolate and of strengthening the integration of faith and culture among the students, teachers, parents and community leaders. It is my fervent prayer and wish that further studies will be conducted regarding the congregation not just as a religious institution of the Catholic Church but also as a social institution working hand-in-hand with the Filipino community as a whole.
ENDNOTES:

1. Libro de Bautizados, Iglesia de los Santos Reyes de Parian, Siglo XVII (1626-1700), tomo 2º. Dominican Archives of the Philippine Province, San Juan, Metro Manila (DAPP). When the researcher first saw the book in 1959, it was still in the possession of the convent of Santo Domingo in Quezon City.

2. El P. Fr. Alberto Collares. Catalán e hijo de hábito del convent de Santa Catalina virgin y martir de Barcelona, a tomó el hábito el 1º de Marzo de 1627, y profesó en idéntico día el año siguiente de 1628. Llegado a estas Islas, desde 1633 aparece respectivamente asignado al parian de los chinos, a este convent de Manila y a la casa de Bataan, hasta el Capítulo de 1639 en que se lo encomendó po primera vez la Vicaria del Parian; cargo que en diferentes veces desempeñó unos dieciseis años. Mas adelante fué honrado por dos veces con la presidencia del hospital de los chinos, y otras dos con la Vicaria Provincial en esta provincial de Manila. Murió placidamente en este convent de Manila, el 26 de Agosto, de 1673, recibidos los santos Sacramentos, alos 40 años de ministerio tagalo-sínico (Compendio de la Reseña Biográfica de los Religiosos de la Provincia del Santísimo Rosario de Filipinas. Comprende desde 1578 a 1895. Manila: tip. Del Real Colegio de Sto. Tomas, 1895).

3. Father Pedro Murillo Velarde came to the Philippines in 1723 and remained until 1759 when he set for Europe as procurator from the Philippine Province of the Society of Jesus to Madrid and Rome.

4. The records of the three younger children each bear a cross mark along the margin, probably indicating death. This was an offered explanation in a consultation in 1986 by Fr. Luis Serra, O.P., Parish Priest of the Chinese Parish of Binondo.

5. Fr. Paul Klein (Pablo Clain) was a Jesuit from Bohemia. He came to Manila in 1682 where he taught at the Jesuit College.


7. About the second decade of the 17th Century, there was in Manila a group of Japanese Christians exiled from Japan. Having been converted by the Jesuit missionaries in Meaco, the exiles were first accommodated inside the Walled City (Manila), and transferred later to the Jesuit-ministered territory of the doctrina de San Miguel outside the city. The Japanese women had lived together in a religious community known as Congregación de las Señoras Japonesas recogidas, the first superior being Doña Julia Nayto, known as la Madre de la Congregacion.

It is the conjecture of the writer that the house behind the Jesuit College to which the Servant of God retired for her retreat was one of the Jesuit-own houses occupied by the Japanese beatas before their ultimate transfer to San Miguel.

8. Constituciones y Reglas de las Beatas Yndias Doncellas que sirven a Dios Nuestro Señor en este Beaterio de Manila, debajo de la Dirección Espiritual de los Reverendos Padres de la Compañía de Jesús, 1726. MS from the Archivo General de Indias (AGI); photocopies at the RVM Archives. Special Collection.
9. MSS, Special Collection RVM Archives. RG2 S:02V.
10. In 1884, she was recalled to the Beaterio of Manila and was named Secretary to the Superior while at the same time, Mistress of Novices. On 11 June 1891, she received the appointment as Rectora (Superior) of the Beaterio to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Mother Marciana de Leon. She held this charge through the chaotic years of the revolution and led the little group through the evacuation in Bulakan.
11. The 13th Superior of the Beaterio and became the first Superior General of the Congregation elected at the 1st General Chapter.
12. Excerpt from the Diary of Mother Efígenia Alvarez.
13. Little children taught by the beatas.
14. Former slaves brought to be freed.
15. Native of Tondo and daughter of famous painter Damian Domingo. She joined the beaterio as a recogida at the aged of when she felt the call to embrace the evangelical counsels and sought the manifestation of God’s will which came in a unique manner.
17. Excerpts from the letter of General Emilio Aguinaldo to Mother Efígenia Alvarez on the occasion of her Golden Jubilee, 9 August 1934.

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_____________ . …and the woman’s name is IGNACIA. Quezon City: RVM Publications Committee.
_____________ . Madre Ignacia del Espiritu Santo Isang Tunay na Magiting na Pilipina. Manila: CFA Media Group-SCC Chevalier Center