

## *The History of the Indonesian Province (1924 - 1977)*

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**1** Although the erection of a Vice-Province in Indonesia took place only on March 1st, 1962, and it became a Province on May 1st, 1974, the activity of the Congregation in Sumatra began back in 1924 when South Sumatra was still a missionary region of the Dutch Province.

### THE BEGINNINGS

**2** The missionary territory of South Sumatra was entrusted to our Congregation by the Papal Brief of December 27<sup>th</sup>, 1923. The first missionaries were two Fathers and one cooperating Brother who on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1924, arrived at Tanjungsakti, then the only missionary centre.

**3** This centre was directed by Father H. J. D. Van Oort who immediately started inspecting the territory to check the possibility of organizing missionary activities. The territory to be evangelized included the present provinces of Jambi, Bengkulu, Lampung and Sumatra Selatan (excluding the two islands of Bangka and Belitung).

**4** After this tour of orientation by Fr. Van Oort Palembang was chosen as the main missionary centre since it was the largest and most important town of the territory and also the point of departure for two railroads, one southbound, the other westbound.

**5** In this same place the Capuchin Fathers bought a house where since 1922 they have celebrated a Mass every month. Nevertheless, Palembang was not yet a fixed centre and was visited only during occasional tours. However at Easter in 1925 Palembang became established permanently and in July of the same year M. Neilen settled there as its first parish priest. His house also served as a place of worship. After some enlargement and

renovation in 1932 the present church was built and consecrated to the Sacred Heart. However, the main centre (and the Apostolic Prefect's residence) remained Tanjungsakti, but only until 1934 when the second Apostolic Prefect of Sumatra, Msgr. H. M. Mekkelholt, the former dean of Palembang, was appointed.

**6** The first Apostolic Prefect was Msgr. H. L. Smeets, who had previously worked for five years in Zaire, but he could not adapt himself to the new environment so different from that he had just left. As soon as other unforeseen difficulties occurred he returned to Europe and thereafter Fr. Van Oort became Prefect ad interim until 1934.

**7** After that the following centres were opened: Bengkulu in 1926, Tanjungkarang in 1928, Pringsewu at the time of the Javanese emigration in 1932, Lahat in 1935, Metro, the second foundation among the emigrated Javanese in 1937, and then Pasuruan in 1939, also among the Javanese of Lampung.

**8** During the next years helpers were needed for this new missionary endeavour. At the beginning in 1926 the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of Roosendaal arrived and took over the hospital of a charitable organization that was unable to run it.

**9** The following year in 1927 the Sisters of the Sacred Heart from Moerdijk arrived and they started to manage the school at Palembang and later schools in other places. In 1929 the Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo joined our mission at Bengkulu. In 1932 the Franciscan Sisters of Thuine arrived at Pringsewu followed in 1936 by the Congregation of the Brothers of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart as well as the Brothers of Utrecht.

**10** In 1941, after the breakout of the war, there were 139 missionaries working in South Sumatra: 25 SCJ priests, 8 SCJ collaborators, 7 lay Brothers and 99 Sisters.

**11** In 1939 the Apostolic Prefecture of Bengkulu was made an Apostolic Vicariate and at the same time the name changed to the Vicariate of Palembang, which was in reality the residence of the Vicar.

## AFTER THE WAR

**12** It is not necessary to describe here in detail the misery of the war and its concentration camps. It is enough to note that at the end of the war only 96 religious remained: 16 SCJ priests, 6 collaborators, 6 lay brothers, and 68 Sisters.

**13** After the war the rebuilding was quite slow due to the struggle for independence, concluding in December 1949 with the acknowledgement of Indonesian independence.

**14** Nevertheless, some important events did take place during this period. First of all, the erection of the Minor Seminary of Palembang in 1947, followed by another seminary at Pringsewu in June of the same year. The latter was erected through the initiative of a Javanese priest because the communications between Palembang and Lampung were still, not re-established. Later the two experiments were unified.

**15** Before the war there were some candidates for the priesthood. One of them, Antonius Genti Aras, came from Tanjungsakti; two others from Central Java. The first one died in January 1938 at Moentilan, after having made his novitiate at Asten (Holland). Of the other two, one, Slamet Sapta Atmadja, died at Helmond in 1935; the other named Wigjnasoehardjo, was ordained priest in 1939 at Nijmegen, where he died in 1943 as a result of a poisoning at the Scolasticate.

**16** Although in the seminary the intention was not to form candidates only for our Congregation and the students were left entirely free to join the Secular Clergy or other Orders and Congregation, nevertheless, it was our desire that most of them would join the SCJ Congregation and this for practical reasons. Of considerable importance was the fact that the first generation of local priests could feel encouraged by the realization that they were not alone but members of a group in which they could find support in difficult moments.

**17** Another interesting development was the foundation of a second mission at Batuputih, situated seven kilometers from Baturaja and in the midst of an aboriginal population of Sumatra.

**18** Fr. H. Hermelink, who always took care of the children and who was looking for something to do during the cessation of missionary activity brought on by the war of independence, started to build a place of refuge for the abandoned children wandering in the Palembang streets. This refuge became a true orphanage called Rumah Yusup, the House of St. Joseph, and in 1948 it was transferred to Baturaja. Here, Fr. Borst, who had taken over from Fr. Hermelink, contacted Batuputih, having heard some rumour that people there took great interest in Christianity. The Dutch residents of Baturaja put Fr. Borst in contact with the “Kampong”, village, of Batuputih and as result half the population converted to Catholicism. A church and a school were built and during the following years about 450 people were baptized; this number later increased to 700. At present, however, the problem of conversion from Islamism to Catholicism no longer exists; they both remain as they are. At any rate, they are not hostile to each other. A rather serious incident happened in 1958, during which Fr. Leon Kwanten was in danger of being killed. He was saved by a 12-year-old urchin, who after seeing what was happening, courageously ran to ring the church bells.

When they heard this tolling all the Catholics gathered together and the killers ran away, leaving Fr. Kwanten seriously wounded.

**19** Another attempt to found a mission among the aborigines around Palembang had to be abandoned. Fr. Filing used to go there frequently but one day the house where he taught was beset by a siege of stones. From that day on, people lost their courage. The families that wished to remain Catholics were forced to go away; the other families were reconverted to Islamism.

**20** Besides the social work for the welfare of the children at Palembang being carried on by the House of St. Joseph, there was further interest in education. There was already a Xaverian Foundation, begun on May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1930. Under the same patronage there arose in 1959 an Upper Middle School (SMA) Its first director was Brother J.F.L. Nienhuis; his successor was Fr. (now Msgr.) J. Soudant and after him, Fr. J. Goeman. At present Fr. J. Weusten directs the school. Almost all the teachers and directors of the school are laymen.

**21** After the war there was an enormous increase of teaching in Indonesia. From the beginning the main language in all the schools, from the primary school to the university was Indonesian (Malay in an Indonesian version). Schools were built everywhere, although they were often very primitive. In this movement the Catholic Church has always acknowledged the importance of teaching both for religious formation and for education in general, and so the Church cannot but promote it. The school is and remains a powerful means for man's integral education, intellectual, moral and religious, as well as physical (sports). In all Indonesian schools, whatever their orientation, both religious and character formation are obligatory. It is precisely in this field that the Congregation must make a contribution, because in its programme, thanks to the Founder, the education of youth is present. The Xaverius Foundation coordinates the teaching in the Dioceses of Palembang and Tanjungkarang, which have 43 elementary schools, 20 lower middle schools, and 9 upper middle schools for a total of about 45,000 pupils. There was even an attempt to build a branch of the Catholic University of Atmadjaja at Palembang but after some years the idea had to be abandoned.

**22** During these years it happened that the Congregation became more and more conscious of the fact that its members were not only missionaries who served the Church, but also that they had to safeguard their identity and independence as far as their religious Congregation was concerned. At the beginning of the mission there was no religious superior who looked after the specific interests of the Congregation and its members. Perhaps this was because of the small number of religious there. There was, it is true, the Apostolic Prefect, also a member of the Congregation, but he was not appointed superior in the Congregation. However, after the difficulties of the

first years it was necessary to appoint someone superior there, who would look after the interests of the Congregation in a special way. And so it happened that towards the end of 1927 Fr. Van der Sangen left for Sumatra as the first religious superior at the request of Fr. Govaart, who was then provincial superior.

**23** In 1934 the *Statutum Missionis* was compiled regulating in general terms the relationship between the ecclesiastical authorities and the religious in the missionary territory.

**24** These articles of association were possible only if they were ratified by special agreement on both sides. The first Convention was signed in 1951(1952).

**25** But for a long time the missionary mentality dominated over that of the religious. The existing relationship between missionary activity and the Congregation was not deeply felt. That depended on, among other things, an historical reason. The fact is that before the war the Congregation, and especially the Dutch Province, was so short of money that it could not help the mission as it was possible to do for example in Zaire where every missionary centre was self-sufficient, depending entirely on its own resources. Although in the beginning the same goal was sought in Sumatra, it never succeeded.

**26** In that period there were many complaints and as a result the members of the Congregation felt themselves abandoned. There arose certain tensions, tensions that should have disappeared once this situation was remedied.

**27** After the war, while the majority of the missionaries were transferred to Palembang in order to begin the work of reconstruction there in whatever way they could (first at Palembang and later at Lahat and Bengkulu), in Lampung the situation was completely different. All the missionary personnel had disappeared except for some German Sisters whom the Japanese considered their allies and so not subject to internment, even though they mistrusted them. In addition to these there were still some Indonesian Sisters.

## RECONSTRUCTION IN LAMPUNG

**28** At Msgr. Mekkelholt's request an Indonesian priest from Java was sent to Lampung to give at least a little help to the Catholics. He was Fr. Wahyosudibyo, OFM and later Fr. (now Msgr.) Padmoseputra, a secular priest. It was the latter who in 1947 began a seminary in Lampung. Fr. W. Boeren was the first to return to Tanjungkarang, followed by Fr. Hermelink (now Msgr.) and by Fr. Tromp; and finally arrived Fr. G. Koevoets and Fr. A. Oonk, who resided sometime in the seminary of Padangbulan, which was one of the most primitive places, especially for one who had just recently left

Europe. In effect, Padangbulan is a small *desa*, village, 8 or 9 kilometers from Pringsewu. Fr. Boeren remained in Tanjungkarang, Fr. A. Hermelink went to Pringsewu, Fr. Koevoets to Telukbetung and Fr. Tromp to Metro; in this way the main places were again occupied.

**29** The hospitals which belonged to the missions of Pringsewu and Metro were requisitioned by the state and never returned though the Sisters were allowed to continue their charitable apostolate there. The government has now built a new hospital at Metro and that of the mission was returned, but the Sisters closed it and opened instead a maternity clinic.

**30** One can say that since 1951 missionary activities have begun to function normally and in a different manner, surely better than before the war. The Church today is freer in its movements and, in spite of some local difficulties often rising from a small number of government employees, the relationship between the Church and the State has always been good.

**31** Also the losses of personnel caused by the war have been recovered. In 1951 there were 28 priests and 6 collaborators. The number of Sisters and the lay Brothers has also reached its pre-war level.

**32** Following the Papal Brief of June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1952 the mission of South Sumatra was divided into two territories, but both remained entrusted to the Congregation. Since then Lampung became an autonomous territory having Msgr. Hermelink (called Gentiaras) as its first Apostolic Prefect.

**33** At this date the number of Catholics totalled 6,500, 4,000 in the Vicariate of Palembang and the rest in the Prefecture of Tanjungkarang.

## FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

**34** After the division the two independent territories developed very fast, especially after the communist revolution of 1965. The number of Catholics increased mainly during the Javanese immigrations. Consequently Tanjungkarang very soon excelled Palembang in the number of Catholics. According to the latest statistics Palembang today has 30,723 Catholics, while in Tanjungkarang there are 52,355.

**35** In 1961 the ecclesiastical hierarchy was set up for the whole national territory of Indonesia. It was on that occasion that the Vicariate of Palembang and the Prefecture of Tanjungkarang were raised to the rank of Dioceses and had as their first bishops, respectively, Msgr. H. M. Mekkelholt and Msgr. A. Hermelink. Msgr. Mekkelholt retired in 1963 and was succeeded by Msgr. J. H. Soudant, SCJ.

**36** It was just at that time, that, influenced partly by the events of the moment and partly by the Second Vatican Council, there took place great changes in outlook concerning the idea of missionary activity. The schools continued to play an important role but alongside of them there arose a strong

support for social works. Since the Second World War men have come to realize the great social injustice of a colonialism that has subjugated politically and economically almost all the territories outside of Europe and North America. The colonized nations regained their freedom and little by little expressed the conviction that the rich countries had the duty to cooperate in the development of the poor countries that had been exploited for such a long time. The work of social development, which grew up everywhere, could not be neglected here, considering the fact that social justice is part of the spirit of our Founder.

**37** In Lampung social action started in 1958. In 1963 Fr. J. Vranken was elected as a special social delegate. In 1971 a *Commission for Social Development* was set up in three sections. Two centres for emigrants were established, one at Tanjungmas north of Pringsewu and the other near Kotabumi. Besides, in the *desas* or villages were built many bridges, indispensable for the transport of crops and other products. Towards the end of 1976 Fr. H. Sondermeijer became the social delegate.

**38** A social institute was established also at Palembang, while at Baturaja, Fr. Abdiputrarahardja added to his other works an institute for the emigrants with the same spirit that had animated him at Kotabumi where he began in 1965.

**39** In official organization came into operation only in 1968 with the appointment of Fr. N. van Steekelenburg as social delegate. A social commission was formed in 1973 under the direction of Fr. Abdiputrarahardja, who succeeded Fr. Van Steekelenburg as social delegate the following year.

**40** It is worthwhile to note that on December 22nd. 1976, also the Congregation of FIC Brothers with two lay brothers began to work among the emigrants.

**41** It is necessary also to say a few words about some important developments regarding the internal life of the Congregation.

## NOVITIATE AND SCHOLASTICATE

**42** Let us start with recalling the erection of the Minor Seminary of Palembang and that of Lampung, two undertakings later unified in the Seminary of St. Paul at Palembang, which produced the fruit of its first four novices in 1955. Then began the canonical novitiate at Lahat in a house built for that purpose with Fr. J. van der Sangen as director of novices. At the end of their novitiate year these four Indonesian brothers, the first to receive their formation in our novitiate house, were welcomed into the Congregation. One of them is now Msgr. Henrisoesanta, the Auxiliary Bishop of Tanjungkarang, and another is the above-mentioned Fr. Abdiputrarahardja. Two years later came our first collaborating Brother, Stephan Purwasiswaya.

**43** The entrance of our first candidates for the priesthood made necessary, as a consequence, the erection of a Major Seminary. We deceived ourselves in thinking that, in spite of foreseen difficulties, we could undertake this work ourselves. We looked for a professor of philosophy among the available missionaries and found Fr. F. Hovers. Other professors were: Fr. van Gisbergen for exegesis, Fr. W. de Witte for Church history, and Fr. J. van der Sangen as professor of liturgy. In spite of this poor beginning, we had even a bishop: but of course, this was more his merit than ours!

**44** After a very uncertain year and several unrealized proposals, it was decided as soon as the first scholastic year was finished to transfer the students to Yogyakarta so that our scholastics could continue their studies at the major seminary for secular priests conducted by the Jesuit Fathers. We intended to buy a house for them but because of a lack of funds at the end of the following year we resigned ourselves to sending them to Rome.

**45** In 1960, since we had a good number of candidates for the priesthood, a new effort was made to maintain their whole formation in our hands. And so a house was built at Gisting in Lampung to serve both as a novitiate and as a scholasticate. However, in 1964 we realized that things were not going well and the scholasticate was transferred definitely to Yogyakarta, where a new building was constructed. Some years later, due to an increasing number of students, the house became too small and so in another part of Yogyakarta there was built a new house to be used for theological studies. The previous house was reserved for philosophical studies and for the novitiate, according to the following new criterion.

**46** For specific reasons there are still two scholastics who continue their studies under the Canons of the Holy Cross.

**47** The Novitiate remained for some years in Gisting under the direction of Fr. Coenderman and then of Fr. A. Carter. But under the impetus of new guidelines expressed by (lie Council the novitiate too has adopted new ways of training. As an experiment the Indonesian Province received permission to allow the SCJ candidates to make their postulate and novitiate while pursuing their philosophical studies. Fr. G. Zwaard was put in charge of their formation. The purpose of this experiment is to offer to the novices a better opportunity for getting to know religious life in its common, everyday aspects. Many thought that the traditional novitiate kept them too aloof from everyday life, and gave them an image of religious life that was too distorted in relation to its real character.

**48** On the other hand the novices complained that during their formative period organized according to the new criterion, they were too occupied with studies and that consequently they had very little time or opportunity for calm recollection and reflection on their vital personal interests.

**49** Those who are promoted at the minor seminary and finish their studies at the end of November go then to Gisting for two months under the guidance of the novitiate master. After which they go to Yogyakarta to begin their higher studies while at the same time continuing their postulate and novitiate following the new method.

**50** On May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1976, the Diocese took over the running of the Minor Seminary.

## JAKARTA

**51** For a long time the Congregation had the intention to make a permanent settlement in Jakarta, the capital and seat of the Indonesian government as well as that of ecclesiastical administration, the residence of the Apostolic Delegate and the office of the Wali Geraja (i.e. where the bishops' conference gathers to resolve common problems and to make contacts with government organizations).

**52** In December 1971 Fr. G. Filing took up residence at St. Anthony's Parish in the capital city with a Jesuit father as his assistant. The parish was officially entrusted to the Congregation on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1973, after Fr. M. Fortner from the United States Province had come to replace the Jesuit father in December 1972.

## MISSIONARIES COMING FROM OTHER PROVINCES

**53** During this period some missionaries came from other provinces outside Indonesia. The first ones were three missionaries who came in 1952 from the English Province. One of them is still there. In 1961 the first American and Polish collaborators arrived; they were 12 in all. Their number increased thereafter. At present there are eight Polish collaborators. Two brother scholastics from the U.S. Province have completed their theological studies together with our Indonesian brethren in Yogyakarta. One of them, after his ordination, is exercising his ministry in Lubuk-Linggau. Another father came from the Luxemburg-Walloon Province and still another from the German Province.

## FROM REGION TO PROVINCE

**54** On March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1962, our Region became a Vice-Province. The first vice-provincial was Fr. G. Koevoets who had already been regional superior for three years. Then on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1974, the Vice-Province became a Province. One of the reasons which led to this decision was the following: after the Indonesian independence the situation was such that it was impossible to continue to depend totally on the Dutch Province. It would have been an

anachronism impossible to maintain any longer, both to insure the sure progress of the situation and because our Indonesian religious were able to assume responsibility for themselves. In addition, the number of members working in Indonesia was at the moment of its erection as a Vice-Province even greater than the number of members in the other Vice-Provinces previously erected. And Indonesia had even better prospects.

**55** When the Province was formed the houses which were near to each other were erected as religious houses. After some experimentation and change, finally two religious houses were set up in the missionary territory, one in the Diocese of Tanjungkarang and the other in the Palembang Diocese. Here the religious house was situated in the provincial house, which was also the rectory of Sacred Heart Parish. It was Metro that became the religious house in the Diocese of Tanjungkarang. The other rectories were assigned to one or other of these two religious communities as branch houses (*domus filiales*) dependent on them.

**56** Besides these two religious houses, there are still two other communities erected as religious houses; they are the minor seminary at Palembang and the Scholasticate at Yogyakarta. This one has its own branch house, the house of theological studies at Papringan (Yogyakarta).

**57** On June 26<sup>th</sup>, 1976, the house of Gisting was re-established as a novitiate for the brother novices during their period of pastoral experience. Two months of spiritual retreat are set aside for our brothers during the year of their novitiate.

## CONCLUSION

**58** At the time of its erection as a Province there were: 36 priests, 4 scholastics (Indonesians), 10 collaborators.

**59** On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1977 there were: 63 priests (of whom 12 are Indonesians), 10 scholastics (all Indonesians), 11 collaborators (6 Indonesians), making a total of 84 religious (28 Indonesians). Furthermore, there are 19 novices (all Indonesians) who are also scholastics.

*(Translation by Thomas Maingi)*

## INDONESIAN PROVINCE - SET UP IN 1974

### Statistics for the last 25 years: 1953 - 1977

**60**

	Priests	Scholastics	Brothers	Novices	Total
1953 Region					38
1954					38

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1955					
1956					38
1957					42
1958					42
1959					43
1960					47
1961					46
1962 Vice-Province	35	6	12	2	55
1963	36	6	12	1	55
1964	39	6	12	7	64
1965	41	10	13	6	70
1966	44	15	14	6	79
1967	58	18	19	4	99
1968	56	19	18	0	93
1969	53	18	17	0	88
1970	54	17	16	0	87
1971	54	13	12	0	79
1972	62	10	13	0	85
1973	60	9	12	22	103
1974 Province	62	6	11	14	93
1975	62	8	10	15	95
1976	63	10	11	8	92
1977	62	11	12	19	104