
Document 1570C

Letter from Fr. Diego de Herrera to the King, dated Panay 25 July 1570

Sources: AGI 68-1-42; B&R 34: 229-234; copied in FBG 8:179-182.

Letter from Father Diego de Herrera, O.S.A. to King Philip II

Sacred Catholic Royal Majesty:

When I saw that the affairs of this land had no permanent settlement and no hopes of one, and that the natives were very much molested by the Spaniards, and that so far as I could see God was being served but little in this region because of the great licence which men have here for evil and the lack of justice, and that very little service was being rendered your Majesty, since they are ruining excellent lands here for you, I determined last year, 1569, to go to New Spain in order to give advice of what was passing here in order that some reform might be instituted in this, and to discuss the matter with the Viceroy in order that he might relieve the condition as much as he could and give notice of the other things to your Majesty. [I determined] that if the Viceroy thought that I ought to go to Spain to discuss the matter with your Majesty, I would also do so. When I reached New Spain and discussed this matter with the Viceroy, and its great necessity for reform, and the extremely ruinous condition of affairs, he thought that I ought to return [to the Philippines] and give notice of it to your Majesty.¹ Accordingly, he told me that I would be fulfilling the service of God and of your Majesty if I would immediately return to these districts on the first ship. He gave me to understand that until the remedy was specified he could [not] reform some of the evils.

Although that order was very grievous to me as I had reached New Spain ill and worn out by the sea, since the service of two such great lords as God and your Majesty

¹ Ed. note: He had written the King from Mexico on 16 January 1570 (See B&R 3:69-72).

was placed before me, I considered it fitting, and accordingly re-embarked for these islands on the 9th of March of this year 1570.

I reached this island of Panay where the Governor is established, on the 22nd of July.¹ All the people were overjoyed at the reinforcements that your Majesty orders sent them, and with the concessions of the petition made from this land. I found the country in a most ruinous condition and such that more has been destroyed in this one year here than during the past five years. Your Majesty owns so many islands in this district that one is surprised at the number. They are all very rich and fertile and contain many gold mines, pearls, and wax, while some of them have cinnamon. They are thickly inhabited and the people promise better than those of New Spain. But since your Majesty does not provide anyone permanently and prescribe the manner of living, and protect and defend the natives, and keep justice for them, and power to punish whoever injures them, all will be lost in a very short time, for the policy employed with the natives could last but one year here if there is much greater violence. That consists in robbing them, burning their villages, and enslaving them. If this is not done it is affirmed that it is impossible to find support. This is false, for on the contrary, it is impossible to find support in this manner, for everything is being destroyed [by this manner of acting]; and the natives are becoming so exhausted because they are not left for an instant. However, they all desire peace in an extraordinary manner and to live under the protection of your Majesty and to pay the tribute. They would give the sum asked of them, if they thought that no evil was to be done them. But today they are made friends and on the morrow they are robbed. Many of them have been killed and many villages burned. I am writing this in general although not going into details in anything, in order not to trouble your Majesty. I wrote more at length to the Viceroy of New Spain in order that he might inform your Majesty, for he can easily ascertain whether these things are so from those who come here. This fleet came here at the beginning greatly in need of people who knew how to govern, and the same is true of war, for besides the Master-of-Camp here, who has died², all the rest know but little as was evident in the war with the Portuguese in Çubu. At that time although the Portuguese were so few, they caused such a great extremity that some captains advised the abandonment of the site and retirement to another part; and if the Portuguese did not cause the abandonment while they were there, they caused it when they left; and the strongest site and best port in all these islands, so far as has yet been seen, was abandoned, and we came here to establish ourselves in Panay along the swampy and very poor shore of a river. It will be very much less strong than Çubu and has no port, while it is hot and unhealthful. If your Majesty does not appoint someone to govern, this colony will daily become less, and will fall entirely into destruction. If we are not more firmly established, we religious cannot treat of the conversion of these natives with zeal and care nor with so much fruit as if the land had peace and security.

1 Ed. note: Error for June (See Doc. 1570B).

2 Ed. note: Mateo del Sanz.

They sent from here to petition your Majesty to concede them the favor to allow them to rob and enslave the Moros throughout these districts. They reason that they gave for it was to say that they were Moros and that they were preventing and opposing the preaching of the gospel. The statement that they were preventing the preaching of the gospel was false, for they have never prevented it nor do so at present. On the contrary, there is an increase to be observed in families where the husband is a Moro and the wife a pagan, who come in order to beg the religious to baptize their son and make him a Christian; for they do not at all object to each one living according to the belief that he likes best. For all the Moros who live in these islands have been Moros for but few years back. Many of them, such as those of Luçon, have nothing except the name, and the fact that they do not eat pork; for they have no mosque or *cacique*¹ (who are their priests). This worship is only a trifle more firmly established among those of the island of Burney than in the other, although they are also of recent date there. Not all the island is Moro, but only certain villages along the coast, for the inhabitants of the interior are heathens. None of them possess the lands of Christians or wage war on them, or do them any injury; although we do to them, and much, for four or five ships of Burneo have been pillaged and many people killed, while many more from Luçon have been killed, although excellent friends to us. As to the chiefs, they made the land friendly to us, or at least exerted a great influence in that direction. They supplied us with food in abundance and stuffs very suitable for clothing, and gold for our silver, in order that we might barter for our necessities. Now, however, conditions are such that no one dares come [to trade]. I do not believe that any other reason can be given for authority to rob them, except that they are Moros; and that is no legitimate reason and cannot be done.

After we religious came to these districts with the fleet, at your Majesty's command, nothing besides a little rice has been supplied to us for our sustenance every week in the same way as to the soldiers. It is a ration, but even with bread a man cannot be supported by it. I have written to that effect to the Viceroy of New Spain so that we may be supplied from there with necessities until there shall be sufficient means of gain in this land from which to supply us; but he either has no authority from your Majesty to do that, or he does not dare unless it be remitted to us here. I entreat your Majesty to please order us to be supplied with an amount each week per religious as is done in New Spain, in consideration of the fact that our expenses here are heavier than in New Spain. For the Indians in New Spain know only how to give, but these Indians here know only how to beg. The soldiers who are here now are so poor that it is necessary to try to give to them and not to beg from them. Consequently, it will be necessary for your Majesty to make us a more liberal concession than to the religious of New Spain. I believe that one religious can be supported in these regions for 200 pesos but not with less. I trust,

1 Ed. note: Herrera probably confuses the word "kasis" (the Arabic word for a Christian priest) with the American word "cacique" which means chief.

God helping, that the fruit which will be obtained in the conversion in these districts, will be so great that your Majesty will make us other greater rewards.

We have hitherto stayed here because we suspected here that your Majesty would order us to abandon this place, but since we now know that it is your Majesty's will that we continue to advance the undertaking, we shall begin to baptize all the people; for although there are some Christians, there would be many more if we had known before what we now know.

May our Lord preserve the sacred royal Catholic person of your Majesty for many years, as I your humble and least servant desire.

[From] this island of Panay, 25 July, 1570.

Your sacred royal Catholic Majesty's most humble servant,
Fray Diego de Herrera.

[Endorsed: "Examined. To be given to the reporter, so that he may file it with the others."]