
Document 1588C

Letter from the Bishop of Manila to the King, dated Manila 27 June 1588

Source: AGI 68-1-32; translated in B&R 7:64-76.

Letter from Bishop Domingo de Salazar, O.P.

Sire:

In a letter which your Majesty had written to me from Madrid, on the 11th of January of the year '87, I see the reprimand which your Majesty gives me, on account of information that you had received that, on certain occasions which had arisen, I had had controversies with the royal Audiencia here; also that this has finally resulted in scandal and comment in the town, and that there was fault on both sides, I receive this reprimand as from my king and lord, but, although it comes from him, it is very serious and is sufficient to cause much pain; nevertheless, I have not allowed myself to feel hurt, since your Majesty judges according to the information that you have received. He who so informed your Majesty that I was made to appear guilty will give account to God for his good or bad intention, since for my own satisfaction the testimony of my conscience is all sufficient. It is well-known in the city, and outside of it, that if I had not entered as mediator neither the president and auditors, nor the auditors alone, would have had peace. It would not have been possible for me to establish peace if there had not been friendly relations between them and me.¹

...

The hardships and calamities sent by God to this land make me greatly fear that we who live here have seriously offended Him. For I have been here eight years and not one year have I seen pass without the happening of great calamities: loss of ships; death of the animals which maintained us; hurricanes, called here *baguios*, which tear up the trees by the roots and overthrow the houses completely, or leave them so that they cannot be inhabited; and the general fire of the year '83, of which your Majesty has been

¹ Ed. note: Mainly because of what the Bishop says here in his defence, the Audiencia was to be abolished, for a while, by the King.

informed. Both before and since that time, this city has been burned three or four times; and now, as the last straw, the ship **Santa Ana**, which left this city last year, the richest ship to leave these islands, fell into the hands of the Lutherans. With that loss, and also that of the ship **San Juan** the year before [1586], which likewise was laden with goods from this country, some of the citizens of these islands are totally ruined, and others have suffered such heavy losses that it will be long before, with much difficulty, they regain their former state.

It is very evident, and can be denied by no-one, that the loss of that particular ship was ordained by God; for, three days before it reached the coast [of California], another ship—from Macao bound for Mexico—passed the same place and was not sighted by the Lutherans.¹ When news was received in Peru of the coming of this pirate, the Viceroy sent in pursuit of them a good fleet, with many soldiers and ammunition sufficient to engage an equal or greater number. When they came to the port of Acapulco, supplies were needed; and they requested these from the purveyor who had them in your Majesty's warehouses. He was unwilling to give them; and they even say that an order was given to detain some pack-teams which brought biscuits, so that the captain of the fleet from Peru could not take them. Thus they say that, as it was not desired to supply them with provisions, and because Doctor Palacios² became dictatorial in regard to several points, they returned to Peru; while the Lutheran remained free to attack and capture, as he did. So great was our misfortune that, at the time when the two captains were debating as to who should take command, the pirate was near the port of Navidad, which is not very far from Acapulco, repairing his ships. Had they attacked him, it would have been impossible for him to escape; but God chose to blind our men, so that we might be punished by this pirate. The punishment of God did not stop here; for, having set fire to the ship **Santa Ana**, they left it half burned, set sail, and came to these islands.

With more than human courage, they passed in the midst of them with a ship of 100 tons³, where the natives venture trembling in very light boats; but this infidel dared not only to come into our midst, but to collect tributes from your Majesty's vassals. A Spaniard was captured, and after having told him what they wished him to say to us, they put him ashore. What they said was in boast that they had left the coasts of Peru and New Spain utterly ruined; and that they had robbed and burned the ship **Santa Ana**, and hanged a canon who was on his way from this city to Mexico. In testimony of his prowess and our misfortune he displayed the silks, brocades, and cloths of gold which he had seized as plunder. Not content with this, he went away threatening us that he is to return soon to drive us all hence, and to destroy the nest that we have made here—meaning thereby the stone fortress built here.

1 Ed. note: This ship was the N.S. de Buena Esperanza, Captain Pedro de Unamuno.

2 Ed. note: A detached member of the Audiencia of Mexico.

3 Ed. note: Actually, 150 tons.

The grief that afflicts me is not because this barbarian infidel has robbed us of the ship **Santa Ana**, and destroyed thereby the property of almost all the citizens; but because an English youth of about twenty-two years, with a wretched little vessel of 100 tons and 40 or 50 companions, should dare to come to my own place of residence, defy us, and boast of the damage that he had wrought. As your Majesty has here an army of captains, who, as I understand, are certainly as many as the companions of the Lutheran, he went from our midst laughing, without anyone molesting or troubling him; neither has he felt that the Spaniards are in this land to any purpose. In this matter, I do not care to blame anyone, because I understand that the Governor did his duty, although I was always of the opinion that the pirate should be pursued and that the result thereof would not be so bad as some say. The belief here, however, is that God is chastising us for our sins, and is making us the laughing-stock of other nations, who have all hitherto stood in such fear of us.¹

...

As I have said before, I had determined to write nothing whatever in detail concerning the damages that the Viceroy of New Spain had done to these kingdoms. It seems to me that your Majesty will have had advices thereof, and will have ordered a means of correction. Moreover, as many are interested and have grievances, there will be no lack of a person to advise your Majesty thereof. Nevertheless, I have since thought that I neglect my duty in failing to send a memorandum to your Majesty which was forwarded to this city from Lope de Palacios, captain of the ship **San Martín**, which went to China. He sent to this city, asking that he be granted permission to leave Macao, because he feared that they were about to kill him in order to gain possession of his property. I am the only person who can send this memorandum to your Majesty, as Lope de Palacios sent it to this city with much secrecy, and in the same manner it was given to me. I discussed the matter with the President, saying that we should send for the captain as if the idea were our own and he had not requested it—employing such great secrecy that the Portuguese who were here would not learn of it; for the same Lope de Palacios had declared that he would be certainly put to death if they knew that he was trying to come here. Nevertheless, the request to send for him was in vain, and I was moved to forward this memorandum to your Majesty. It states therein the great harm done by the Viceroy in sending the ship **San Martín** to Macao. As the same person who went to learn the damage gives testimony thereof, no witness more worthy of credit can be entered in the cause. I am also writing to the Viceroy of New Spain in regard to the injuries which he wrought on these kingdoms by despatching the ship **San Martín** to China—although God supplied the remedy, by the loss of the same ship. I tell him that if that ship had been sent to this city, a more prosperous voyage would have been made than the investors could have expected, for so many Chinese merchants came this year to this city, that the merchandise was worth nothing; and if the ship **San Martín** had come here a satisfactory and cheap cargo could have been obtained, per-

1 Ed. note: The event that turned the tide was really the Spanish Armada.

haps even in greater quantity than at Macao. Instead of damaging this city, those persons would have been enriched, who on account of greed were unable to see the damage done to all of us. Thus God has punished them all, by depriving them of that profit the desire for which had blinded them to their duty.

They also say that the [wreck of the] ship **Santa Ana** was sold for 30,000 pesos and ordered to make a voyage to Macao. These proceedings also were put to confusion by God, through means which have cost us dearly, namely, the loss of that vessel. It can be said that if it had been at Macao somewhat less damage would have been done to these islands than in the burning of the ship by the Englishman.

As I wrote to your Majesty, via Malacca, for ships to go from Mexico to Macao is to destroy both those kingdoms and these, since the Chinese raise the prices of their merchandise to such an extent that Portuguese and Spaniards cannot live. May your Majesty be pleased to order the viceroy to hold these lands in somewhat higher estimation, since your Majesty considers them (and justly so) worthy of constant attention. Ever since the Viceroy came to Mexico, he has not sent to this country any troops (except exiles or criminals), or ammunition, or the customary supplies for this camp, such as wine, flour, and other articles; he has so reduced everything that there is great privation here, and very little profit to your Majesty.

Your Majesty's Governor and royal Audiencia in these islands look well to the service of your Majesty and the good of this country. Will your Majesty be pleased to order the Viceroy of New Spain, present or future, not to disturb or change what has been decided by their predecessors, not only in the customs duties, but in the price fixed for each ton, and in the mode of registration. According to our information, the Viceroy has changed everything, greatly increasing the taxes imposed here...

Will your Majesty be pleased to order that this be remedied by severe measures.

May our Lord guard your Majesty many years for the good of us who can do but little.

At Manila, 22 June 1588.

The Bishop of the Philippines.