
Documents 1606D

A Recollect Father died in sight of the Ladrones in 1606

Sources: 1) Fray Andrés de San Nicolás, Historia general de los religiosos descalzos del orden de los Ermitaños del gran Padre Doctor de la Iglesia San Agustín..., Madrid, 1664; translated in B&R 21: 107-127. 2) Fray Juan de la Concepción, Historia general de Philipinas, Manila, 1788; translated in B&R 21: 261-268.

D1. Extract from the History of Fr. San Nicolás

Decade II. Chapter V. Year 1605. First mission of our religious to the Philippines.

To his arduous labor in the formation and growth of the poor discalced Augustinians, the first provincial [i.e. Fray Juan de San Gerónimo] gave a heroic end by beginning the very observant province of San Nicolás de Tolentino, in the islands adjacent to Asia which we commonly call Philippines...

The Father vicar-provincial had already chosen his workers, men like himself. They were among the choicest and best men that the Reform then had in their convents. They

were as follows: Fathers Fray Andrés de San Nicolás, who was called de Canovas, an apostolic man, and a great preacher in word and deed;¹ Fray Miguel de Santa María, a most exemplary man, and devoted to the rigorous life;² Fray Gerónimo de Christo, very austere and observant;³ Fray Pedro de San Fulgencio, a capable and very clever man for all things;⁴ Fray Diego de la Anunciación, adorned with very singular virtues, and regarded as a saint;⁵ Fray Rodrigo de San Miguel, most keen-witted and erudite in all learning;⁶ Fray Francisco Baptista, a penitent to excess, and regulated by conscience; Fray Francisco de la Madre de Dios, most zealous for the discalced, and for the welfare of his brethren; Fray Andrés del Espíritu Santo, a religious, although very young, very modest and retiring.⁷ The Father superintendent also chose four other religious, lay brethren, who were of use and a great credit to the Reform, on the voyage, and at the time when they came, whose names are as follows: Fray Simon de San Joseph; Fray Juan de San Gerónimo;⁸ Fray Gerónimo de la Madre de Dios; and Fray Juan de San Guillermo. They all assembled in Madrid on the 15th or 16th of May [1605]. Thence they left for Seville, and from there went later to San Lúcar. They were detained there until they could embark in one of the ships of the New Spain trading fleet, which set sail from the great bay of Cádiz, on 12 July, and commenced its voyage happily.

...

Finally they reached the port of San Juan de Lua [i.e. Veracruz], on 17 September, with the rejoicing common to those who sail, and specially on those seas. They disembarked and, after having rested for some little time, they took the road; this they moderated by stopping several days in Puebla de los Angeles, as guests of our calced fathers, where they received the friendly reception and love that that province has shown to the discalced very often because their beginning was in that form.

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- 1 Ed. note: Not the same man as the author, because he died at sea, when the ship was in sight of Guam, as will be mentioned below.
 - 2 Died at Manila as a result of having been stoned by the natives of Mariveles.
 - 3 Died at Manila in 1608.
 - 4 Soon returned to Europe to get more missionaries, but died on reaching Milan.
 - 5 Served as superior of the convent at Bagumbayan (outside the walls of Manila) and, after some years, returned to Spain where he lived until his death in 1625.
 - 6 His civilian name was Rodrigo de Aganduru Moriz, an author, born in 1584. In 1614, he went to Spain for more missionaries, returning in 1617-18. Again voyaging to Europe (1622) via India, he arrived at Rome in 1626. He died in Spain on 26 December 1626. He left a manuscript history book which was not published until 1882 (See Doc. 1542F).
 - 7 Born at Valladolid in 1585, served in Zambales. Went to Spain and returned with more missionaries in 1622. He spent the rest of his life in the Philippines, where he died at Manila in 1658.
 - 8 Ed. note: Bears the same name as the Father superintendent.

Chapter VI. Our religious reach Luzon, after the death of Father Andrés de San Nicolás in sight of the islands...

We left Father Fray Juan de San Gerónimo and his 12 associates, anxious to finish their journey, continuing their road from Mexico to the port commonly called Acapulco, because it was necessary to embark once more in order to reach the Philippines, where God our Lord had prepared many souls who, oppressed by the demon, had no ministers to lighten their darkness.

There was already in the said port a ship ready to sail, called the **Espiritu Santo**, and they were accordingly detained but a short time. They finally set sail on 22 February of that year, 1606, in all safety, and all being overjoyed at seeing themselves nearer the land that they were seeking.

Some incidents happened on that voyage which were afterward regarded as miracles, and all attributed them to the good company of such notable religious whom they carried. The first one was that, the ship being all but sent to the bottom by burning, the fire having approached near some barrels of powder, warning was given in such a good time that it could be extinguished, when if there had been but little more delay, this would have been impossible. The second seemed more prodigious; for on a certain very clear and serene night, shouts came from the bow from those who were stationed there, crying: "Land! land!" The pilot and sailors were thunderstruck as soon as they saw themselves upon some shoals or sunken rocks, and already lost beyond all remedy. Thereupon bewailing their misfortune, they tried to seek confession, as quickly as possible. They thought that all efforts were useless; therefore, they cared for nothing else. However, they tried to cast the [sounding] line, but uselessly, for their lines were cut, and they even more confounded by their slight hopes of life. The ship went ahead into that *reventazón* [dashing waves]—as it is called—as if it were passing through a strait; and after having sailed a goodly stretch without accident, among so many reefs, they found themselves on the high sea, free from everything.

Father Fray Andrés de San Nicolás had preached the previous afternoon with great energy against the great licentiousness and shameless conduct of the passengers and the other people, who had no fear of God. He severely censured their excesses, and the little anxiety that they showed in that time of greatest danger. With burning words, he exhorted them to do better, representing to them their danger and begging them, finally, to confess, since they did not know what was to happen that night. The fruit that proceeded from that sermon was large, for, his audience becoming terrified and contrite, many of them confessed, and others proposed to do the same by having their entangled consciences examined as soon as possible. After a few hours, what is described above was experienced, whereby all thought that the good preacher had had a revelation of that event; and they could not thank our Lord sufficiently for having granted to them the company of such good religious, but more specially the company of him who preached to them of their danger—whom they regarded as a distinguished servant of God, as he was. Some certified afterward that that place through which the boat had passed had been a rocky islet, and that they had seen it on other voyages; and they were

astonished at having escaped alive on that occasion, attributing it, beyond doubt, to a manifest miracle, which the Lord wrought at the intercession of those Fathers. They desired, therefore, to listen to their daily teaching, and specially to that of the Father who announced to them what we have seen. Consequently, not sparing themselves at all, the Fathers gave in alternation their inspired discourses, which were the health and medicine of the many who were there—the ship so conforming itself to these that it seemed a reformed convent, where before it had been a house of confusion and bluster, with soldiers, seamen, and sailors.

The same Father, Fray Andrés, among the continual sermons, preached a very fervent one on a certain day, and gave them to understand that he would live but a short time, and that he was not to reach the promised land, for his faults and defects. That happened so, for not long after, he fell sick, before sighting the islands called **Ladrones**. His sickness increasing, when he was told that the islands were in sight, he arose from his bed, and looking at them, through a porthole of his cabin, immediately lay down again, saying: "*Nunc moriar lætus.*"¹ His weakness was already very great, and, as he had already received the holy sacraments, and was in great resignation and joy of soul, and all our Fathers were present, he begged Father Fray Juan de San Gerónimo to have the passion of Jesus Christ our Lord read to him very slowly. That was done, in the manner that he desired. He, holding an image of the same crucified Lord in his hands, broke out into very glowing utterances of love, and shed many tears during those moments. After the passion was finished—which lasted until near dawn, on account of so many pauses—he begged pardon of all for his omissions and neglect. He asked to remember him in their masses and prayers. They recited the penitential psalms and other prayers, at the end of which, the sick man, very happy, conversed with his brethren with great affability. He charged them to keep their vows and the observance of the rules of the order. He persuaded them to persevere steadfastly in their purpose, and to be mindful of the zeal with which they had been ready to leave their fatherland for the welfare and conservation of many souls. He encouraged them to place their confidence in God, for His Sovereign Majesty had special providence and care over that small flock. Accordingly, they were not to become disconsolate with the thought that they had no house or convent in the Philippines, for already a lodging suitable for their purposes was being prepared for them. He concluded by urging them to commend their souls to Him, and then became very calm. All obeyed him, surprised, and desirous of such a death; and, at the end of the prayer, that chosen spirit went out in peace and quiet from the waves and shipwrecks of this world, and reached the safe and calm harbor of glory.

Upon beholding his death, one cannot imagine the grief of both religious and laymen; for, venerating him as a father, they bewailed him universally, and, in all truth, there was not one who did not show great affliction.

The corpse remained in such manner that it caused gladness to all who looked at it. Various opinions were expressed as to whether they should bury it in the sea or not.

1 "Now I shall die happy."

The laymen promised that they would deposit it in a fitting place, until they should cast anchor in the [Philippine] islands then near. Father Fray Juan de San Gerónimo did not consent to this, in order to avoid innovations—and specially when they were going to countries where they had no home, and where they knew no-one. Therefore, placing the body in a closely-sealed wooden box, with an inscription written on a certain sheet of lead, which denoted his name, country, and virtues, amid their lamentations and tears the body was cast into the sea, without having added the weight which is used to draw the body to the bottom of the water.

On account of that carelessness, the box should have remained on the surface of the water, without being able to sink at all; but on that occasion the Lord permitted that the waves should receive such deceased without any violence. As the ship was in a calm, consequently, all were witnesses that it settled to the bottom very gradually, and easily.

Certain violent fevers were raging in that vessel, from which about 40 had already died, at the time the noted Aragonese and observant religious finished the navigation of his life. But from that instant all had health, becoming better and recovering very soon. That was attributed to his prayers in Heaven in fulfilment of the word that he gave them, during the last moments of his life, namely, that he would commend them to God in glory, provided that he went there, as he had good hopes of doing. After the conclusion of the services for a death so fortunate and so bewailed, they soon arrived, on 10 May, at the islands that they were seeking. Having disembarked first, according to the order that they bore, at the island of Cebu, the discalced were lodged in the convent of our calced Fathers, the venerable bishop, and that example of prelates, Don Fray Pedro de Agurto, as we saw in his life, having gone out to receive them in procession. That most illustrious man desired that the new missionaries should not go further, and offered them a foundation and whatever they wished, in order to exercise themselves in the conversion and salvation of the infidels. It was impossible to assent to so many kindnesses, for their immediate passage to Manila was unavoidable, in order that the Governor might see the despatches and the decrees from Spain, which it was necessary to present to him. After having given the bishop the thanks due, they had to set out as soon as possible.¹

¹ Ed. note: They arrived at Manila before Governor Acuña returned from the Ternate expedition. However, he was busy at Cavite with the despatch of the ships for Acapulco when death hit him suddenly. Consequently, he did not have time to receive and examine the mail brought by the friars. They, in turn, handed it over to the royal Audiencia.

D2. Extract from the History of Fr. de la Concepción

Volume IV. Chapter VII. Arrival at these islands of a new mission of the dis-calced Recollects, the reformed branch of the Hermits of the order of the great father St. Augustine.¹

...
37. The president Fray Juan considered such liberal propositions as these as annoying temptations² to which, through the motive of their zeal, not one of his could consent. He considered it advisable to avoid them by flight, and resolved upon his voyage to the port of Acapulco. There was already a ship there about to sail to the Philippines on the day of the invocation of the Holy Ghost. Having embarked on it, they set sail on 22 February 1606.

They had their terrors during the voyage; the ship caught fire, and the fire was already quite near the powder barrels that were stored in the Santa-Bárbara.³ Warning was given of this (which is one of the greatest of dangers), in sufficient time to enable them to extinguish the fire. Had it reached the powder, the worst ruin would have surely followed. I think that there is no peril of the sea more horrible. Another danger happened on a calm, clear night, when the cry of : "Land!, land!" came from the bow. That danger startled the pilots, who had no shoals down on their charts there.⁴ They were aware of them by the breakers in the water, and the vessel was so engulfed in them that it could neither bear away nor put in, without the same risk. As the breaking of the waters was getting nearer the ship, they considered all their efforts vain, and without any urging, allowed themselves to be carried in the same path. They tried to make soundings, but the plunging of the ship and the violent dragging of the sounding-line on the reefs did not permit them to make an accurate calculation of the depth. In such a contest, the hopes of all were already weak, besides which they were entering amid the breakers. The ship sailed a long distance without meeting accident, and later they found themselves in the deep sea, free from such a dangerous fright. That shoal was marked down accurately on the charts, and was noted on other voyages. It was a rocky islet surrounded with many covered reefs.⁵ They considered it a marvelous occurrence that they should pass over them without meeting with an accident on them.

1 Ed. note: It is obvious that this version has heavily borrowed from that of Fr. San Nicolás.

2 Ed. note: Invitations to remain in New Spain.

3 Ed. note: The gun-room which was usually located at the poop under the steering compartment.

4 Ed. note: This may be a free assumption by the author, as the same shoals had been met on previous voyages, and would surely have been recorded on all sailing charts in use at Manila.

5 Ed. note: Since the position is not recorded, we can only speculate as to the identification of this shoal. Could it have been an emerging reef, such as the Wilder Seamount, at 9°N & 174°W? This is a possibility, as Morga has just said that they sometimes went down as far south as necessary to catch the brisas, 10° not being unusual, before climbing back to 14°, the latitude of Rota (see Doc. 1605). This Wilder Seamount, according to a modern chart by the national Geographic Society, is now only 3 fathoms below the surface.

Father Fray Andrés de San Nicolás fell sick near the islands of the **Ladrones**, and, recognizing that his attack was serious, he sought consolation in the holy sacraments. During his last hours he fervently exhorted all to persevere in the undertaking that had been begun, promising them a happy result. He yielded up his spirit to God amid tender colloquies. Those of the ship wished to keep his body in a well-sealed wooden casket, in order to give it decent burial on shore; but in order to avoid innovations, the venerable superior, Fray Juan, did not consent to this. Accordingly, having been placed in a casket, he was cast into the sea, accompanied with the usual obsequies.

38. They continued from that moment their voyage prosperously, after an almost general epidemic of fever, safe and sound. By special orders they anchored in the port of Cebu.