
Document 1663C

Fr. Sanvitores applies for permission to open a mission in the Ladrones Islands

Sources: AHN Diversos, legajo 385; Process of Mexico, fol. 99; AGI Fil. 82x; Fr. García's book, Book II, Chap XIII, pp. 167-168; copy in RAH 9/2676 part of doc. n° 11. translated by Fr. Juan Ledesma.

Introductory note, by Fr. Ledesma.

The "enclosed letter" mentioned above is the Brief or Memorial of St. Francis Xavier to Fr. Simon Rodriguez, confessor of the King John III of Portugal "to unburden the conscience of the King." Evidently Fr. Sanvitores wishes, with the presentation of this Memorial to King Philip IV, "to unburden also his conscience" regarding his subjects both of the Philippines and of the Marianas. In fact the copy of the said Memorial is followed by words addressed to the same King Philip IV. Since the Memorial was enclosed in the letter to his father dated 18 July 1663, and the date of the Memorial was 1664, while its arrival at Madrid was in the following year of 1665, it is to be supposed that the letter of 1663 to his father could not leave with the vessel (of 1663) and had to wait one year to make the voyage. Perhaps it was because (a copy of St. Francis') Memorial was not yet ready in 1663. Be it noted too that the Memorial was dated in Manila where the Servant of God was transferred to only in 1664.

Letter from Fr. Sanvitores to King Philip IV, dated Manila 18 July 1664

Original text in Spanish.

[Endorsement:] *Copia de carta de S. Francisco Xavier escrita desde las Indias Orientales al Padre Mestro Simon Rodriguez de la Compañia de Jhs residente entonces en la çiudad de Lisboa, y confesor que era del Rey D. Juan el Segundo de Portugal.—Y dicha carta hiço copiar el Padre Diego Luys de Sanvitores de la misma Compañia de Jhs de un chino de hedad de 70 años el qual acompaño al Benerable martir Marçelo*

Mastrillo, y aora este chino enseña la lengua a dicho Padre Sanvitores, para que vaya predicar, y convertir aquellos gentiles.

Esta copia la remitio dicho Padre Sanvitores de las islas Filipinas a su Padre el Señor D. Geronimo de S. Victores con carta y es la fecha en la Ciudad de Manila a 18 de Julio de 1664 años.

El Apostol de las Indias S. Francisco Xavier escribiendo al P. Simon Rodriguez uno tambien de los primeros Compañeros de S. Ignacio, que governaba la Compañia de Jesus en Portugal, dize assi.

[Note in margin:] Epistola de S. Francisco Xavier Ap. Epit. del Apost. de las Ind. Div. 5. n. 111.

*“Tiempo es ya Charissimo Hermano Maestre Simon de dar un desengaño al Rey, pues esta mas cerca de lo que piensa la hora en que Dios N.Sr. le a de llamar a dar cuenta, diciendo: **Redde rationem villicationis tuæ.** Por lo qual hazed que provea a la India de fundamentos espirituales, porque me parece, y quiera Dios que me engañe, que se a de hallar el buen Principe a la hora de la muerte mui alcançado. Temo que en el Cielo Dios N.Sor. hablando sobre el con los Santos dice assi: El Rey muestra buenos deseos por cartas para que se aumente mi honrra en la India, y con raçon pues no cumplen las tales cartas y mandatos, prendiendo y castigando a los que da cargo de su hacienda, sino procuran, como deben sus provechos, y acrecentamientos della.”*

“Solo un camino hallo (segun el uso y experiencia que tengo destas cosas) para propagar nuestra santa Fe en la India, y es que el Rey a todos sus Ministros y Governadores les notifique, que de nadie se da por tan servido en la India quanto de los que con todo cuidado procuran que se estienda la Fe de Christo, y por tanto encarga y manda que procuren la conversion de la Isla de Zeylan, y el aumento de nueueos Christianos en el Cabo de Comorin, y para esto se busquen de todas partes personas Religiosas, y se valgan del trabajo, y Ministerio de los de nuestra Compañia, y de los demas, que pareciere para aumento del divino servicio. Y si a caso sus Ministros fueren en esto negligentes, los amance, y asegure con juramento, (y sera de gran servicio de Dios haver este Juramento, y de mayor el cumplirlo) que sino descargaren su Real Conciencia, aumentando quanto posible fuere la Christiandad de la India, luego que vuelvan a Portugal an de ser castigados con perdimiento de sus bienes, y largas prisiones. He os dicho lo que siento: callo lo demas, solo añado que si se hiciere, esto que propongo, y deseo grandemente, entonces se librarán de las injurias y opresiones que padecen los pobres Indios nuevamente reducidos a nuestra Santa Fe, y se reduzcan los demas sin dificultad alguna, porque si en esta falta la ayuda y authoridad del Rey, y del Governador, verdaderamente se pierde tiempo. Creed me que hablo con mas experiencia de la que convenia: porque sucede asi, yo bien lo se; pero no es menester decirlo.”

“Esto os escribo Hermano M. Simon para descargo de la conciencia del Rey, a quien toda nuestra Compañia tanto debe. Y si yo estuviera cierto, que su Alteça lo estaba del grande, y desengañado amor, que le tengo, pedirle ia una merced, para servirle con ella y es que todos los dias se ocupe un quarto de hora en pedir a Dios N. Sor. le de bien a

*entender, y mejor a sentir dentro de su alma aquellas palabras de Christo: **Quid prodest homini si universum mundum lucretur animæ vero suæ detrimentum patiatur?***

Hasta aqui S. Francisco Xavier: previniendo tambien el remedio eficaz, que piden las cosas de la Christiandad de las Indias en estos tiempos, singularmente las que tocan a Terrenate, y a Samboangan fuerça del Rey nuestro Sor. en la Isla de Mindanao (que son las partes, en que se sabe de cierto predico S. Francisco Xavier en lo que toca a este Gobierno de Filipinas) y fuerças ambas desamparadas oy con gravissimo daño de la Christiandad de estas Islas, que esta a gran riesgo de perderse en la mayor parte dellas por falta singularmente del presidio de Samboangan.

*La propagacion de la Fe que pide el Santo a las Islas donde no aya llegado, es de la que se nesessita tambien en estas Islas, y tierras cercanas, como la gran Isla de **Burney** &c. y sinngularmente las Islas que llaman de los **Ladrones** que despues de tantos años y tan buena ocasion de las Naos de su Magestad que dan vista a ellas todos los años, no se les a dado aun la luz del Evangelio, que Dios N. Sor. a embiado a estos ultimos fines de la tierra por medio del zelo de nuestros Catholicos Reyes, cuya Real Cedula (que diçen ay) para que se procure la conversion destas Islas **de los Ladrones** esta totalmente olvidada, con gravissimo perjuicio de estas pobres almas mas necesitadas aunque las del Purgatorio, pues estan en extrema necesidad de lo necessario para su salvacion, en que se les pudiera socorrer sin mucha dificultad, y con no poca esperanza del fruto, especialmente antes que las inficione la infame secta de Mahoma que es arta confusion nuestra, y no pequeño estorvo del Santo Evangelio, el que se nos aya adelantado en las mas de las Islas deste Archipelago.*

Por las almas pues destos pobres Gentiles pide S. Francisco Xavier y lo que mas es, por ellas clama la sangre de N. Sor. Jesu Christo y en su nombre debe clamar qualquiera de sus Ministros, y el minimo de todos.

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+ Diego Luis S. Vitores +

Translation.

[Endorsement:] Copy of the letter that St. Francis Xavier wrote from the East Indies to Father Master Simon Rodriguez of the Society of Jesus, then living in the city of Lisbon, and confessor to King John II of Portugal.—Father Diego Luis de Sanvitores of the same Society of Jesus has had this same letter copied by a 70-year-old Chinaman who had accompanied the Venerable martyr Marcelo Mastrillo [to Japan], and at present this Chinaman is teaching the [Japanese] language to the said Father Sanvitores, so that he may be able to go and preach, and convert those gentiles.

This copy was sent by the said Father Sanvitores from the Philippine Islands to his father, Don Gerónimo de S. Vitores, with a letter which is dated Manila, 18 July 1664.

The Apostle of the Indies St. Francis Xavier writing to Fr. Master Simon Rodriguez, who was also one of the first companions of St. Ignatius, and was governing the Society of Jesus in Portugal, says the following:

[Note in margin:] Letters of St. Francis Xavier, Ap. Epit. del Apost. de las Ind. Div. 5. n. 111.

“It is time, most beloved brother Master Simon to admonish the King that the hour is much closer than he thinks in which God our Lord will call him to give an account of his administration saying: *Redde rationem villicationis tuae* (Give an account of your administration of the vineyard). Therefore, see to it that he provide for the spiritual foundation of the Indies. Because it seems to me, and may God grant that I am wrong, that the good Prince will find himself very much hard up in his death-bed. I fear that God our Lord speaking about him with the Saints in Heaven says the following: *The King shows through his letters good desires for the increase of my honor in the Indies and rightly so, for it is for this purpose that he possesses them. But he does not punish those who do not carry out his decrees and mandates; he does not apprehend and punish those to whom he commits the care of his possessions when they do not as they should see to their improvement and growth.*”

“I see only one way (according to the practice and experience I have in these matters) for the propagation of our holy faith in the Indies; it is that the King assure all his Ministers and Governors that he does not consider himself served well in the Indies except by those who with great care work for the propagation of the faith of Christ. Consequently he orders and commands that they work for the conversion of the Island of Ceylon and the increase of the new Christians at Cape Comorin. For this purpose he orders that a search be made all over of Religious persons, and that advantage be taken of the work and ministry of the members of our Society and of others they may believe useful for the promotion of the divine service. And if perhaps their Ministers should be negligent in this, let them threaten them and assure them under oath (and it will be of great service to God to make this oath and even of greater service to fulfill it) that if they do not comply with the demands of his royal conscience by promoting as much as possible the increase of the Christians in India, they will be punished, upon their return to Portugal, with the loss of their properties and with long periods in jail. I have told you what I feel in this regard, and am keeping to myself the rest. I only add that if what I propose and greatly desire is carried out, then the poor natives of India, newly converted to our holy faith, will be spared the abuses and oppression they are suffering, and that all the others will be converted without any difficulty. Because we would be truly wasting time if in this matter we do have the help and authority of the King and of the Governor. Believe me: I am speaking with more than the necessary experience, for I know well what is going on. But there is no need to mention it.

I write this to you, Brother Master Simon to unburden the King's conscience, to whom our Society owes so much. And if I were sure that His Highness were aware of the great and plainly true love I have for him, I would ask for a favor by which I would do him good and that is that everyday he give a quarter of an hour to prayer, asking God our Lord to let him understand well, and even better to make him realize intimately those words of Christ: *What does it profit a man if he should gain the whole world, but suffer the loss of his own soul?*”

Thus far are the words of St. Francis Xavier, who also foresees the efficient remedy demanded at this time by Christianity in the Indies, specially that of Ternate and Zamboanga, the fort of the King our Lord in the Island of Mindanao (which are in the area under the Philippine government where it is known for certain that St. Francis Xavier preached). Both of these forts are abandoned today, at the greatest of harm to the Christian community of these Islands, most of which are at great risk of being lost, precisely for the lack of a garrison at Zamboanga.

The propagation of the faith which the Saint begs for the Islands he has arrived at, is what is also needed in these Philippine Islands and in neighboring lands such as the great Island of Borneo and others, particularly the Islands called **Ladrones**. After so many years and with such good opportunity through the galleons of His Majesty which visit them every year, these islands have not received yet the light of the Gospel which, through the zeal of our Catholic Kings God our Lord has sent to these remotest regions of the earth. It is said that there is a Royal Decree for the conversion of these **Ladrone Islands**. But it is totally forgotten, resulting in very grave harm for these poor souls, which are in even more need than those in purgatory, for they are in extreme need of what is necessary for their salvation. They could be helped without much difficulty and with no little hope of success, especially since they have not yet been infected by Mahomet's infernal sect, a source of much confusion for us and obstacle to the Holy Gospel, that has not made progress in most of the Islands of this Archipelago.

St. Francis Xavier, therefore, begs for the souls of these poor gentiles, and what is more the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ clamors for them and in his name ought all his Ministers to do likewise; and the least of all,

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+ Diego Luis de San Vitores +¹

¹ Ed. note: The end result of this application by Fr. Sanvitores was the issuance of the royal decree of 24 June 1665 (see Doc. 1665D). A copy of this memorial was also copied by Fr. Sanvitores off the coast of Navidad on 2 January 1668 and attached to his letter to the Viceroy (Doc. 1668A).