



THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN THE PHILIPPINES

(Continued)

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CHAPTER 23

THE CHURCH AT THE SERVICE OF THE STATE AND THE FILIPINO PEOPLE DURING THE MOSLEM RAIDS

The most dramatic chapter in the history of the Philippines is the one on the Moslem raids on the towns of the Philippines, a chapter written in blood and tears and nourished in pain and suffering.

1. *General Ideas* The island of Mindanao, second biggest after Luzon, has been inhabited by two kinds of peoples: *aetas*, or negritos, and *malays*. The former, closed to civilization, lived in the interior of the island, wandering as nomads with no fixed residences. Among the malays, we can distinguish three groups: Moslems, Christians and pagans. These last are what are known today as the "cultural minorities," although in time they will cease to be such with the advance and migration among them of the Christian Filipinos.

The Moslems, or *moros*, as they were called by the missionaries, were for three hundred long years, avowed enemies of the Christians because of religion. A historian describes them as "suspicious, wary and proud. It is very hard to make them speak clearly in their dealings and have them fulfill their agreements, for they evade their promises with a thousand tricks . . . They are least inclined to work and are very lazy . . . Their government is patriarchal and despotic . . . They have sultans and datus. The former wield authority over wider areas and rule with the help of a council of several

datus, although the latter do not submit to them except in matters of common interest. The sultan and the datus have *sácops*, or subjects, and slaves who are their main source of wealth, for these take care of their estates, dive for pearls for them (which is the cause of the premature death of many of them), and fight their battles for them."¹ According to a Jesuit missionary, "they are so hard to the motions of the grace of God and so fixed in their beliefs that it is almost morally impossible to convert them."²

They are good fighters and, had not the Spaniards stopped them in their path, they would have succeeded in conquering all the islands of the Philippines and imposed their religion on them. Nonetheless, they had inflicted enough damage on the places they reached during their raids, sometimes with the help of the Camucones — the people living in the islands between Tawi-tawi and Borneo — and the Borneans.

2. *Explorations and Plans of Conquests* By an act dated 16 January 1571, the *adelantado* Miguel Lopez de Legazpi took possession of the land of Mindanao in the name of His Majesty, King Philip II. In 1579, on his return from the Borneo expedition, Don Esteban Rodriguez de Figueroa repeated this act of possession, besides taking possession also of the Jolo archipelago when he was commissioned for the task by Governor Francisco de Sande. Later, knowing a little more about the extent and the advantages of the island of Mindanao, Rodriguez sought license to conquer it. This was granted by Philip II, with the title of *Adelantado* and *Marquis* over the lands he would conquer. But this proved in vain, for he died at the hands of a Moro stalwart in April 1596, right at the outset of the conquest.³ Cowed by this event, the Master of the Camp, Juan de la Jara, retired to a place at the mouth of the Pulangi river and with the help of some Moslem allies erected a fort which he called "Nueva Murcia."

Don Juan Ronquillo, who was dispatched by Governor Francisco Tello, in the same year of 1596 retired to La Caldera, a place near Zamboanga without engaging the Moslems. He

¹ Montero y Vidal, José, *Historia de la piratería malayo-mohematana en Mindanao, Joló y Borneo* (Madrid, 1888), 19-20.

² *Ibid.*, 21.

³ Calvo, José, S.J., *Memoria a Su Majestad* (no date), p. 2. There is a copy in AUST, Sección de "Libros," tomo 7, fol. 316 ff.

was succeeded in command by Captain Cristobal de Villagra, who burned the fort by order of the governor (1599). It seems it was the abandonment of this fort which had held the Moslems at bay that provoked the first Moslem incursions into Christian lands. An alliance of 50 Joloano and Mindanao sail attacked the coasts of Cebu, Negros and Panay.⁴

In 1599, they attacked the town Oton, where they sacked the houses, burned the church and carried off many captives. The next year, two Moslem chiefs tried to repeat the same deed by leading 70 vintas against the city of Arévalo; but the Alcalde mayor, Don Juan Garcia, better forewarned than before and having at his command 80 Spaniards and many native archers, forced them to flee to their ships with much damage.⁵

From this experience, the Moslems dared less frequently to attack the towns defended by Spaniards, but they continued raiding at will many others located along the coasts of Mindanao, the Visayan islands and Luzon. We shall not delay to list the numerous surprise attacks on Christian towns for we would require several volumes for that. Normally during these raids, they landed by surprise, raided the town, sacked the houses, went inside the churches, profaned the holy images and robbed the bells and sacred vessels, and finally they burned the town, carrying off with them the younger and the more robust of the people to be sold as slaves to the merchants from the Spiceries. The missionaries sometimes were able to flee and hide in the thickness of the forests; but, on a sufficient number of occasions, some fell into the hands of these marauders, who either assassinated them or took them as captives in the hope of obtaining a fat ransom in their exchange.

⁴ Miguel de Benavides, in a letter to Philip III, dated 5 July 1603, says with the regard to this point: "Even the Indios have taken courage against the Spaniards that they come from Mindanao in battle array, to harry our coasts; and they have taken captive Spaniards and even two priests — to say nothing of innumerable Indios, whom they seize to sell into slavery among infidels, where it is very likely that they will abandon the faith. They have destroyed villages and churches, and taken away much valuable spoil; and at one time it was only through the mercy of God that they failed to capture the Governor, Don Pedro de Acuña. Other Indios, called Camucones, a wretched people, have also brought misfortunes upon our people." (Blair and Robertson, XII, 101-102)

⁵ Calvo, loc. cit.: Zúñiga, Estadismo, I, 118-121; Blair & Robertson, V, 225; VI, 57-58; VIII, 73-77; IX, 264-265; X, 41-42, 49, 53-74, 168-169, 214-215; XLI, 2777-321; XLVI, 13-14, 34-44; de la Costa, Horacio, S.J., Jesuits in the Philippines, 292 ff.

2. *Defense Measures Against the Moslem Raids* Because the government, either for lack of resources or for other reasons, could not always solve the problem of Moslem piracy, the religious missionaries had to put up by themselves the defenses of the towns committed to their care. They constructed watch towers, to begin with, from which through a pre-arranged system of signals, they warned against the presence of Moslem pirates around the vicinity. On this matter, the Augustinian Fray Julian Bermejo became famous. He set up in the island of Cebu a code of signals which on repeated occasions proved to be an effective defense against Moslem incursions.⁶

Not content with building towers, the missionaries decided to undertake the construction of forts to serve as a refuge and a defense of the people against enemy attacks. Thus, the Recollects built forts in Tandang, Siargao, Surigao, Bislig and Butuan in Mindanao. The famous "*Padre Capitan*," Fray Agustín de San Pedro, erected a fort by Lake Lanao, in order to instill into the Moslems fear and respect for the Spanish government. In the island of Palawan, which was quite open to the attacks of the followers of Mohammed because of its extensive coastline, the same Fathers erected forts in Taytay, Cuyo, Agutaya and Calamián, besides inducing the authorities to build another one beside the river Labo. Fray Joaquin de la Virgen del Rosario raised still another one in the town of Guildunman in Bohol island.⁷

As a defense against the same enemies, the Augustinians built forts in Taal, Batangas (1792); Bucay, Abra; Talisay, Argao and Bolijoon in Cebu; and Cagayancillo, Antique.⁸

The forts in Minalabag, Camarines; Mauban, Tayabas; Tanauan, Leyte were the work of the Franciscan fathers.⁹

The missionaries not only constructed defenseworks to aid the people, but they also had to provide them with artillery, bullets, gunpowder — all out of the funds of their Order. They

⁶ Ruiz, Licio, *Sinopsis histórica de la provincia de San Nicolás de Tolentino de la orden de agustinos recoletos* (Manila: Tip. Pont. de la Univ. de Sto. Tomas, 1925), II, p. 328.

⁷ Op. cit., 171, 182, 193, 223, 356, 367, 374 ff.

⁸ Marin, Valentín, O.P. *Ensayo de una síntesis de los trabajos realizados por las Corporaciones religiosas de Filipinas* (Manila, Impr. de Santo Tomas, 1901, 68, 102, 110, 113, 115, 145.)

⁹ Ibid., 399, 433, 467.

also took care to garrison them with enough manpower recruited from the *población*, keeping them on the alert for surprise attacks. When the enemy appeared, the townspeople fled behind the stone walls of their fort, thus escaping either death or capture.

So effective was the defense set up by the Filipino Christians under the leadership and guidance of the missionary priest that the Moslems rarely succeeded in capturing even one of them. In certain cases, these forts contained within its walls the church and *convento*. Likewise, the thick walls and solid bell towers of some churches served as forts, built as they had been for the double purpose of serving as temples for worship and fortresses.

3. *Offensive Measures* Some of the missionaries, not content with erecting forts, took the offensive and sallied forth at the head of their Christian followers in search of the enemy to engage them in battle. History has preserved for us five names that were the terror of the Moslem pirates: three Recollects, one Augustinian and one Jesuit.

The first was the Recollect Fray Augustin de San Pedro, better known under the nickname "*Padre Capitan*." A Portuguese by birth, he had given signs of a liking for the military arts since childhood. He embarked for the Philippines in 1622 and, assigned to the Caraga mission in eastern Mindanao next to Butuan, he dedicated himself zealously to the conversion of the natives. But the Moslems did not cease obstructing his work. In order to stop them, he armed his Christians and led them himself, driving away the enemy from those regions. Transferred to Cagayan in the present Misamis provinces, he inflicted quite a bloody defeat on the hosts of Corralat (or, Kechil Capitwan Kudrat), for out of 2,000 men, 1,600 were left behind on the field of battle. Because Corralat recaptured the town while the priest was away, the latter decided to attack him early at dawn on the lake of Lanao. Leading 500 Christians and some Spaniards, Fray Agustín went up to the shores of the lake, where, in a combat with the Moslems, completely routed them. After this defeat, Corralat did not dare again for some time to cross arms with the soldiers of *Padre Capitan*.

Much later, on orders from Governor Corcuera, the same *Padre* marched to the lake to fight Corralat anew. This time,

he had a small army of 1,500 Christians aided by a small fleet of 10 ships constructed on the lowlands and brought up piece by piece to the lake. The fruit of this victory was the submission of 50 towns located around the lake.

He had to return once more to Lanao Lake to give support to Captain Bermudez and the Jesuit Father Gregorio Belin, who, besieged by the Moslems, were on the point of surrendering. On this occasion, too, victory went to the Recollect missionary. Assigned finally to Romblon, he repulsed an assault by 300 Moslems who, without a single exception, fell on the beach.¹⁰

By 1750, the sultan of Jolo, Mahomet Al-Muddin, came to Manila in order to embrace the Christian religion. The Jesuits well acquainted with the antecedents and the intentions of the sultan, tenaciously opposed his baptism; but in the end, the opinion of the Dominicans, perhaps not quite well-founded, prevailed. Later events proved the Jesuits right. Imprisoned by government order when Mahomet Ali-Muddin returned to Jolo, his younger brother Bantillan picked up the reins of government and declared the most ruthless war on the Christians ever known till then. It is to this period that the deeds of Father Francisco Ducos, Jesuit missionary to Iligan, belong. He was the defense of the towns in north and northeastern Mindanao. His most famous deeds in arms were the defense of Iligan during a two-month siege and the attack in 1754 against the pirates of the gulf of Panguil, which had become the center of Moslem raids and depredations. Father Ducos subjugated this gulf, burned several towns, captured a fleet of 170 sail, while taking a great number of Moslem captives and liberating many Christians. Appointed much later as the Commandant of the fleet of Iligan by Governor General Pedro Manuel de Arandia, he continued warring against the sectaries of Mohammed, causing them sufficient damage. An accident in 1754 cost him an eye and left his right arm half-paralyzed.¹¹

Father Julian Bermejo, an Augustinian of the 19th century, is chronologically the third in our gallery of heroes. After serving as parish priest in Argao and Boljoon, he was elected provincial in 1837. But less happy with life in the city, he

¹⁰ Ruiz, 182-186; Marin, 279-285.

¹¹ Saderra Masó, Miguel, S.J. *Misiones esuíticas en Filipinas* (Manila: Tip. Pont. de la Univ. de Sto. Tomás, 1924), 36-37.

resigned his post in an interim Chapter. On his return to Boljoon, he resolved to put an end to the piracy of the Moslems in those shores, and built a chain of forts from Tañong to Sibonga, which he fortified and garrisoned with people from the same towns. Not satisfied with these defensive measures, Father Bermejo decided to go up on the seas to prosecute the pirates. He constructed for this purpose an armada of 10 barangays recruited from the towns of Argao, Dalaguete and Sibonga, and armed each one with two *falconetes*, with a sufficient number of steel weapons to prevent boarding, sailing in pursuit of the Moslems at the first warning from the watch towers. This priest inspired the Christian soldiers with such valor and courage that they went to battle as though on a fiesta. Fortune always followed him, especially at the pitched battle off the island of Sumilon, where he routed seven Moslem *pancos*, sinking three, capturing one and driving off the rest. With this defeat, the Moslems no longer appeared before those shores until they learned that the Christian fleet had been dissolved.¹²

The fourth was Recollect Fray Pascual Ibañez. This priest could not bear that the Jolo Moslems, severely punished by Governor Claveria, should return to perpetrate anew their usual raids on the Christian towns. On learning, then, that Governor Antonio Urbiztondo was preparing a new expedition against the Moslems, he obtained permission to join the expeditionary force, accompanied by a large number of Visayan volunteers. On 28 February 1854, the Spanish and Filipino troops attacked the defenses of Jolo which consisted of eight well armed forts. Because the Moslems defended themselves well behind their canons and palisades, the attackers seemed to hesitate. At this juncture, Fray Ibañez harangued his faithful Visayans who, inspired by the words of their leader, threw themselves with renewed spirit on the attack, wiping away all opposition. But the missionary was not able to taste the victory, for he had to be taken away after receiving a bullet wound in his arm, which caused his death a few days later.¹³

Finally, the Recollect Fray Ramon Zueco distinguished himself at the head of 450 volunteers during the expedition

¹² Pérez, Elviro, J., O.S.A., *Catálogo Biobibliográfico de los religiosos agustinos de la Provincia del Santísimo Nombre de Jesús de las Islas Filipinas* (Manila: Est. tip. del Colegio de Santo Tomás, 1901), 377.

¹³ Ruiz, 185-196.

led by Governor Malcampo against the heart of Moroland. In this campaign, which ended with the occupation of Jolo in 1876, Fray Zuco stayed at the head of his volunteers.¹⁴

4. *Jesuit Diplomats and Peace Negotiators* This resumé would be incomplete if we omit the services rendered by three Jesuit missionaries for religion and for the country.

In an expedition made by the Moslems against the towns along the coasts of Leyte near Dulag, where they burned and sacked churches and houses, besides killing many Christians, Father Melchor Hurtado fell a captive of the Moslems. After a year's captivity in the region by the mouth of the Rio Grande, where he continued his missionary work among his fellow captives and the pagans living there, he was ransomed by his brother Jesuits. Fearful lest the government in Manila dispatch a fleet then being readied against them, the Moslems agreed to negotiate a peace treaty, which the same priest concluded, having been properly authorized by Governor Pedro Bravo de Acuña and sent to Mindanao precisely for this purpose in 1605. Of this priest, the governor said that he "prized Father Melchor Hurtado in Mindanao more than 100 soldiers armed in steel and full of courage."¹⁵

Another Jesuit missionary which frequently entered Moro territory, either as ambassador for peace or pushed on by his own apostolic zeal, was Father Pedro Gutierrez, one of the first missionaries to Dapitan and later Rector of Zamboanga. In 1640, he was sent as an ambassador to the court of Corralat to negotiate peace and liberate the Christian captives. Besides succeeding in his embassy, he also won the respect of the sultan. In a second mission charged to him by Governor Corcuera to bring a letter to the kinglet of Jolo and recover stolen riches, he succeeded also in winning the friendship of the Moslem chief, although he failed to establish peace between him and the Christians. He undertook other embassies to Moroland in order to obtain the release of some captured missionaries and to persuade the Moslems to lay aside their piratical ways.¹⁶

The third Jesuit who succeeded as an intermediary between the Moslems and the Christians was Father Alejandro López.

¹⁴ Marin, 287-290.

¹⁵ Saderra Masó, 33.

¹⁶ Ibid., 33-34; Calvo, 2.

In 1646, he went to Jolo to have the sultan ratify the peace which the later's predecessor had signed with the Spaniards. He next made a visit to the court of Corralat for the same end, and still another one to Jolo and Buhayen in 1649. These visits helped towards the relative peace which existed between the two groups at a time when it was sorely needed by the Christian forces in order to put down several uprisings in the Visayas and face the Dutch menace.

Nobody, however, thought that Father López, so well received and respected by the Moslem leaders, would meet death at the hands of one of them. Returning from one such visit, or embassy, which Governor Sabiniano Manrique de Lara had charged him with, he and his companion, Father Juan de Montiel, died at the hands of the people of the new sultan of Buhayen, Balatamay, with the consent or complicity of Corralat. Father López had just negotiated a peace treaty with them! Regarding this incident, Corralat wrote to his brother, the sultan of Jolo: "We have killed the priests because they wanted us to become Christians. It will thus be good that we all unite and return to our faith." Father López took advantage of the influence he enjoyed among the Moslem chiefs to benefit the Christian towns and to spread Christianity. Although his activities were for the most part of a political nature, they redounded to the good of the Christian religion.¹⁷

5. *Effects of the Raids.* — One of the effects was the depopulation of the Visayan islands. Terrorized by the frequent and unexpected attacks by the Moslems, the Christians preferred to live in the mountains and abandon their coastal dwellings. Besides, the Moslems normally took off, on the average, a thousand Christian captives each year, whom they brought to Mindanao and Jolo where many of them died of hunger and maltreatment. Others, to escape these fears, apostatized. A few managed to be ransomed for a sum of money: 100 pesos for each Christian, 1000 or more pesos for each religious.

Another effect was the insecurity of navigation through the Visayan seas. Various religious missionaries and many Christians fell into the hands of the Moslems as they went from island to island. When the Moslems sailed up to the town of Tayabas,

¹⁷ Saderra Masó, 34.

they almost, over and above the thousand misdeeds they perpetrated on the coasts of Camarines, captured Archbishop Miguel Garcia who then was making his visitation of the region.¹⁸

Finally, many families were broken up. Among the moral cases of this period, some were of those who wanted to enter a second marriage after the spouse had disappeared. Thanks to the Moslems, it was not known where the absent partner was or whether he was still alive.

6. *End of Moslem Piracy.* — This heavy national crisis which had weighed on the Filipinos for three centuries had its moments of high tension and relative peace. In general, one notes that the Moslems stayed quiet if the Filipino and Spanish forces did not go to disturb their land. Thus, after the evacuation of Zamboanga in 1662 by order of Governor Sabiniano Manrique de Lara until the fort was rebuilt by order of Governor Fernando Bustillo y Bustamante in 1717, these enemies of the Christian religion were relatively peaceful. But, from the latter date, they initiated a series of depredations which did not stop until the second half of the XIX century.

The following observation of a Franciscan missionary in Bikol is noteworthy: "In our own times, and until the eminent and dedicated Governor General Norzagaray inflicted the *coup de grace* to the piracy of the Moslems of Jolo and Borneo with the construction of steam gunboats, we have seen frequent and periodical attacks by those races. Going up to the very ports of Bikol, they subjugated and enslaved as many as they found in their way."¹⁹

¹⁸ Calvo, 7.

¹⁹ Castaño, José, Breve noticia acerca del origen, religión, creencias y supersticiones de los antiguos indios del Bicol (Madrid, 1895), 17.