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Notes and Comments

Before Bacoor: The Initial Career of Padre Mariano Gomes (1822-1824)

LUCIANO P. R. SANTIAGO

INTRODUCTION

This is the third in my series of articles on Padre Mariano Gomes de los Angeles (1799-1872), one of the most revered martyrs in Philippine history but whose life has remained shrouded in obscurity. Based on accidentally discovered documents at the National Archives and the Manila Archdiocesan Archives, these articles progressively fill the many disconcerting gaps in Gomes's biography. The first article brought to light the last will he wrote the day before his execution and the second, the chaplaincy he served for fifty years (1822-1872).¹

The present article concentrates on the intervening two years of his career between his installation to the *capellania* of Doña Petrona de Guzman on 7 February 1822 and his assumption of the curacy of Bacoor, Cavite on 2 June 1824. Although it covers only a brief period of his life, it clarifies a crucial stage in his formation when he had to make the often difficult transition from a deacon in the seminary to an ordained priest in the field. It is based mainly on the *Libro del Gobierno Eclesiastico* (1815-1824) of the Archbishop of Manila, Fray Juan Antonio de Zulaybar, O.P. (1804-1824) and his newly found *Libro de Ternas*

1. Luciano P.R. Santiago, "The Last Will of Padre Mariano Gomes," *Philippine Studies* 30 (1982): 395-407; "The Capellania of Padre Mariano Gomes," *Philippine Studies* 32 (1984): 325-34.

(1806-1824) which had been inadvertently misclassified at the archdiocesan archives.²

TRADITIONAL DATA

To date, we have a confusing picture of Gomes's scholastic years and early career. This is not surprising because our main informant, his nephew and biographer Marcelino Gomez, had to rely on oral tradition a hundred years after the events in question (1922) due to the loss of the priest's personal papers.³

Padre Gomes graduated with a Bachelor of Philosophy degree from the College of San Jose at the age of fifteen (1815). Transferring to the University of Sto. Tomas, he earned there the degree of Bachelor of Canon Law at eighteen (1818). Finally, he graduated with a Bachelor of Sacred Theology degree from the same university five years later (1823). However, his name does not appear in the list which is apparently complete of graduates of the Dominican University. On the other hand, we know from his letter of application for the capellania of de Guzman dated 5 February 1822, that he was then already a Bachelor of Sacred Theology and was, in fact, working as a teaching assistant (*bachiller pasante*) in that faculty.⁴

Marcelino Gomez further claims that instead of pursuing the licentiate in theology, his uncle took an interest in the vacant curacy of Ermita. Although he topped the synodal examinations for this post, he disqualified himself on the advice of Padre Juan Ibañez, parish priest of Sta. Cruz, Manila, due to his youth. Later, upon winning the parish of Bacoar, he was ordained to the priesthood with dispensation for his age.⁵

The original records do not bear out most of the details of Marcelino's hear-say recollections. In the first place, the Ermita parish was never vacant during this time. Its pastor, Padre Thomas Aquino Suarez was quite active from 1811 to beyond 1827. Nor was Padre Juan Ibañez the parish priest of Sta. Cruz, Manila then,

2. Archives of the Archdiocese of Manila (AAM) *Libro del Gobierno Eclesiastico (LGE)* (1815-1824): *Libro de Ternas (LT)* 1806-1824). Misplaced under *Cabildo Eclesiastico*. There is no paging but it is chronologically arranged.

3. Marcelino Gomez, "El Padre Mariano Gomez," *The Independent*, 4 February 1922, pp. 15-22.

4. Santiago, "Capellania."

5. Marcelino Gomez, "Padre Gomez."

not to mention the improbability of self-disqualification by a topnotcher in the synodal examinations.⁶ On the other hand, it is true that Gomes was ordained to the Holy Orders with dispensation for age but almost two years before and not after he obtained the curacy of Bacoór.⁷

CHAPLAIN, SACRISTAN AND PRESIDENT OF THE
SAN CARLOS SEMINARY (1822-1824)

The following is the documentary chronology of Padre Gomes's activities from 1822 to 1824 before coming to Bacoór.

After being endowed with means of support in the form of a capellania, Gomes who was still then in the diaconate, started competing in the synodal examinations for available positions in the archdiocese. The first two offices he aspired for were the pastorship of San Pedro de Makati vacated by the death of Padre Martin Feliciano and the sacristanship of the Cathedral parish (*Sagrario*) due to the promotion of its incumbent. The Cathedral parish refers to the part of the cathedral which served the City of Manila or Intramuros as distinguished from the cathedral proper which served as the principal church of the archdiocese. The examinations were held from 4 to 13 July 1822. For the first position, Gomes made the *terna* or list of first three placers but was in the third place. The first two slots went to Padres Luciano Dayrit and Narciso Leaño, in that order. As vice royal patron, the governor-general almost invariably nominated the topnotcher to the position, in this case, Dayrit. On the other hand, Gomes topped the *terna* for the sacristy of the cathedral parish, the other two placers being Padres Felix Valenzuela and Domingo Dayrit. The *terna* was submitted to the Governor on 1 August.⁸

On the same day, the archbishop, of whom he had clearly become a protegé, appointed him president of the Seminary of San Carlos.⁹ He replaced Padre Mariano Ramirez who had been just promoted to the parish of Malate. Being the most senior scholar (*mas antiguo agraciado*) of the seminary, as noted in his appointment papers to the chaplaincy of de Guzman, he was

6. AAM, *LT* (1806-1824).

7. AAM, "Edicto para las ordenes generales," *LGE* (1815-1824) f. 391v.

8. AAM, *LT* (1806-1824).

9. AAM, *LGE* (1815-1824) f. 392v.

indeed the logical successor of Ramirez. This policy of granting the presidency of the seminary to its most outstanding student or alumnus was begun by Archbishop Basilio Sancho de Stas. Justa Y Rufina (1767-1787) who appointed Bachiller Don Juan Carpio, a Pampango-Chinese mestizo (1768-1772) as the first such official that we know of. According to the records of Carpio and Ramirez, the president was second in rank to the director of the seminary, taking the latter's place in his absence and charged with the preparation of the annual accounts (*cargos y datas*) of the institution.¹⁰ The director he worked with was also a new appointee, Licenciado Don Macario Gregorio Pimpin (1795-1835) who, interestingly enough, was the first *Indio* priest to hold that office. Later, Pimpin was to become a ranking member of the cathedral chapter.¹¹

On 22 August 1822, Gomes was formally given the title of sacristan of the cathedral parish,¹² thus serving in three concurrent positions as chaplain, seminary president and priest-sacristan.

ORDINATION (1822)

Although he was barely twenty-three, a year short of the required age for ordination, Gomes seemed quite ready for it because of his combined responsibilities. Hence, when the edict for general ordinations for the Ember Days of September was published on 20 July 1822, he confidently applied despite his age. Not surprisingly, the archbishop approved his petition with dispensation for his age and he was elevated to the priestly dignity on 21 September 1822.¹³

Exactly two weeks later, on 5 October, he was granted the initial license to celebrate masses in the archdiocese for two years, the usual duration then being only six months.¹⁴ True to tradition, he must have sung his first mass at the parish church of Sta. Cruz, Manila, his birthplace.

10. AAM, *LGE* (1767-1771) Docs. 216 and 425; *Expedientes sobre diferentes materias* (1730-1799); *LGE* (1815-1824) f. 278.

11. AAM, *LGE* (1815-1824) ff. 399v; 405 and 446v.

12. *Ibid.*, f. 397v.

13. *Ibid.*, f. 391v.

14. *Ibid.*, f. 403v.

A SHEPHERD IN SEARCH OF A FLOCK (1824)

As an ordained priest, Gomes settled down to his triple tasks in Manila for almost two years. But evidently, his interest lay somewhere else — in pastoral work. During this time, therefore, he was also apparently waiting in the wings for the next available curacy. The first opportunity came in December 1823 when the two prominent parishes of Biñan, Laguna and Quiapo were vacated by the deaths of their respective pastors, Bachiller Don Jose Arevalo and Maestro Don Lazaro de la Rosa. The competitive examinations for these were held early the following year from 21 January to 3 February 1824. Gomes participated in them but unsuccessfully although he made the terna for both pastorships. He only received the third place for that of Biñan which was won by Bachiller Don Lorenzo Jose, parish priest of Cavite el Viejo; and the second place for that of Quiapo which was obtained by Bachiller Don Arcadio Aquino, parish priest of Bacoor, Cavite.¹⁵

As a result of the above examinations, however, the parishes of Cavite el Viejo and Bacoor now became available due to the promotion of their incumbents. In addition, the curacy of Sta. Cruz, Manila, Gomes's birthplace, also fell vacant in January 1824 due to the demise of Bachiller Don Raymundo Roxas, the archdiocesan secretary. Henceforth, his chances, of acquiring a proprietary parish improved considerably.¹⁶

On the other hand, something tragic always seemed to happen to detract from his enthusiasm. The archbishop, his patron, followed the archdiocesan secretary to the other life on 4 March 1824.¹⁷ The examinations for the next three curacies were, therefore, postponed until the cathedral chapter, the archbishop's successor, could schedule them under its auspices from 3 to 8 May 1824. Gomes took third place for Sta. Cruz which was won again by Bachiller Don Arcadio Aquino, a seemingly tireless examinee; and the second place for Cavite el Viejo which went to Bachiller Don Aniceto de la Merced who was to write the erudite *Pasiong Candaba*. Finally, he got the highest rating for the parish of Bacoor, the terna for which was sent to the governor-general on 8 May, the last day of the examinations. The latter

15. Ibid., ff. 455v and 457v; LT (1806-1824).

16. AAM, LGE (1815-1824). f. 459v.

17. Ibid., f. 467.

presented him for the position on 20 May and the chapter bestowed on him the title of proprietary parish priest of Bacoor four days later.¹⁸ Without wasting time, Gomes took possession of his parish on 2 June 1824 and served it faithfully for the rest of his life, that is, for forty-eight years until his martyrdom in 1872.¹⁹ When he was executed by the garrote on 17 February 1872, he was only seven months short of celebrating his golden jubilee as a priest.

CONCLUSION

This is the first time we definitely clarified Gomes' varied and substantial activities during the two years preceding his famed pastorship in Bacoor. It is clear from the start that his vocation was in pastoral work. Unlike a few of his colleagues who continually searched for more progressive parishes, Gomes was content to serve for life in the very first parish assigned to him. That, after all, is the meaning of a proprietary pastor. His initial experiences as chaplain, sacristan, and president of San Carlos Seminary must have amply prepared him for his lifetime work in Bacoor.

He was evidently an outstanding student in the seminary as indicated by the fact that he became its most senior scholar and ultimately, its president, and he was ordained a year earlier than usual. However, it appears from the results of the synodal examinations he participated in, that he had colleagues more brilliant than himself. Clearly, he was more a man of action than erudition. His talent lay more in leadership and administration, and Archbishop Zulaybar was only one of the first to recognize this. It was to serve him in good stead not only as pastor of Bacoor but later as vicar forane of the ecclesiastical province of Cavite and best of all, as organizer of the tormented native clergy. Ironically, it was the same talent which brought him tragedy. It attracted the attention of colonial authorities in search of scapegoats in time of trouble. Indeed they eventually made him a scapegoat in the Cavite Mutiny of 1872.

18. AAM, *LT* (1824-1826); *LGE* (1824-1826) f. 25.

19. E. A. Manuel, "Mariano Gomes," *Dictionary of Philippine Biography* (Quezon City; Filipiniana, 1955), pp. 195-99.