

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Padre Faustino Jose Villafranca: The Filipino Pilgrim

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Philippine Studies vol. 34, no. 1 (1986): 77–85

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

Notes and Comments

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THE FRAGILE PAGES OF MEMORY

Thus this solemn (ceremony) was finished, and in his return to the sacristy, His Holiness stopped for the kissing of the feet, for that is how one pays homage to the Vicar of Christ. During this exercise, the Father Prior took my hand and led me towards His Holiness. When we were nearing him, His Holiness displayed a certain anxiety to find out who I was. The Father Prior told him I was a prebend from Manila, at which information he shared opportune remembrances of the Philippine Islands and while we kissed his feet, he mentioned that the Bishop of Nueva Caceres would be here for the centenary of St. Peter, to which the Father Prior replied that I was his disciple, adding that the Bishop would not arrive for the Council. We withdrew to give way to the others who wanted to have a word with His Holiness, but our short conversation with the Pope attracted the attention of this respectable assembly. From the time he dismounted from his carriage at his arrival, I noted that Filipino features aroused his curiosity because he looked twice towards the small viewing window where the Father Prior and I were looking out. Now, thanks to God, a native of the Philippines will no longer be something strange to him. Since Sicily I have noticed that the Filipino type is completely unknown in Italy.¹

Padre Faustino Jose Villafranca, STD (1833-71) who wrote the foregoing account of his visit with Pope Pius IX in 1869, was a

1. Perfecto Terra, Jr., "Villafranca's 'Desde Filipinas a Europa,' " *Phil. Studies* 32 (1984): 214.

prebend of the Manila Cathedral, and was the first and only Filipino to publish a travelogue during the Spanish era. Addressed to his two younger brothers, Mariano and Ambrosio, the seventy selected letters he assembled for this book narrate his travel experiences and observations from 5 February to 25 November 1869. "I will have the satisfaction," he wrote in the preface, "of knowing that events and things that I have seen, admired and experienced will be consigned, with much more security, to this book than to the fragile pages of memory." For more than a century however, oblivion threatened to engulf his work until it was rediscovered recently in Naples by a researcher, Perfecto Terra, Jr. who studied and quoted excerpts from it in *Philippine Studies*.² Searching tirelessly for the obscure Villafranca in his own book, Mr. Terra came up with a clear enough picture of his character and ideas. In there are extant records at the National Archives, the Archdiocese and the University of Santo Tomas from which we can put together a documentary biography of Villafranca.

FROM NASUGBU TO INTRAMUROS

The Villafranca brothers took pains to point out that they were Indios not only by official classification (which is based solely on the direct male line) but also because their mother was an India from Binondo. Their original surname was Marcelo and their father Don Catalino José Marcelo was a Batangueño from the town of Násugbu where he was a descendant of the *principales* Don Juan Marcelo and Doña Juana Nepomuceno. As expected in those days, Don Catalino also married a member of the *principalía* a class from Binondo, Doña Agapita, daughter of Don Silvestre de Ocampo and Doña Dominga Garcia. Through his intellectual gifts, Don Catalino rose to prominence as a *profesor de latinidad* in the walled city of Intramuros, a rare achievement for an Indio of his time. Here he founded a private school for elementary and secondary education (*primera y segunda enseñanza*) which prepared Filipino boys for higher education at Letran and the University of Santo Tomás, the only university in the Philippines in the nineteenth century. Eventually, he acquired two residences in In-

2. Ibid., pp. 197-224.

tramuros: one at Solana no. 16 and the other at Dasmariñas no. 14.³

The first of Don Catalino's three sons, Faustino José Marcelo was born on 15 February 1833 in Intramuros, most probably in their older house in Solana ("Sunny") Street which is situated midway between Letrán and the University. As a sign of his parents' piety, he was baptized two days later at the Manila Cathedral. His brother Mariano was born two years later on 22 July 1835 and the youngest, Ambrosio was born much later on 7 December 1842. No doubt other children were born to the Marcelos in the intervening years but they did not reach maturity.⁴

The three brothers probably took their primary and secondary education in their father's school together with other pupils from various towns in the Islands who lived with the family as *internos*. One of the latter was Gregorio Antonio (1833-93) whose surname was later changed to Ballesteros. A talented youth from far-away Abulug, Cagayan, Antonio entered the Marcelo school in 1844. Unfortunately, two years later, he was orphaned of both parents. Recognizing his brilliant mind, however, Don Catalino took pity on him and let him stay for free in his home and school until he could transfer to Letrán as a scholar.⁵

In 1847 at the age of fourteen, Faustino enrolled at the University of Santo Tomás for the three-year philosophy course. His brother Mariano followed two years later. In 1850, he graduated as a result of Governor Claveria's decree on the systematization of Filipino surnames in 1849, the Marcelos adopted the surname "de Villafranca," although strictly speaking they were not required to do so since the governor was mainly concerned with families or clans which did not transmit regular surnames.⁶ "De Villafranca" was more meaningful than it was distinguished for

3. Archives of the Archdiocese of Manila (AAM), "Credenciales de Dr. Faustino Villafranca," *Libro de Gobierno Ecclesiástico (LGE)*. 1861-62 sede vacante. doc. 105; "Ordenacion de D. Ambrosio Villafranca a cuatro menores" *Ordenes Generales (OG)* 1866 B; *Permutas y Renuncias (PR)* 1844-98 B; E. Arsenio Manuel, "Mariano Villafranca." *Dictionary of Phil. Biography (DPB)* (Quezon City: Filipiniana, 1955) 1:473-4; The National Archives (TNA), "Bienes de la menor D.^a Maria del Carmen Villafranca," *Bienes de Difuntos*. legajo 97.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Manuel, *DPB* I: 89-90.

6. AAM. "Credenoiiales;" UST Alumni Association (USTAA). *Graduate Listing 1611-1971* (Manila: UST, 1972); Narciso Claveria. *Catálogo Alfabético de Apellidos* (Manila, 1849; reprinted by the National Archives, 1973). The three brothers later dropped the preposition "de" from their new surname.

an erudite family such as theirs. It means "of a free (or open) village" which for them probably referred to their unconquerable mind and spirit with which they were richly blessed by Providence.

PERSONAL VOCATION

At this point, Don Faustino José Marcelo de Villafranca decided to become a man of God and thus, he took up the four-year theology course at Santo Tomas, his Alma Mater (1850-54). His decision coincided with the start of the crisis of the native clergy and was therefore, most probably not unrelated to it since, as we have seen, he came from a very religious Indio family who must have deeply sympathized with the cause of Filipino priests. In fact, his two brothers would also follow in his footsteps and study for the priesthood. From 1849, the secular clergy were relentlessly oppressed by a series of royal decrees secured by the religious orders in their favor. Inherent in these decrees was the assumption that native priests were inferior to the friars and thus, the former had to be relegated to subordinate positions in the parishes under the latter. To counteract this pernicious fallacy, one of the goals of the Filipino clergy was to prove their intellectual equality with Spanish priests, especially in the ecclesiastical sciences. To be sure, they had proven this before in the eighteenth century with the emergence of the first Filipino priest-doctors (1772-96). But, racial prejudice has a very poor memory. Henceforth, Faustino would be one of those who would lead the way in fulfilling not only the intellectual but also the spiritual goals of this tormented group.⁷

During his third year in theology in 1853, Villafranca was invested with the clerical habit, The next year, after being conferred the degree of Bachelor of Sacred Theology *nemine discrepante*, he was granted tonsure in March and ordained to the minor orders in December. He was then elevated to the subdiaconate in March 1855 and to the diaconate exactly one year later. In the meantime, he was simultaneously pursuing a licentiate in philosophy, a

7. Luciano Santiago, "The First Filipino Doctors of Ecclesiastical Sciences 1772-96," *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* 12 (1984): 257-70; "The Filipino Priest-Doctors in the Nineteenth Century 1801-71," *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* 13 (1985): 34-50.

three-year course in canon law, and the *pasantia* (teaching assistantship) in theology which also took three years. He graduated as a Licentiate in Philosophy on 21 July 1856 and as a Bachelor of Canon Law on 1 March 1857. He was finally raised to the priesthood on 17 September 1857. Two weeks later on 3 October, he was granted the faculty to celebrate mass, for an initial period of eight months.⁸

During this period, he was also asked by the rector and other members of the faculty of the University of Sto. Tomas to be a professor of the three ecclesiastical sciences (philosophy, theology and canon law) as well as examiner in them with the right to vote. Following in his father's footsteps, he took the extra degree of *Titulo de Profesor de Latinidad* in 1858. Early the following year, on 14 January 1859, he obtained a Licentiate in Sacred Theology *nemine discrepante*. The only other graduate was Fray Ceferino Gonzales, O.P. (1831-93), the pride of Philippine Dominicans who was to become cardinal-archbishop of Toledo and primate of Spain. The next month, to familiarize himself with pastoral work, Villafranca was assigned briefly to his home parish of Binondo. Soon after however, he was back at his Alma Mater to work on his doctorate in theology which he finally received on 11 November 1860 together again with Gonzalez.⁹

Thus, Villafranca became one of the few stars in the darkened firmament of the native clergy. At this time, there were only two other surviving native priest-doctors who were both surnamed Garcia, though unrelated to each other. One was the old Dr. Marciano Garcia (STD 1844), rector of the College of San José and the other was Dr. Vicente Garcia (STD 1855), vicar general of the diocese of Nueva Cáceres. Dr. Pedro Pablo Peláez, though of Spanish blood, may also be considered one of them because he completely identified himself with Filipino priests and had, in fact, emerged as their first leader in their struggle for justice.¹⁰

FR. PEDRO PELAEZ AND FR. VILAFRANCA

Pelaez became the vicar capitular or virtually, the acting archbishop of Manila (1861-62) after the death of Archbishop Arangu-

8. AAM, "Credenciales," OG 1854 A, 1855 A, 1857-9 B; LGE 1852-61 doc. 2785; USTAA, *Graduate Listing*.

9. Ibid.

10. Santiago, "Filipino Priest-Doctors."

ren. Not unexpectedly, Villafranca became one of his protégés. On 5 September 1861, Peláez issued Villafranca's *credenciales* or documented bio-data in which he emphasized the young doctor's being an Indio on both sides of his family but a brilliant and worthy one, contrary to the claims against his race. This was duly copied in the official book but the original was sent to the queen to whom the vicar recommended Villafranca as a prebend in the cathedral chapter of Manila in view of his impeccable conduct and accomplishments.¹¹ Though deserving, Villafranca no doubt seemed too young an Indio for the position—he was only twenty-eight so that Peláez's recommendation did not bear fruit until a few years later.

In the meantime, Villafranca remained at the service of the University of Sto. Tomas mainly as an examiner of graduate students. In February 1862, he examined Burgos for the licentiate in sacred theology. In time, Peláez found an important parish for him when the proprietary pastor of Calamba, Padre Rufino Collantes, became disabled due to old age. On 6 May 1862, Peláez designated Villafranca as the *cura ecónomo* of this Dominican hacienda with the right to share two-thirds of Collantes' stipends and emoluments during the latter's remaining years. The young curate plunged at once to work and requested the vicar to allow him to withdraw ₱1,284 from the parish funds for the repair of the dilapidated church and rectory and the acquisition of new vestments. His petition was promptly approved on 21 May.¹²

No biographer of Rizal has ever associated Villafranca with the great Calambefio or his family. Rizal had been born the year before Villafranca arrived in Calamba and at best, he must have had a dim memory of the energetic curate. Nevertheless, it can be inferred that Villafranca gained the close friendship of the most prominent family of the town who lived just across the street from the church and shared many similarities in culture and learning with his own family.

Peláez never tired of citing "the young pastor of Calamba" as one of the model priests of the archdiocese "against whom even the most insolent calumny finds nothing to say." This was what he

11. AAM, "credenciales."

12. Fidel Villaroel, O.P., *Father Jose Burgos, University Student* (Manila: UST, 1971) p. 47; AAM, LGE 1861-2 doc. 231. *Libro de Oficios (LO)* 1846-62 docs. 1697, 1700 and 1710.

asserted to the papal nuncio in Madrid in May 1863 in answer to the racial slurs made against the native priests by the Recollects.¹³ Tragically, however, two weeks after he wrote this letter, Peláez perished in the earthquake of 1863 which leveled Manila to the ground. Villafranca lost his spiritual father and the secular clergy, their gallant leader.

The next year, however, he acquired the curacy of Dinalupijan, Bataan through competitive examinations. Its hacienda belonged to the San Carlos Seminary. Before the end of the same year 1864, his own father passed away. In his last will dated 27 October 1864, the prosperous patriarch declared his three worthy sons his heirs. Ambrosio, the youngest son, decided to become a priest too at this point and would likewise eventually earn the doctorate degree in theology.¹⁴

Faustino worked in Dinalupijan for only two years, for in 1866, he finally received his royal appointment to a full prebend (*racion entera*) in the cathedral chapter which was, in effect, Peláez's legacy to him as noted earlier. This distinguished office also brought him back to the scenes of his childhood and to the academic halls of his Alma Mater which was walking distance from the cathedral. He was asked to resume his role as examiner and thus, he examined Burgos again, among others, twice in 1868 for the degrees of STD in April and JCL in October. Burgos had succeeded Peláez as the champion of the native clergy.¹⁵

PILGRIM OF PROGRESS

Villafranca's tenure as a prebend, which was largely ceremonial, gave him more leisure to read and reflect. It must have been during this time that he crystallized the idea of traveling to see for himself the ancient and modern marvels of the world which he had read about and imagined. Both his brothers were now well established. Mariano, after abandoning his priestly studies, had shifted to law, married a lady of exquisite beauty, Filomena Asunción, and became a prominent lawyer in the government service.

13. John Schumacher, S.J., *The Revolutionary Clergy* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila, 1981), p. 12.

14. *Guía de Forasteros en las Islas Filipinas para el año 1864* (Manila: Amigos del País, 1864) p. 332; AAM *Catálogos del Clero Secular* (CCS) 1865 (Enero) and 1866 (Enero); OG1866B; USTAA. *Graduate Listing*; TNA. "Bienes."

15. AAM, CCS 1867 (Enero); Villaroel, *Father Burgos*, p. 76.

Ambrosio, had accumulated four baccalaureate degrees in Philosophy (1858), theology (1863), canon law (1866), and civil law (1868), and had been ordained to the subdiaconate (1868). The three brothers mortgaged their two houses in Intramuros to religious foundations in 1869 apparently to partly finance Faustino's trip. If this was so, Faustino was exercising the privilege of the oldest brother, but with the consent of the younger brothers. The house in Solana street was mortgaged to the archbishopric for ₱2,000 at 6 percent annual interest and that in Dasmariñas, to the archconfraternity of Binondo for ₱3,000 at 8 percent.¹⁶

A well-informed man, Villafranca must have been aware that the Suez Canal had been under construction for almost nine years. (It was finally inaugurated on 17 November 1869.) But either he did not trust the much delayed timetable, or he felt a certain urgency to travel, or both. He went ahead with his plans and left Manila on 5 February 1869. After transferring ships five times, he reached Naples seven weeks later. He obtained an audience not only with Pope Pius IX but also with the exiled Spanish Queen Isabel II in Paris. It was this monarch who had granted him his present position. He also had a reunion with his co-graduate, Fray Ceferino González, at the Dominican College in Ocaña, Spain. Because of his family background, position, and affability, he interacted without diffidence with the important persons he met during his travels in Europe. His insight and sense of history also deepened and elevated his travel experiences above the merely visual. Above all, he became acutely aware of his Filipino identity vis-a-vis other peoples of the world. In the process, he revealed a nonseparatist stance which he shared with the native clergy despite their persecution and the suspicions of the colonial establishment.¹⁷

Villafranca must have returned to Manila in early December 1869, since his last published letter which was dated 25 November of the same year was about a storm which shook his ship mercilessly in the China Sea. He returned just in time to participate in

16. AAM, LGE 1852-61 doc. 2854; Filomena Asuncion was a favorite subject of her uncle Justiniano Asuncion one of the great Filipino painters in the nineteenth century who immortalized her beauty in at least two extant paintings. Santiago Pilar, "The loving eye for detail," *Archipelago* 2 (1975) 18:20 and 24, and "Miniature portraits: small wonders," *Archipelago* 3 (1976-II) A-26:19 and 20; Manuel, *DPB* 1:473-4; USTAA, *Graduate Listing*; TNA, "Bienes."

17. Terra, "Villafranca's 'Desde Filipinas' "

his brother Ambrosio's elevation to the priesthood at the cathedral during the Ember Days of Advent. (He had missed his ordination to the diaconate in May.)¹⁸ With funds left over from his trip, Villafranca published his travel letters to his brothers the following year. He must have sent copies of them to friends in Europe in gratitude for their hospitality.

Soon after his pioneering journey and the launching of his book, the thirty-eight year-old pilgrim died on 11 October 1871. His death must have been sudden because he did not get the chance to compose his last will unlike his father and two brothers. His brothers, upon their application, had to be declared on 21 November by the probate court as his heirs.¹⁹ His untimely death, however, spared Villafranca the anguish of witnessing two more events in the sorrowful saga of his group a few months later: the execution of his associates Padres Burgos, Zamora, and Gomez, and the banishment of ten other native priests for the Cavite Mutiny of January 1872, and the suppression of the doctorate for Filipino candidates in his Alma Mater early the same year.²⁰ Although he was ostensibly apolitical, had he not died, Villafranca might very well have been roused by these events to more vigorous activities like his surviving colleagues.

But Villafranca's real legacy to his people no matter how long it was set aside would re-emerge sooner or later. "(My book) may perhaps become useful sometime to our countrymen who, from our little corner of the globe wish to know about the world, and who would without doubt, congratulate me if I would unfold even briefly everything that occurred to me in my travels, which is contained here within these rough pages."²¹ Villafranca's efforts and foresight have finally been vindicated.

18. Ibid; AAM, OG 1869B and 1869C.

19. USTAA, *Graduate Listing*; TNA, "Bienes"; Manuel, *DPB* 1:473.

20. Schumacher, *Revolutionary Clergy*, p. 35 n. 11.

21. Terra, "Villafranca's 'Desde Filipinas,'" p. 212.