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Don Juan Sebastian Arámburo and Don Bernardo Justiniano

LUCIANO P. R. SANTIAGO

The most eminent as well as the most tragic Filipino doctor of ecclesiastical sciences in the nineteenth century was Padre José Apolonio Burgos (1837-72). Although a Spanish *criollo* with some Malay-Chinese blood, he identified himself with native Filipinos. He spent a considerable part of his youth at the University of Santo Tomas garnering an enviable litany of academic degrees: Bachelor of Arts (A.B.), 1855; Bachelor of Sacred Theology (S.T.B.), 1859; Licentiate in Arts (A.L.), 1860; Licentiate in Sacred Theology (S.T.L.), 1862; Bachelor of Canon Law (J.C.B.), 1866; Doctor of Sacred Theology (S.T.D.), 1868; Licentiate in Canon Law (J.C.L.) 1868; and Doctor of Canon Law (J.C.D.), 1871. He was the only Filipino to earn two doctorates in the nineteenth century. However, records show that had Burgos's alma mater not suppressed the doctorate for Filipinos in 1872 at least a few more native priests would have duplicated Burgos's academic feat.¹

But unknown to many Philippine historians, two Filipino priests in the eighteenth century had actually preceded Burgos in achieving this distinction. They were Don Juan Sebastian Aramburo (1752-1800) and Don Bernardo Justiniano (1765-ca. 1814), both Chinese mestizos. After the British Occupation (1762-64), racial prejudice against those of Chinese blood had intensified because of the collaboration of the Chinese community with the invaders. Thus, Aramburo and Justiniano had to struggle much harder than Burgos against racial discrimination in order to become doctors in their chosen fields, let alone become doctors twice over.²

1. UST Alumni Association (USTAA), *UST Graduate Listing 1611-1971* (Manila: UST, 1972); and Supplement 1775-94 (typewritten copy courtesy of Fr. Fidel Villarreal, O.P.); Fidel Villarreal, O.P., *Father José Burgos, University Student* (Manila: UST, 1971); Luciano P.R. Santiago, "The Filipino Priest-Doctors in the Nineteenth Century (1801-1871)," *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society* (PQCS) 13 (1985):34-50.

2. USTAA *Graduate Listing & Supplement*; Luciano P.R. Santiago, "The First Filipino Doctors of Ecclesiastical Sciences (1772-1796), PQCS 12 (1984):257-270.

DON JUAN SEBASTIAN ARAMBURO

The first Filipino to achieve two doctorates, Arámburo obtained the following degrees from U.S.T.; Bachelor of Philosophy (Ph.B.), 1772; S.T.B., 1775; Master of Arts (M.A.) and A.L., 1781; S.T.L., 1782; Doctor of Philosophy, 1782; and S.T.D., 1783. To be sure, he was neither the first Filipino nor the first Chinese mestizo doctor. The first Filipino doctors were Don Manuel Francisco Túbil (1742–1805), an Indio Pampango, and Don Joseph Patricio de Molina (1741–98), a Spanish mestizo, who had graduated as Doctors of Sacred Theology in 1772. The first Chinese mestizo doctors were Don Francisco Borja de los Santos (ca. 1748–1807) and Don Dionisio Vicente de los Reyes (ca. 1750–80) who had finished Ph.D. degrees in 1778. Insisting upon the academic rights of their racial class, Santos and Reyes had undergone a baptism of fire at the university council and the Royal Audiencia. Their struggles culminated in the issuance of the royal decree of 1781 reaffirming the rights and privileges of Chinese mestizos in the Philippine colony, including that of graduating with the highest degree offered by the royal university. Thus, they paved the way for the younger Aramburo to achieve his two doctorates.³

Arámburo was a "mestizo de sangley." He was born in 1752 in the walled city of Manila where his wealthy parents, Don Ambrocio Theodoro and Doña María Ramos, had established their residence. He evidently took his name from a Spanish Basque godfather. It appears that his father was also a Chinese mestizo rather than a pure Chinese or he would not have been allowed to reside in Intramuros.⁴ In fact, the Aramburos must have been one of the rare Chinese mestizo families who lived in the "noble and ever loyal" city which was also the educational center of the colony.

Arámburo first studied at the Colegio de San Juan de Letrán where he was a classmate of Dionisio de los Reyes. Their theses for the baccalaureate in philosophy were so impressive that the Archbishop of Manila, Don Basilio Sancho de Santas Justa y Rufina, gave them his imprimatur for publication in December 1771. A few months later, in March 1772, both Arámburo and de los Reyes graduated with honors at the University of Sto. Tomas with which Letrán was affiliated. They entered the seminary of the university, taking up the theology course which they finished with a Bachelor's degree in 1775. Meanwhile, from 1773 to 1775 their colleague, Francisco Borja de los Santos, had

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.; Archives of the Archdiocese of Manila (AAM), *Libro de Gobierno Eclesiástico* (LGE) 1772–83, folio 154.

been pleading before the Royal Audiencia for the right of Chinese mestizos to acquire the licentiate and doctorate degrees after this was opposed by the university council composed mostly of Dominican and Spanish secular priests.⁵

Because of his scholastic record, Arámburo became a protégé of Fray Juan Fernández, O.P., rector of the university. On 5 October 1775, Fernández nominated him as the new chaplain of the *capellanía de misas* of Capitán Don Pedro Quintero Nuñez, succeeding Bachiller Don Luís de la Paz, a young native priest who had died unexpectedly. Fernández was the patron of this trust fund which had a capital of ₱2,000. The annual interest of this would be applied as a stipend for life for Arámburo. The archbishop of Manila installed him in this capellanía the following day. On 7 October, the archbishop also conferred on him the tonsure.⁶

Arámburo apparently received minor orders in late 1775, the subdiaconate in early 1776 and the diaconate later the same year. In the catalogue of the Manila clergy in 1776 when he was still a sub-deacon, he was noted as possessing "evident ability" (*clara capacidad*).⁷

In the meantime, Santos had won his case at the Royal Audiencia and was consequently given his licentiate in philosophy in 1776. Thus, Reyes (but not Arámburo) confidently applied for the same degree in the same year. Incredibly, however, Reyes was turned down by the university council. To make matters worse, the incumbent governor-general, Don Simón de Anda, the erstwhile champion of the Filipino clergy who had now turned against them, sided with the council. The university rector was able to prevail upon the governor to at least allow Reyes' investiture. But Anda suppressed the racially tolerant constitution of the university. The crisis was defused only by Anda's death in October 1776 whereupon his successor restored the university statutes. Although Arámburo did not plunge directly into this controversy, as a conspicuous member of the embattled group of Chinese mestizos, he could not but have supported Reyes' cause. He was, in fact, to be one of its main beneficiaries.⁸

On the ember days of Pentecost in 1777, Arámburo was finally raised to the priestly dignity by Archbishop Sancho. He was granted

5. USTAA, *Graduate Listing & Supplement*; Santiago, "The First Filipino Doctors"; AAM. LGE. 1767-71. doc. 1034.

6. AAM, LGE 1772-83. f. 153.

7. Archivo General de Indias (AGI), "Catálogo del Clero Manilano. 14 de Oct. de 1776," *Filipinas* legajo 1027 in Angel Martínez-Cuesta, "El Clero Filipino: Estudios Históricos y Perspectivas Futuras," *Misionalia Hispánica* 40 (1983):346-55.

8. Santiago, "The First Filipino Doctors."

the privilege to say Mass for a period of one year as well as his first assignment as coadjutor of Pasig on 5 August 1777. Aramburo worked in this Augustinian parish for the next three years.⁹

In 1780, he returned to Manila to resume his studies at his alma mater. On 17 February 1780, his license to hear confessions was extended for two years instead of the usual one year period. Later in the same year, the Philippine colony was agitated by the news that war between Spain and England had broken out again. To avert another catastrophic British invasion, all able-bodied Filipinos were mobilized for military defense. Aramburo was made chaplain of the Chinese mestizo troop, but this did not significantly interrupt his academic activities. In 1781, he graduated with both masteral and licentiate degrees in arts.¹⁰

At this point, Aramburo combined postgraduate studies with teaching. He was appointed professor of philosophy at the College of San Jose, a post which he won by competitive examination. This was the former Jesuit institution which had been taken over by the archdiocese after the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1768. In this position (which he held for the rest of his life) Aramburo contributed the generous sum of ₱18 in 1781 to maintain the military readiness of the colony against the British threat noted earlier. He also became one of the renowned preachers at the Manila Cathedral who were selected by the archbishop at the beginning of each year to preach on special occasions. In recognition of his distinguished services to the church, in 1781 he was given the license to celebrate Mass for five years and in 1782, the license to hear confessions for four years and to preach "for a period of time at the will of His Grace."¹¹

Soon he crowned his academic career with a "double doctorate" in philosophy (1782) and theology (1783). His thesis (*papel de theorema*) was dedicated to Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary, patroness of his Dominican professors, and was approved for publication on 9 April 1783.¹²

On 7 April 1791, Archbishop Fray Juan Antonio de Orbigo y Gallego, O.F.M., successor of Sancho, installed Aramburo as a synodal examiner of the archdiocese. In 1795, he competed for the first time for the magistral canonry of the cathedral chapter and was listed on the *terna* (list of the top three candidates). Archbishop Gallego submitted this

9. AAM, LGE 1772-83, f. 10v.

10. Ibid., ff. 63 & 82v.; USTAA, *Graduate Listing & Supplement*.

11. AAM, LGE 1772-83, ff. 97, 97v., 99v. & 132 v.; LGE 1789-97, f. 138; LGE 1797-1804 f. 42; Expedientes Sobre Diferentes Materias (EDM), 1779-99 A.

12. USTAA, *Graduate Listing and Supplement*; AAM EDM, 1779-99 A.

terna to the king's secretary in Madrid but Arámburo was not chosen for the position.¹³

In 1798, the cathedral chapter, in *sede vacante*, named him *censor librorum*. The following year, Arámburo vied again for the magistral canonry and placed first on the terna. The second placer was another Chinese mestizo priest, Maestro Don Lázaro de la Rosa, who later became pastor of Quiapo. This time, the king promoted him as the first Chinese mestizo canon of the Manila cathedral. Tragically, Arámburo died sometime in the year 1800 before the king's decree was received in Manila. He was then only forty-eight and in the twenty-third year of his priesthood.¹⁴

DON BERNARDO JUSTINIANO

The second Filipino to achieve two doctorates, Don Bernardo Justiniano, acquired the following degrees from the Dominican University: Ph.B., 1783; A.L., 1784; Licentiate in Philosophy (Ph.L.) and Ph.D., 1785; Bachelor of Laws (Ll.B.), 1787 and 1795 and Doctor of Laws (Ll.D.), 1795. Justiniano's baccalaureate thesis, like those of Arámburo and Reyes, was also published with the archbishop's imprimatur in 1783. He was likewise classified as a "mestizo de sangley." His father, Ignacio Yengco, of Binondo was a Chinese businessman and his mother, Teodocia Bernarda, of San Pedro de Macati was a Tagala. He was born in his mother's hometown on 8 June 1764 and was named for his godfather, Bernardo Juan also of Macati, when he was baptized nine days later. In this period when racial discrimination was on the upswing, having a Chinese father meant that he was not necessarily covered by the academic-legal precedence established earlier by Arámburo, Reyes and Santos who, in contrast, belonged to families which had been Chinese mestizos for generations on their father's side. Justiniano and another Chinese mestizo student whose father was Chinese, Don Pedro Leon de Arcega, had to battle separately for their rights. Justiniano was a Letranite while Arcega was a nonseminarian student of the College of San Jose.¹⁵

13. AAM, LGE 1789-97, f. 71; Libro de Consultas 1790-96. f. 62.

14. AAM, LGE 1796-1804, f. 182 v.; EDM 1800-32 A; "Año de 1827. Expediente creado sobre la solicitud del P.D. Romualdo Alberto para que sea atendido en una de las prebendas de esta Sta. Iglesia Catedral," Prebendas 1804-55 B. f. 19. In this document, Padre Alberto cites cases of Chinese mestizo priests in the past who had been awarded prebends in the Manila cathedral.

15. USTAA, *Graduate Listing and Supplement*; Archives of the University of Sto. Tomas (AUST), Diligencias de Grados, Facultad de Philosophia (DGFP) 1784-85; Luciano P.R. Santiago. "The First Filipino Doctors"; Evergisto Bazaco, O.P. *Historia Documentada del Real Colegio de San Juan de Letran* (Manila: UST, 1933), p. 221; AAM. *Censura e Impresión de Libros 1764-1843*.

When they applied for their licentiate and doctorate degrees in Philosophy in 1785, the rector, Fray Domingo Collantes, O.P., with the university council, the majority of whom were Dominican and Spanish secular priests, turned them down. It was pointed out that their Chinese fathers, like most Chinese in the Philippines, had been declared traitors to the king for collaborating with the British invaders two decades earlier.¹⁶

The two beleaguered applicants appealed for justice to the Royal Audiencia and this highest court in the land again promptly upheld their rights and ordered the rector to admit them to the necessary examinations for the degrees in philosophy. The rector and the council promised to comply but reserved the right to determine their "purity of blood" by probing their paternal origins. Arzega and Justiniano were only too happy to be given this chance to vindicate their fathers' honor. They presented prominent native and Spanish citizens who unanimously attested to the fact that their fathers were "exemplary Chinese" who abandoned their comfortable homes and businesses in Manila during the British Occupation in defiance of the exhortations of their leader, Capitan Subang, to collaborate with the invaders. The renegade capitan had built a temple for their ancestral images in Arroceros not far from the Parian, and promised to pay a peso a day to anyone who would join his forces. Ignacio Yengco, Justiniano's father, who was a devout catholic who frequented the sacraments, hid with three other Chinese converts disguised as Indios in the town of San Pedro de Macati where his wife hailed from. When the British and their Chinese allies advanced to this town, they fled to the mountains. It was a week after the British had left the Philippines on 31 May 1764 that Justiniano was born in Macati. The Parian of Manila having been vacated by Chinese rebels, Justiniano's father settled his family and opened a store there. In 1771, however, he was expelled with other Chinese despite his loyalty during the war. Nevertheless, he managed to visit his wife and son in Manila three time before he died in the old country. Bernardo was seven when his father was banished and about ten when he saw his father for the last time. He must have decided then to work hard to become a worthy son of the father he loved and admired as a hero albeit a tragic one.¹⁷

Apparently touched by the poignant testimonies of the witnesses before him, the rector's heart melted. He called for a juridical debate to resolve the racial issue once and for all. Arousing considerable

16. Ibid..

17. AUST. DGFP. 1784-85.

enthusiasm on both sides, it was held at the convention hall and lasted for seventeen hours. After every aspect of the question had been exhaustively discussed, the rector stood up to make a shatteringly simple declaration: "We acquire nobility in many different ways but if we trace our origins, we are all equal." Only then were Justiniano and Arzega granted both their licenciante and doctorate in Philosophy in 1785. They were the fourth Filipino Doctors of Philosophy. Arzega became the first Filipino lay doctor of Philosophy.¹⁸

Justiniano had been ordained to the minor orders by Archbishop Sancho in 1782. However, like Burgos in a later century, he had to postpone his presbyteral ordination for more than a decade in order to become a Doctor of Laws too. In that era, priests were forbidden to enroll in civil law, and since canon law was offered initially in combination with civil law, they were, in effect, disqualified from taking up canon law. In 1795, Justiniano became the first Filipino Doctor of Laws. With his extraordinary credentials, he loomed as one of the most valuable members of the Manila clergy.¹⁹

On 7 September 1796, Archbishop Orbigo gave Justiniano the license to wear the clerical habit and the title of "patrimonio," which means that his affluent family had formed a trust fund for him as his means of support. He was apparently raised to the subdiaconate on the ember days of December of the same year and was also appointed a *promotor fiscal* of the archdiocesan court. Quite fittingly, he was ordained to the diaconate and the priesthood on the ember days of Pentecost in 1797 in Naga City by his defender, now bishop of Nueva Cáceres, Fray Domingo Collantes, O.P., because Archbishop Orbigo had died in the meantime. On 24 July 1797, the cathedral chapter of Manila in *sede vacante* granted him the license to celebrate mass for one year. On 23 August, it also conferred on him the title of general confessor for two years with the faculty, usually reserved for a prelate, to absolve unusual transgressions. These licenses were extended in the subsequent years. Thus, in 1798, the license to say mass was extended to three years and in 1801, to five years. In 1799, his privilege to hear confessions was renewed for three years and in 1802, for four years.²⁰

18. Ibid.; Evergisto Bazaco, *Historia Documentada*; Pablo Fernandez, O.P., "La Diocesis de Nueva Cáceres en 1796," *Philippiniana Sacra* 5 (1970):360-97; John N. Schumacher, S.J., "Nationalist Student Activism in Manila in the 18th and 19th Centuries," *Philippine Historical Review* 4 (1971):191-93. The debate called by the rector, however, is not mentioned in AUST. DGFP. 1784-85.

19. Salvador P. Escoto and John N. Schumacher S.J. "Filipino Priests of the Archdiocese of Manila, 1782," *Philippine Studies* 24 (1976):326-43; Villarroel, "Father Burgos"; and USTAA, *Graduate Listing and Supplement*.

20. AAM, LGE 1789-97. ff. 270v. & 288v.; "Año de 1797. Asunto de D. Juan Baez." *Asuntos Criminales*. 1769-1809 A; LGE 1797-1804. ff. 25, 27v., 68v., 144v., 217 & 274..

In addition to his diocesan functions, Justiniano found time to teach at his alma mater where he was named professor of *gramática* and of laws at the turn of the century. Like Arámburo, he was numbered among the preachers of the cathedral starting in 1804 when he was invited to give the sermon on 30 August, the feast of Sta. Rosa de Lima, patroness of the New World including the Philippines. On 6 February 1804, he requested permission to publish his second work, *Novena para las Animas Benditas del Purgatorio*, in both Spanish and Tagalog. After being reviewed by Fray Thomas Canon, O.S.A., it was approved two days later by the cathedral chapter. Justiniano was promoted as *promotor fiscal* of the archdiocese on 20 April 1804 when the incumbent, Dr. José Valentín de Araya fell ill.²¹

The new archbishop of Manila, Fray Juan Antonio de Zulaybar, O.P., appointed him the first Filipino *defensor de matrimonios* on 13 December 1804. In his first episcopal visitation of the parishes in August 1805, the prelate also made Justiniano his *promotor fiscal*.²²

The *Libro de Gobierno Eclesiástico* from 1806 to 1815 is missing so we have to turn to other sources for references to Justiniano. He had not been engaged in pastoral work and according to the catalogue of the Manila clergy in 1806, he was living in his own house in Binondo. However, when Dr. José Xavier de Torres, pastor of Binondo, became incapacitated by illness later that year, Justiniano was asked to administer the parish as the assistant curate. Before Torres died on 10 March 1807, he named Justiniano one of the executors of his last will. The next day, Justiniano formally turned over the parish to Don Francisco Ortiz de Urbina as the acting pastor of Binondo.²³

In his middle age, Justiniano seemed to have financial problems. In 1808, in the proceedings on the last will of a wealthy Pampango priest, Bachiller Don Antonio Ubaldo Bondoc, Justiniano was listed as one of the debtors who owed him P100 (a large amount at that time), which Bondoc had willed to his parish church of Apalit. At about this time, Justiniano was teaching at the College of San José. A document dated 1 February 1812 mentions him as a colleague of Dr. Mariano Bernabé Pilapil in that institution. He probably died a few years later in his late forties like Arámburo. There is no entry about him in the *Libro de Gobierno Eclesiástico* from 1815 to 1824.²⁴

21. AAM, LGE 1797-1804, ff. 54 & 60.

22. AAM, LGE 1804-06, ff. 57v. & 149v.

23. AAM, Catalogo del Clero Secular, Año de 1806 (misabeled as 1808); EDM. 1800-32 A.

24. AAM. Libro de Oficios. 1804-13 f. 147; "Capellania de Pilapil." Capellania de Misas. 1751-1833.