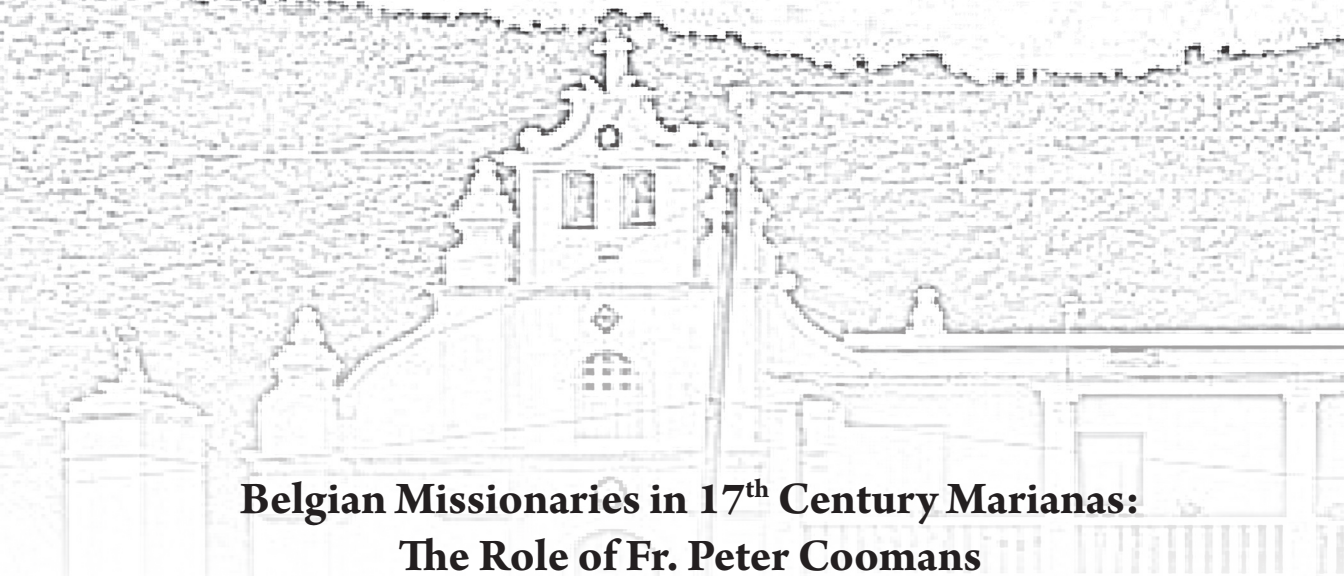




Belgian Missionaries in 17th Century Marianas: The Role of Fr. Peter Coomans and Fr. Gerard Bouwens

Augusto V. de Viana

Belgians comprised some of the European missionaries who helped administer the nascent Spanish colony in the Mariana islands. The Christian mission there was founded by Fr. Diego Luis de Sanvitores in 1668 and the task of conversion of the natives to the new faith was entrusted to the Jesuits. Missionaries from Belgium added to those from other nations such as Italy, Germany and Moravia. They were chosen because of their ability to endure harsh conditions.

The first decades of the Marianas mission was fraught with extreme difficulties most especially the resistance of the natives to the changes brought by Christianity. Two missionaries, Fr. Peter Coomans and Fr. Balthazar Dubois, paid with their lives while serving as missionaries in the Marianas. Despite the difficulties, they sowed the seeds of the Christian mission in the island and ensured the continued existence of the colony. Fr. Coomans and Fr. Gerard Bouwens played an important part in the islands as superiors in the Mariana Mission. Fr. Bouwens later made recommendations for good governance in the islands. An important role played by these two missionaries was that they recorded the history of the colony and recorded some important aspects of the culture of the native Chamorro people and the challenges faced by the mission including the serious challenges such as the martyrdom of fellow missionaries and the native rebellions which lasted until 1695. For his important role in serving the mission, Fr. Bouwens was hailed as its second founder.

Keywords: *Jesuits, Belgium, missionaries, mission, colony, rebellion, reduction, natives, indios.*

Introduction

Missionaries from Belgium were among the religious who played an important role in the Christianization of the Mariana Islands. The islands were discovered in 1521 by Magellan who was then on his way to the Philippines. Its formal colonization however did not take place until June 16, 1668, when the first permanent mission was established under Fr. Diego Luis de Sanvitores, S.J. The first European missionaries in the islands were Spaniards but they were joined by other Europeans. Originally the Jesuits who were given the task of proselytizing in the non-Christian lands were warned by the King of Spain in his decree of June 15, 1654 not to include non-Spanish religious. This decree was reversed when another royal order was issued on December 10, 1664, allowing foreign missionaries to join Jesuit missions. These foreigners came from states allied with the ruling Hapsburg dynasty like Belgium, Italy and Moravia.¹

The Belgians were preferred by the Jesuits to their missionaries outside Europe. St. Francis Xavier himself was said to have written: "Send me some Flemings (one of the dominant peoples of Belgium). They were as sturdy as the well-known Belgian horses, able to sustain hardships and fatigue and used to function under harsh climates." It was thought that their Germanic language would not be suitable for the Portuguese and Spanish colonies but these would present no problem of accommodation in places where the language of the administration were not European such as China and Japan.²

The Education and Records of the Belgian Jesuits

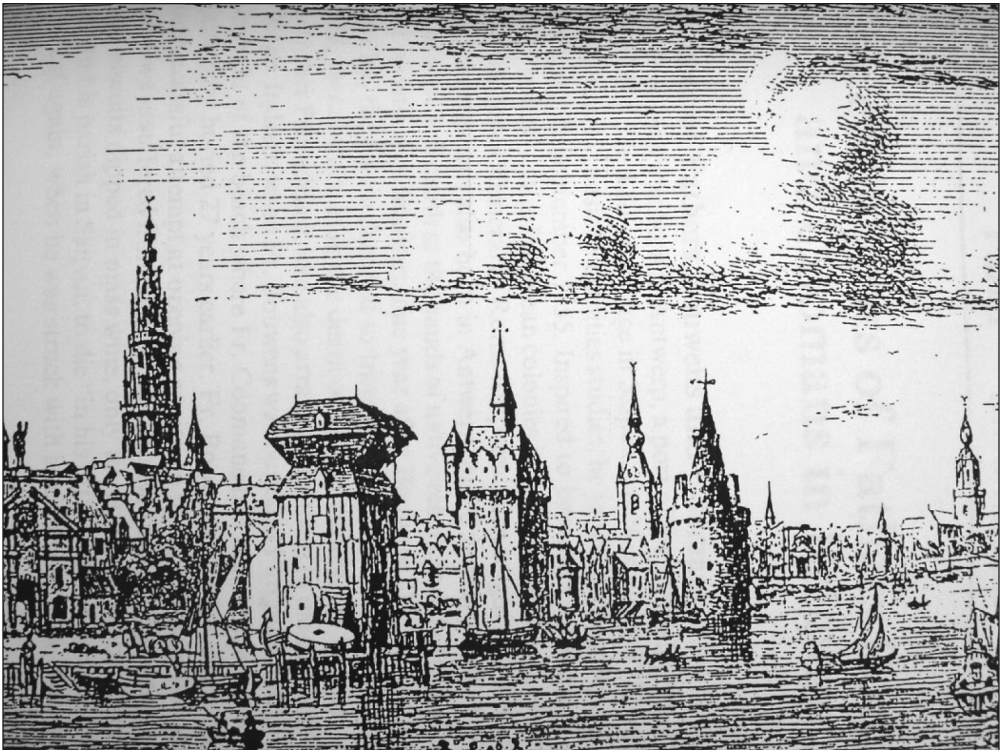
Many of the Belgian Jesuits were trained in cities like Antwerp. The city is located in the Flemish part of Belgium. The inhabitants who spoke a Dutch-like language called the city "Anwerpen," a port on the lower parts of the Schelde River. The city got its name from the words *handt* and *werpen* which means "hand to throw."³ According to local lore, a legendary figure named Salvius Brabant cut off the hand of the giant Antigone and threw it into the Schelde River. Antwerp is located 17 leagues from the North Sea. Its bustling port is still located along the river. It had eight canals to transport goods through the inner city. There was a system of canals which connected it to Brussels, the capital of Belgium. Passenger barges sailed to the

¹ Archivo General de Indias, Filipinas (AGI Fil.) 81. Ramo 61, Document No. 288. *The King Accepts that some foreign missionaries may join Spanish missions*, cited as Document 1664 B in Rodrigue Levesque, Ed. *History of Micronesia*, Vol. 4, pp. 230-233. This source shall hereinafter referred to as HM with volume and page number supplied.

² Rodrigue Levesque. Ed. *Belgian Jesuits in the Mariana Islands*. (Gatineau, Quebec: Editions Levesque, 2000?), p. 19. Unpublished manuscript in the possession of the author.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

city twice a day. Before the separation of the Netherlands following the Protestant Reformation, Antwerp was the foremost trade center of goods in the Holy Roman Empire. Products including spices from the Moluccas were traded there. King Charles I of Spain who later became Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire spent his boyhood years in the city. King Philip II of Spain called a meeting there for the Order of the Golden Fleece. The kings of England, Portugal, Rome, Bohemia, Poland and Portugal along with other royalty, high religious officials came to Antwerp. The city produced a great number of famous men such as the map-maker Abraham Ortelius, the printers Christoph Plantin and Balthazar Moretus, painters Paul Rubens and John Baptist Van Dyck. Another famous person from Antwerp was the Jesuit Daniel van Papebroch, a famous bollandist. Papebroch was a correspondent of some of the missionaries who served in the Marianas. The Bollandist organization in which he served still exists today in Brussels. The organization which was founded by Fr. John Bolland (d. 1665) is dedicated to hagiography and the removing of fanciful legends about the saints by sorting out the true facts from fiction through historical research.



The port of Antwerp during the 16th century (from Levesque, *Belgian Jesuits in the Marianas*)

During the Protestant Reformation, Protestant forces took control of Antwerp and chased out the Spaniards. The latter returned in 1576, sacked the city and retook it in 1585. Catholicism was re-established and its main defenders were the Jesuits. Peace did not return until the conclusion of the Treaty of Munster in 1648. The treaty marked the end of Antwerp's prominence as large ships were not allowed from going up the Schelde River. In 1659, the city experienced a street mutiny followed by an epidemic which emptied its homes. By 1678, Antwerp had 1,200 empty houses. In 1684, a severe winter caused the Schelde to freeze solid paralyzing trade along the river and forcing the people to convert its surface into a trade market. In 1698, there were only 65,000 inhabitants in the city.⁴



Map of Antwerp along the Schelde River during the 18th century (From Levesque, *Belgian Jesuits in the Mariana Islands*)

The Jesuit province of Belgium called the Flandro-Belgian Province was established in 1542, two years after the approval of the Order by Pope Paul III on September 27, 1540. In 1542, the first Spanish Jesuits arrived in Louvain. They were forced out of France by King Francois I. The Jesuits then began their rapid progress in the Low Countries that by 100 years later, they reached their greatest number after conclusion of the Treaty of Munster. However, the order began its gradual decline

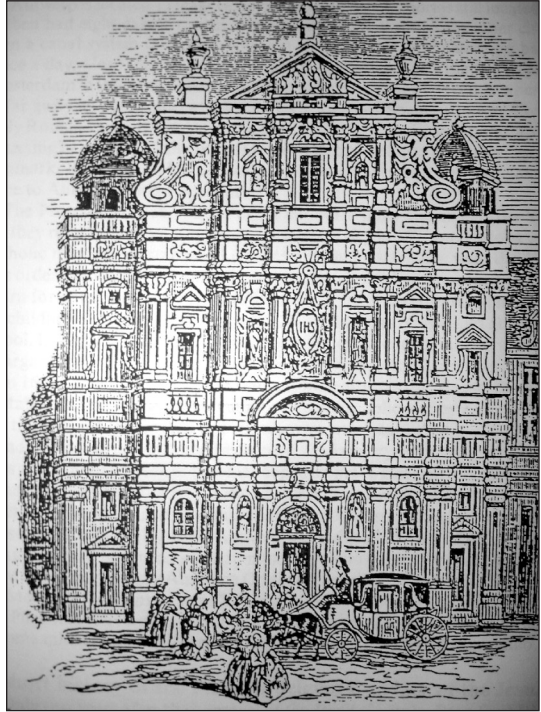
⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

during its second century until the abolition of the order by Pope Clement XIV in 1773.

The daily work of the Jesuits in Belgium consisted in teaching young men in colleges and universities. During the early years of the Order, their students lived in seminaries but they had to follow courses in schools established in the vicinity. Soon the Jesuit Fathers themselves began teaching academic subjects to young members of the Order. Shortly doors were open to young men in Belgium. Humanities colleges in Belgium ran by the Jesuits increased. Around 1650, there were around sixteen of them in the cities of Alost, Antwerp, Audenarde, Bailleul, Berh St. Winoc, Brussels, Cassel, Courtrai, Dunkirk, Ghent, Hal, Maestricht, Malines, Ruremond and Ypres. Generally, each college consisted of 5 or 6 professors and a prefect in charge of discipline and class management. Most of the colleges were not boarding schools but the

students especially from those out of town lived with local families or together in a commercially-run residence called a "convict." There was such a "convict" house run by the Jesuits themselves in Antwerp. This explains why there were many Jesuit vocations there.

Of their colleges, the College of Antwerp was the most aristocratic and international in character since it had students from Holland, Germany, France and Spain. Jesuit run-classes were given free in accordance to their Constitution. Funds used to maintain the colleges came from foundations the bulk of which originated from grants from civil governments. The school program was classical and limited to a few humanities. The school program was classical and students learned from books and explanations from professors. Latin was used as the language of learning which was considered then as a living language. It was taught in a way that the graduates



The Jesuit church in Antwerp which was constructed between 1614 and 1621. The original Church was abandoned to the Calvinists. This church was dedicated to St. Ignatius of Loyola. Now dedicated to St. Charles Borromeo (from Levesque, *Belgian Missionaries in the Mariana Islands*)

of the Jesuit colleges could write and speak it fluently. Books also were in Latin and the teachers only spoke Latin. Thus the students had to speak the language in the confines of the school and even during recreation. Mathematics was taught only in the higher levels of the universities and geography and history were not added to the program until the 18th century.

Aside from Latin, the Jesuits were responsible for the use of ancient Greek in their advanced studies. Most of the teaching was done by young men who were future Jesuit priests. The professed priests were dedicated to internal and foreign missionary work. They were employed in the fight against heresy through preaching and writing. In general, the college professors completed their humanities and were well-trained. Their studies were called rhetorics which is studied in a year. They had a book called *Ratio Studiorum* or Studies handbook which contained their lecture plans, the reference books, assignments, time distribution and reward systems etc. – everything they needed in their teaching.⁵

When the Spanish colony in the Mariana Islands was established by Fr. Diego Luis de Sanvitores in 1668, he wanted to establish a European-type college there but found it impossible due to lack of funds. Missionaries wanted to establish instead a trade school but found it impossible because the terms of the Jesuit foundation do not allow it. Eventually the Jesuits in Europe had to create religious fraternities or sodalities for the religious education of their college students.

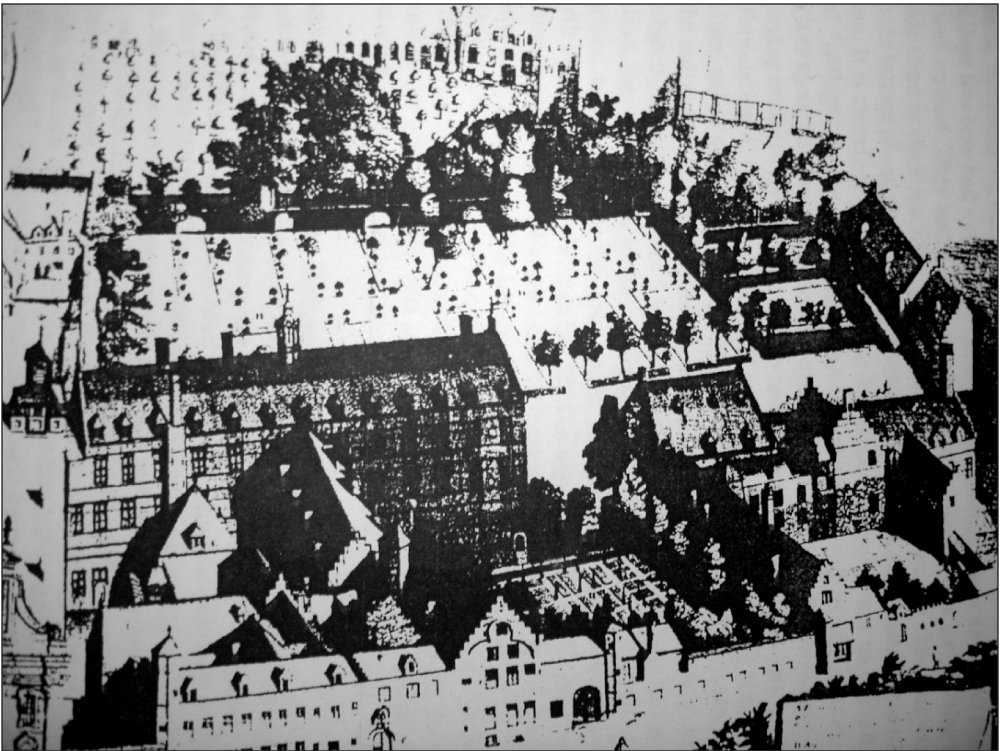
In the university level the future Jesuits learned philosophy and moral theology as their main subjects and the scriptures and controversial oratory as minor subjects. After full graduation they were ready to take their first vows of poverty, chastity and obedience to superiors. There was a fourth vow, which was special to the Jesuits was obedience to the Pope. This last vow led to trouble with church hierarchies and political governments and the eventual suppression of the order worldwide.

The Jesuits in Belgium had three missions: chaplaincy in the Army; chaplaincy in the Navy and mission work among the Protestants in the Netherlands. They pioneered the risky business of serving soldiers and seamen. The third mission was entrusted to them by the Pope.⁶

Aside from missions in Europe the Jesuits were sent to the heathen lands in the Indies and China. St. Francis Xavier himself was sent by St. Ignatius to Asia where he died on the coast of China. Belgian Jesuits served in at least 25 countries: some went to China via Mexico through the Manila Galleon. A number such as Fr. Gerard Bouwens and Fr. Peter Coomans were assigned in the Mariana Islands and died there.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 22.

⁶ *Loc. cit.* .



The Jesuit novitiate at Malines attended by Fathers Coomans and Bouwens
(from Levesque, *Belgian Jesuits in the Mariana Islands*)

Records of the Jesuit Order in Belgium before their suppression in 1773 were confiscated by the Belgian government. Part of it was destroyed by fire, theft and war but the bulk now remains at the Royal Archives and the Royal Library in Brussels. Of great importance in these documents are the annual reports submitted by the provincials to Rome, the annual lists of personnel, obituaries, brief eulogies and letters to and from superiors. Thankfully, many of them are in good condition and some copies were made by Jesuit novices.⁷ In tracing the records of Fathers Bouwens and Coomans, they are known by their Latin names, Gerardus Bouwens and Petrus Coomans or their Spanish names Gerardo Bowens and Pedro Comano.⁸

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

According to Levesque some of the copies have introduced errors such as distorted place names. The originals are preserved at the ARSI (Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu) or Jesuit archives in Rome located at Borgo Santo Spirito near the Vatican.

⁸ According to Levesque, Fr. Coomans wrote his last name as Cersthel but in another letter written in Rota by Fr. Bouwens, His other name was John Adams Gestel is a typical Flemish name but not the real spelling which was Austrian. The real name was Gerstl (see HM Doc. 1684 E).

The Lives of Fr. Gerard Bouwens and Fr. Peter Coomans

Fr. Gerard Bouwens was born in Antwerp on September 23, 1634. After completing his humanities studies, he joined the Society of Jesus at Malines on September 20, 1655. At that time, peace between the Protestants and Catholics was restored in the Treaty of Munster in 1648, allowing a revival of the Catholic religion in Belgium. Bouwens studied at the Jesuit novitiate in Malines. He was inspired to become a missionary and desired to be sent to the Indies, either the Americas or Asia, Bouwens applied to the Jesuit General in Rome and was granted. He then traveled to Spain and to Mexico where he was assigned with Fr. Coomans to the Mariana Mission. By fate or by providence, the two men were destined to travel to the Marianas together.

His companion Fr. Peter Coomans was also born in Antwerp. He was born on January 30, 1638. His mother was a widow when he entered the Society of Jesus on September 19, 1656. He attended the same Jesuit novitiate as Fr. Bouwens. His first assignments consisted of teaching catechism in the villages, attending to the sick in the hospitals and visiting the poor. While he was still a student, he contracted asthma and had to stop his studies for some time. When he recovered, he managed to finish his studies and become a priest. He said his first mass on the feast of St. Francis Xavier and later announced his intention to become a missionary in the Indies. Coomans had to finish his fourth and final year before he was allowed to leave for the missions.

He left Ostend for Spain in an old ship that eluded pirates and storms along the way. On the way to Madrid and during his voyage to Mexico he learned about the newly-established mission in the Mariana Islands and applied for it.

Bouwens and Coomans sailed from Acapulco in Mexico to the Marianas in 1672. The voyage took 86 days. Upon arriving in the islands twelve soldiers serving in the garrison were rotated back to Manila along with one deserter who would be judged by the Governor of the Philippines. Relieving the twelve soldiers were eleven others who were the companions of the two missionaries from Mexico. Aside from Fr. Bouwens and Fr. Coomans, another religious who accompanied them was Fr. Antonio de San Basilio who was born in Catania, Sicily.⁹

⁹ Archives Generales de Royaume (AGR) Jesuites Flandro Belgique, vol. 2, fol. 231-231v, Letter from Fr. Bouwens to Fr. Adrian Horenbeeck, aboard the galleon San Antonio, 14, June 1673, cited in Levesque, Belgian Jesuits in the Marianas as Document 1673. pp. 195-198, also as Document 1673I in HM 5:585-598.

Fr. Bouwens' account carried interesting details. The galleon which brought him to the Marianas also had a board a horse, the first in the islands. It was a gift from General Duran de Monfort. In oral Chamorro tradition, the natives were fascinated with the animal that they thought of it as a supernatural being and offered it gifts including iron to eat. See Mavis Werner Van Peenen, *Chamorro Legends in the Island of Guam*, MARC Publications Series No. 4 (Guam: University of Guam Micronesia Area Research Center, 1993), p. 17.

Both Fr. Bouwens and Fr. Coomans were trained in various languages. They spoke Dutch, French, Latin, Spanish and Greek. When they reached the Marianas, they became familiar with the Mariano (Chamorro) language and also the Tagalog and Pampango languages spoken by their lay assistants and soldiers. Bouwens and Coomans arrived in Guam on May 7, 1672, around three weeks after the death of Fr. Sanvitores who died a martyr's death on April 2, 1672.¹⁰ At that time, the Mariana mission was headed by Fr. Francisco Solano who succeeded Fr. Sanvitores. Fr. Solano's leadership of the mission however, was brief. Already sickly, he died of tuberculosis on June 13, 1672. Before his death he asked a young priest named Fr. Francisco Ezquerria to become the third superior of the Mariana mission. Fr. Ezquerria served as the head of the Mariana mission until he was killed in the village of Ati in Guam on February 2, 1674.¹¹

With the death of Fr. Ezquerria, Fr. Coomans became the fourth superior of the mission. Like his predecessors, his leadership in the mission was also short. One of his duties was to meet the yearly galleon from Mexico and to obtain the needed supplies. The ship drifted off and it was impossible to return to Guam. The ship took Fr. Coomans on its voyage to the Philippines. During that voyage, Fr. Coomans fell into an open hatch and broke his collar bone, causing him great pain. Upon recovering his strength, Fr. Coomans returned to the Mariana mission. He had to take the six-month voyage to Mexico because it was impossible for ships from the Philippines to sail to the Marianas. He returned to the islands in 1676 after an absence of two years. Though he was away from his mission, Fr. Coomans brought the largest subsidy ever

The galleon also had eleven soldiers to reinforce the garrison. On its way to the Philippines, it carried a letter from head of the mission requesting for 200 Pampango soldiers. The request was rejected because the cost of sending 200 men by means of Mexico and feeding them would be prohibitive.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

¹¹ Fr. Francisco Ezquerria was a Spaniard born in Manila on October 2, 1644. His parents were Juan Ezquerria and Lucia Sarmiento. He was admitted to the Jesuit novitiate in January 1660 and was ordained priest on June 15, 1669 at the age of 25. He taught for a while in Manila before asking to be assigned as a missionary away from his birthplace. He went to Acapulco in 1670 and during the voyage he learned the Chamorro language. He arrived in the Marianas on June 20, 1671 and was assigned to the Gani Islands north of Saipan but actually evangelized in the island of Rota before being asked to return to Guam. He was martyred after he administered the sacrament of extreme unction to a woman in danger of dying from child birth.

The natives hated the missionaries because they believed that the holy water they were using for baptism and the oil they were using for the extreme unction were poison. Many of the natives who were administered the two sacraments died shortly. The real cause of deaths was actually the germs introduced by the foreigners from whom the native Chamorros had no immunity. The existence of germs, of course, was unknown at the time.

The angry natives struck Fr. Ezquerria with spears and sling stones and stripped him of his clothes. He then bled to death. Four of his companions Luis de Vera y Picazzo, Pedro Alezo, Marcos de Segura and Mathias de Altamirano all of whom were Mexicans also died with Fr. Ezquerria. The first was speared while the other three who were trying to escape on boats were overtaken by their assassins and were beaten, speared and drowned.

gathered.¹² He was replaced as superior of the mission by the Italian missionary Fr. Bartholome de Besco who was aboard the same galleon that brought him back to the Marianas. Upon assuming leadership of the mission, Fr. Besco made Fr. Coomans his assistant.

It was during Fr. Cooman's brief term as superior of the Mariana mission when a mutiny in the mission almost broke out.¹³ On the occasion of Pentecost, in 1674¹⁴, Fr. Coomans reminded the commander of the garrison to gather the men for prayers in such an important day of obligation. He complied but not after offending his men who were fond of gambling. The men jokingly said that they were not monks to be called to a gathering. Nevertheless, the soldiers arrived for the usual praying of the rosary. Fr. Coomans used the occasion to explain that it is the obligation of every Christian to sanctify holidays and to listen to the word of God. While Fr. Coomans was talking, he was interrupted by a soldier to the displeasure of his commander. Then angry words were exchanged between the priest and the soldier. Fr. Coomans threatened to have him excommunicated for uttering things in a sacred place such as the church. He had the man placed under house arrest but did not impose excommunication.¹⁵

On the second day, the soldier was approached by another. He took offense at what the second said and blows were exchanged. Fr. Coomans ordered him restrained with fetters. He was led by the fetters to take his meal. He did not return however. A soldier beat him up and threw him to the ground. Fr. Coomans tried to have the man restrained. The first man grabbed a bombard, loaded it with stone and aimed it at the commander and Fr. Coomans. The other soldiers wrestled with the man. While they were struggling, other soldiers shouted "To Hell with the King, to hell with the Church, let's get weapons!" Soon, two groups of men faced each other with drawn long knives. The fathers began to mediate an end to the standoff. Fr. Coomans went to his quarters and took out a crucifix. As he rushed out, he heard cries of "Long live the Church! Long Live the King!" The near mutiny was over. The would-be mutineers begged for pardon which was granted.¹⁶

The intermittent uprisings of the Chamorros in the next two years forced Fr. Coomans to stay close to the main mission at Agaña in Guam. During this time he looked after the souls of the natives, read and wrote letters and reports. He also studied languages and composed a vocabulary of the Chamorro language. After

¹² ARSI Phil. 13, fol. 217-219 cited as Document 1686D in Levesque, *The Letters of Fathers Bouwens and Coomans, 1662-1697*, pp. 422-424.

¹³ AGR 2: 173-174. Letter from Fr. Coomans to Fr. de Pape, dated Agaña 10 June 1674, cited as Document 1674H in Levesque, *Belgian Jesuits in the Marianas*, pp. 220-226.

¹⁴ The date was not specified. It was probably May 20, May 27 or June 3, 1674 according to Levesque.

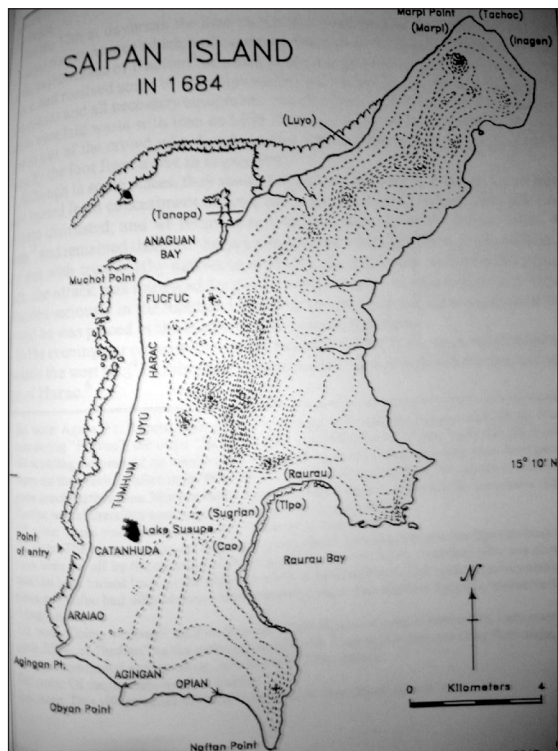
¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

peace was restored Guam was divided into districts or residences. Fr. Coomans was given charge of two districts—the Immaculate Concepcion at Pago and the San Antonio de Borja in Mapupun.¹⁷ As the leader of the two parishes, he personally built the buildings and cultivated plants. He spent his time reducing the inhabitants to the Christian mode of living including enticing natives living in caves to live in the Christian settlements.¹⁸

In January 1682, Fr. Coomans was assigned to Rota with the Fr. Carlos Boranga and Brother Balthazar Dubois. Two churches were built on the island, one at Sosa which was dedicated to San Francisco de Borja and the other at Agusan which was dedicated to San Francisco Xavier. Many of the Rotanese owe their conversion to the zeal of Fr. Coomans. When troubles with the natives were brewing in 1684, Fr. Coomans was called back to Guam.

On March 23, 1684 he joined the expedition led by the Sargento Mayor Jose Quiroga to subdue the inhabitants of the northern islands of the Marianas called the Gani Islands. The force was composed of 76 *indio* soldiers from the Philippines and some Chamorros from Guam. They rode on one European-type boat accompanied by 20 native canoes. Fr. Coomans was accompanied by Fr. Matthias Cuculino (Fr. Kuklein). After encountering little resistance at Rota, the force was augmented by some inhabitants from the island and preceded to land in Saipan on April 15. The invaders landed at Catanhuda and soon met fierce resistance in the villages of Fucfuc, Anagua, Harac and Arariao. After destroying the last village, the force moved on to conquer the village of Aguingan where Quiroga recovered 20 cannons and 14 swivel guns from the wreck of the galleon *Concepcion* which sank back in 1638.



Map showing Saipan and the villages where fierce fighting took place in 1684 between natives and Spanish forces led by Captain Quiroga (From Levesque, *History of Micronesia*)

¹⁷ ARSI Phil. 13, fol. 217-219. *Eulogy of Fr. Coomans by Fr. Bouwens, Guam 31 May 1686.* Document 1686 D letters of Fathers Bouwens and Coomans, 1682-1697. P. 412.

¹⁸ This included enticing people living in caves to live in the settlements.

After erecting a fort in Saipan, Quiroga divided his force into three: one to proceed to the islands north of Saipan; another to Tinian and the last one will return to Guam and continue the reduction of the island. Fr. Coomans accompanied the expedition to the Gani islands. It was composed of 25 soldiers, 20 of whom came from the Guam garrison and other five came from Saipan. It was led by a Pampango captain named Jose de Tapia, a veteran of the previous Chamorro wars. This expedition was dangerous because many of those who were involved in previous rebellions against the missionaries had fled to these islands. Imbued with missionary zeal, Fr. Coomans was intent on spreading the faith and to eradicate the practice of the Chamorro bachelors or *urritaos* who rented young girls for sex.¹⁹ The expedition covered more than 100 leagues and most of the natives in the Gani islands gave it a warm reception.

While the expedition was still in one of the northern islands which was most likely Asongsong (Asuncion), the group received word from Chamorro emissaries that the Fathers and the soldiers in the southern islands (Saipan, Tinian, Rota and Guam) were all massacred in a new and sudden rebellion. While the expedition was fighting in the first three islands, a rebellion led by Antonio Yura broke out. The rebellion had many causes: It was caused by the resistance of the Chamorros to Christianity and the elimination of their native customs. Another cause was the abuses of the officials and soldiers of the mission. The Governor of the islands, Damian de Esplana forced the young men to work in his plantations for free while earning great profits from the products he sold to the passing galleons. Among the young men forced to work for the governor was Yura himself. Esplana also required the young girls of Guam to live with him in his villa. Many of the soldiers of the mission were described as scum chased out of their families and recruited out of the passengers seeking to amass their wealth. They were known to steal and rape. Missionary chronicles described them going out at night to insult God by committing excesses among the people.²⁰

The news of the extermination of the Spanish mission was actually false. Fr. Coomans and his companions hastened to return to Guam. Meanwhile a conspiracy was brewing among the Chamorro rowers. They planned to kill Fr. Coomans and the rest of the soldiers. By killing them they could regain their freedom and practice their old customs which were being eliminated by the missionaries. At a given signal the boatmen overturned their canoes or threw the soldiers overboard as they were leaving Alamagan Island. Twenty soldiers were drowned including their commander Jose de Tapia. Fr. Coomans saw what was about to happen to him and forced the Chamorros in their boat land them back to Alamagan. Only three soldiers from the overturned

¹⁹ Stocklein Welt-Bott No. 8, *Jesuit Annual Report for 1684—1685 by Matthia Kuklein*, cited as Document No.168SJ in HM 8:229-254.

²⁰ *Loc cit.*

canoes were able to survive by swimming to the shore. There Fr. Coomans was taken by the friendly Chamorro chief Antonio Ayihi in the care of a trustworthy friend.²¹

After having survived the massacre of most of the members of his expedition, Fr. Coomans and his companions hid in Alamagan for about a year. In July 1685, he decided to rejoin the Spanish mission in Guam in July 1685. He decided to make a stopover at Saipan. Upon arriving near the shore, his oarsmen were reluctant to land. A fleet of Saipanese canoes encircled their boats and the natives dragged Fr. Coomans ashore and tied him to a tree. The fifteen soldiers who were with him could not offer resistance since they were deprived of their firearms. The Saipanese tore off his clothes and left only his underpants then made him the target of their slings and spears. He died of his wounds as a result of the rain of stones from those slings and spears. His last words were said to have been addressed to his assailants:²²

Sons, never mind that. It is one way to tie me to you and to kill me, in spite of my love for you, but you have nevertheless offended God. He may still have mercy on you, that is what I beg him to do.

He then raised his eyes to heaven commending his soul to God and he moaned. “Jesus, Mary I am dying this way, May this last (words) Jesus, Mary,” and things similar to this

Fr. Cooman’s body was left untouched for hours until it was buried in the sand. His site of martyrdom was in Fatiguan in present-day Chalan Kanoa.

Fr. Cooman’s companion Fr. Bouwens, on the other hand, lived a longer but equally challenging life. After spending a year in the Marianas, his superiors sent him to Manila to discuss important matters with the authorities there. He was diagnosed with what appeared to be a cancer which caused him to suffer terribly. His health however returned and he travelled to Acapulco after a year. Fr. Bouwens collected the



The martyrdom of Fr. Coomans in Saipan. This illustration is not accurate because Fr. Coomans was killed not by arrows but by stones and he was stripped up to his underpants (from Levesque, *Belgian Missionaries in the Mariana Islands*)

²¹ ARSI Phil. 13, fol. 217-219. *Eulogy of Fr. Coomans by Fr. Bouwens, Guam 31 May 1686, op. cit.* p. 426.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 427.

subsidy for the Marianas and returned to the mission in 1675. Upon his arrival in Guam, Fr. Bouwens found letters waiting for him. One of these was his appointment as superior of the mission. He began building the church in Agaña which collapsed as soon as it was completed. He began building a second one which burned down when it was half-completed. Undaunted and seeing these misfortunes as trials of his resolve, he began building a third church which was completed. Later, Fr. Bouwens was sent to Rota where he preached and built a church in the village of Inapsan. Upon his return from Rota a year later, he was again appointed superior of the mission.

During the rebellion led by Yura in 1684, Fr. Bouwens was attacked by the rebels and received three wounds; one to his head; another in his thigh and the third in one arm. He expected martyrdom that day if not for the intervention of one of the soldiers of the garrison. Fr. Bouwens knew personally the leaders of the rebellion. Its main leaders Antonio Yura, Mathias Yay and Ignacio Osi were educated by the Jesuits. Osi and Yay visited Manila in 1671 as one of the Chamorro “envoys.”²³ Since the leaders were educated by the missionaries, they were considered as traitors.²⁴ For the duration of the rebellion, he was cooped up in the mission but went outside at times to preach and teach. He remained in the Guam mission from 1684 to 1688.

After Governor Esplana died of natural causes in 1694, Sargento Mayor Quiroga became the new governor of the islands. He resumed the conquest of the Marianas the following year. With a force of 80 soldiers consisting of Spaniards, *indios* from the Philippines and Chamorro allies, Quiroga left Guam with one galliot, one boat and 20 native canoes. Fr. Bouwens took part in this expedition along with Fr. Basilio Le

²³ Domingo Abella, *Vignettes in Philippine-Marianas History* (Manila: International Association of Historians of Asia, 1962), p. 14.

Also: Rodrigue Levesque, ed. *History of Micronesia*, Vol. 5. (Quebec: 1992), p. 14.

There was a third Chamorro youth who was with Yay and Osi in 1671. He was Pedro Guiran. Fr. Sanvitores sent the three boys to Manila that year to show the fruits of the Mariana mission. Guiran served as spokesman for the group and asked the Governor General to protect the Christianized natives against the onslaught of the pagan Chamorros. Osi returned to Guam in 1671 while Yay stayed in Manila until 1674 when he returned with Fr. Bouwens. The three returned to the Marianas via Mexico. Guiran died off Mexico in 1674. Levesque called the three as Chamorro “tourists” while Abella considered them as Chamorro “envoys.”

²⁴ Real Academia de Historia (RAH) No. 9/3631 Jesuit Tomes, *Letter of Fr. Bouwens to Fr. Francisco Garcia, Guam, 20 May 1685*, cited as Document 1685K in HM 8:229-254.

Yura was killed at the beginning of his rebellion on July 23, 1684. He and his men sneaked into the garrison where they found Governor Esplana strolling in the grounds. They stabbed him nine times and when the soldiers of the garrison were alerted they began to fled. An indio soldier from the Philippines named Jose de la Cruz caught up with Yura and killed him. During their attack Yura and his group killed Fr. Manuel Solorzano and Fr. Balthazar Dubois Flaminco. They were killed along with a sentry, a soldier and two servants of the governor. They also wounded Fr. Bouwens, Fr. Diego de Zarzosa and two lay workers from the Philippines. Other people of the mission who were slain that day were 40 to 50 soldiers who were cut down in the streets of Agaña. Yay was captured by the soldiers of the garrison on October 8, 1684. The fate of Osi was unknown.

Roulx. The force retook Tinian and conquered Saipan. The Chamorros made a last stand at Aguiguan Island on August 12, 1695.

The action at Aguiguan was recorded by an anonymous Jesuit. When the first troops landed ashore, immediately behind them was Father Bouwens. They climbed up the rocks to a very steep cliff while the defenders rained upon them rocks and spears. Fr. Bouwens climbed up the rocks, hanging on as not to fall off into the sea. From time to time the soldiers had to stop to shoot their firearms. The Governor (Quiroga) stood out among them because he was a very skilled and good marksman. One soldier who just fired his weapon was attacked by two Chamorros. They already had him pinned down on the ground to kill him when a friendly Indian joined in and transpierced one of the aggressors and finished him off with a knife. The other aggressor then fled. When the defending Chamorros saw their fortress penetrated by the attackers, they all fled. Many saved their own lives by seeking the protection of the Father (Bouwens), falling on their knees and begging not to be killed for the love of God. The defenders threw away their weapons and surrendered on the promise that they would not be harmed. Only one man, a *ma'agas* or native noble who was wanted for the murder of Fr. Strobach in 1684 was hanged. To mark their victory, Quiroga and his men held a mass and Fr. Bouwens baptized 200 small children. The houses on the island were burned and all the people were taken aboard the canoes to be taken to Guam.²⁵

News about the battle of Aguiguan reached the villages in the Gani Islands. The inhabitants there became terrified and sent messages to Governor Quiroga offering their allegiance. The Governor then ordered them to live in Saipan so they could be better indoctrinated in the new religion. Many of them complied with his order. Hundreds of inhabitants from Tinian and Aguiguan left for Guam aboard 50 canoes. The inhabitants from the Gani Islands stayed in Saipan until they too, were moved to Guam.²⁶ By 1749, Saipan was listed as depopulated.²⁷

For his success in stopping the Chamorro rebellions, Fr. Bouwens recommended the awarding of a land grant to Governor Quiroga.²⁸ In recognition of his services, the King issued a decree rewarding Quiroga in 1715.²⁹

²⁵ ARSI Phil. 13, folios 306-325v, *Relacion de la conquista y rerstauracion de las Islas Marianas*, cited as Document 1696F in HM 9:665-678.

²⁶ ARSI Phil. 14, Fol. 88-89v, *Relacion de la ultima reduccion de las Yslas Marianas llamadas de Gani que estas al Norte de Seipan y Tinian*, cited as Document 1699B in HM 10: 153-161.

²⁷ Don A. Farrell, *History of the Northern Mariana Islands*. Phyllis Koontz, Ed. (Saipan: Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Public School System, 1991), p. 176.

²⁸ RAH 9/2678, Document No. 10. Letter to Fr. General Gonzalez by Fr. Gerard Bouwens, Fr. Bouwens Recommends Major Quiroga for a land grant, dated Saipan, 20 May 1701, cited as Document 1701D HM10: 311-318.

²⁹ AGI Fil. 333, libro 12, fol. 148-149, pp. 352-353. Letter to the Governor of the Philippines, King Rewards Major Quiroga. dated Aranjuez, 20 June 1715. HM 11:644-646.

In 1706, Fr. Bouwens made a recommendation on how to achieve a good government in the Marianas. He said that the *gobernadorcillos* of the districts should be appointed from the native judges of the plantations instead of the Spaniards. He said that this was being done in the Philippines. Unlike the Spaniards, the native officials know the character of the Marianos, as he called the natives of the Marianas.³⁰ He also cautioned against the increased use of money in the islands. He said money does not benefit the people and it creates confusion and hatred. The natives would begin to esteem gold and silver. To introduce money among the Marianos who never knew or esteemed it is not a remedy for disorders. Fr. Bouwens added that oppression occurs whether or not money is involved. If introduced greed would find it to concentrate in a few hands. He proposed that rates for labor should be fixed and compensation can be done in other ways such as in tobacco, machetes and frying pans which are all the goods in demand in the island.³¹

He suggested that government positions in the islands should not be increased if these were to be left unpaid. There were 130 positions in the island when there were originally 40. The government is not able to pay all holders of the positions who were soldiers. Fr. Bouwens recommended the removal of the 90 positions to prevent the men holding them from conspiring against the government. Fr. Bouwens also spoke on matters involving requiring the natives to render communal labor and the charging of tribute. He said that communal labor was the cause of what the natives called *aplui*.³² Males reaching the age of 18 may render communal labor and should be exempted after reaching the age of 50. Regarding the payment of tribute Fr. Bouwens cited a special royal decree requiring only males to pay the tribute when they reach the age of 20 and they should be exempted from paying it when they reach fifty years of age. Under the new code of the Laws of the Indies specifically Tome 2, Book 6, Title 5, Law 21, Fr. Bouwens said that the payment of tribute should be waived if the people had no money and whatever resources they have could be used to feed themselves, provide a dowry and to cure sickness.³³

In his letter the King awarded Quiroga with privileges in accordance of Law 9 and 10 of Book 3 Title 4 of the Revised Code of the Indies.

³⁰ Luis Ibañez y Garcia, Governor of the Marianas 1871-1873. Report to the Governor of the Marianas by Fr. Bouwens,, dated, Agaña, 20 April 1706, cited as Document 1707A in HM 10:530-542.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Oppression or *api* in Tagalog.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 541.

Fr. Bouwen's recommendation regarding tribute appeared to have been accepted by the King. The inhabitants of the Marianas especially on the account of their decreasing population following their reduction in 1695, were exempted from the payment of tribute.

To prevent abuses by the governors who engaged in trade rather than attending to their official duties, as well as extorting donations from the natives, the King in 1707 issued a decree prohibiting traders from becoming the Governor of the Marianas.

See AGI Fil. 332, libro 11, fol. 529v-261, pp. 586-589, Letter to the Audiencia of Manila dated Madrid 18 February 1708, "The King did not want the Governor of the Marianas to be a trader," cited as Document 1707A in HM 10: 546-548.

In 1711, Fr. Bouwens accompanied an expedition to the Carolines. Interest in the islands was growing as reports from castaways blown to the Philippines or people from Guam who drifted to these islands bring a possibility of establishing a Christian mission there. In 1700, the Ulithi Atoll was rediscovered. It was earlier reached by Ruy Lopez de Villalobos in 1543. There were also expeditions to the islands in 1708 and 1709 including one that tried to sail from Guiuan in Samar. The mission to the Carolines in 1711 however was a failure because of adverse winds and currents. Fr. Bouwens barely ate and subsisted on biscuits dipped in mass wine.³⁴

Weak and seasick, Fr. Bouwens returned to Guam and later proceeded to Saipan. He said that he planned to die “in his little nest.” After he arrived he began to eat again and contracted a severe case of diarrhea from which he did not recover. His fellow Jesuits knew that he was dying. They held prayers for him for his eventual demise. On that day his companions were reading to him the prayers for the dead. They asked him to remain with them. “It was not time yet, let us wait until five in the morning,” Fr. Bouwens acceded to their request. He died five minutes after five. He was 78 years old. Fr. Bouwens was buried in the beach at Fatiguan within sight of the beach where Fr. Coomans was martyred twenty-seven years earlier.

Fr. Bouwens was extolled as the “second founder of the Mariana Island mission.”³⁵ The eulogy in his honor praised his virtues. The first virtue was obedience. Fr. Bouwens was attentive to the least indication of the will of his superiors. He never took account of his seasickness. His second virtue was that of chastity. Fr. Bouwens never recognized any woman by sight. He always kept his eyes downward whenever he had to deal with a member of the opposite sex. He never left his escort and avoided any sight that might offend his purity. Poverty was Fr. Bouwen’s third virtue. His belongings consisted of a few pieces of clothing, a breviary and small books which were all worn out. He was also known for his patience. Fr. Bouwens never complained about his terrible hernia or his seasickness. He was also known for his abstinence. During the 1785 expedition with Quiroga he did not eat anything during the 24 hour voyage from Guam to Rota until he had landed in the island. Finally Fr. Bouwens was praised for his charity. During the siege of the mission in 1684 and during the expedition to the Gani islands he readily shared his food with others.³⁶

³⁴ Fr. Muscati, Trans. Van Hamme, *Letter From Fr. Muscati to the Provincial in Manila Announcing the Death of Fr. Bouwens*, (Arnhem: P. Visschers Onuitgegeven Brieven, 1857), pp. 96-197, cited as Document 1712E in HM 11: 517-529.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 523.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 527-528.



An illustration of Fr. Bouwens preaching. This picture could have been, according to Levesque, a picture of a missionary preaching in China. (From Levesque, *Belgian Jesuits in the Mariana Islands*)

The Role of Fr. Bouwens, Fr. Coomans and the Other Belgians

Fathers Bouwens and Coomans are remembered for their role in chronicling the early years of the Spanish mission in the Marianas through their reports and letters. Though both were not the original missionaries who arrived in 1668, their reports especially the one done by Fr. Coomans provided a description of the situation and customs of the Chamorro people at the time of the colonization and the

challenges faced by the mission. This was entitled *The History of the Mariana Island Mission for the 1667-1673 period*.³⁷

The part of the report from 1672 onwards is a primary historical source since Fr. Coomans himself was an eyewitness. Even the part is considered a primary source because it was corroborated by Fr. Tomas Cardeñoso who was one of the original missionaries who arrived with Fr. Sanvitores. Of notable interest was anecdotal information regarding the landing of the mission. The first part of the report listed down the benefactors of the mission especially the secular priest Don Cristopher Vidal who was instrumental in raising the funds of the expedition and also the officials such as the Viceroy of Mexico, the Marquis of Mancera and King Charles II. The report described the size of the mission including the priests. It sailed on March 23, 1668 and sighted the island of Zarpana (Rota) on June 15, 1668. At that time Fr. Pedro de Casanova was saying mass when cries of “Land ho!” were heard. By noon the ship turned to the island of San Juan which was called Guan, Guahan or Iguan by the inhabitants. The ship docked anchor for the night and natives already started climbing aboard.³⁸

³⁷ Fr. Cooman’s report however was not the first description by the missionaries of the Mariana mission. The first report was the *Resumen de los sucesos del primer año de la Mision en estas Islas Marianas*. 26 April 1669 cited as Document 1669A in HM 4:507-516.

³⁸ ARSI Phil. 13. Fol. 95-110. *History of the Mariana Islands for the 1667-1673 period* by Fr. Coomans, cited as Document 1673L1 in HM6:11-144.

Also as Document 1673L2 in *Belgian Jesuits in the Marianas* BR (Belgian version), p. 54.

The report also mentioned the first baptism in the mission. One of those who climbed the galleon was a Filipino Christian who was a survivor of the shipwreck of the galleon *Concepcion* in 1638. He had a daughter almost two years old whom he offered to God to be baptized. The little girl was dressed in white and the ceremony took place aboard the ship. She was named Mariana in honor of the Queen Regent, Maria Ana of Austria and mother of the future King Charles II of Spain.³⁹

On their first day two priests went ashore to explore the island and the goodwill of everyone was obtained. A large crowd gathered welcoming the arrival of the priests, except for one chief from the interior who was indignant and did not want the newcomers welcomed. When it was explained that the priests were God's teachers who came to bring the divine law, he relented and said that the Fathers could suit themselves. The next day, all of the priests went ashore. A banquet was held by the inhabitants in accordance with local custom. The Admiral of the galleon, Don Antonio Nieto handed out an iron hoop for every chief then bade farewell to the Fathers before returning to his ship. The mission was composed of six priests which was actually two more than was already assigned. They were composed of one priest and one brother still unordained.⁴⁰ One priest remained on the ship along with four associates who were still novices. Meanwhile twenty-three natives were baptized on the day the mission stepped ashore on the island.

The report then describes the Marianas and its inhabitants. Fr. Coomans described the Marianas as consisting of 13 islands lying from north to south from 13 degrees in latitude to as far as 22 degrees 5' and the longitude being 170 degrees.⁴¹ Communication between the islands was by the canoes with hardly a day's journey between any one of them. The largest and the southernmost of them was called Guan, Guahan Iguan by the inhabitants and San Juan by the missionaries. It also mentioned that the islands were rich in marine life especially fish, crabs and eels. The eels were hated by the natives and were avoided by them because of some superstitious belief. The Europeans however feasted on them and the natives considered what they were

³⁹ *Loc. cit.*

This person was most probably Pedro Ximenes who was the first person who met the missionaries at the time of their arrival.

⁴⁰ *Loc. cit.*

According to Fr. Sanvitores there actually a total of five priests including himself. The others were Fathers Luis de Medina, Tomas de Cardenoso, Pedro de Casanova and Luis Morales. The unordained brother was Lorenzo Bustillo who would leave for Manila and later return to the Marianas as an ordained priest.

See AGI Filipinas 82-2-54. *Letter of Fr. Sanvitores to Queen Maria Ana dated 23 February 1665*, cited as Document 1668H2 in HM 4:403-432.

⁴¹ There are actually 14: Uracas, Maug, Asuncion, Agrigan, Pagan, Alamagan, Guguan, Sariguan, Anatahan, Farallon de Medinilla, Saipan, Tinian, Aguiguan, Rota and Guam.

Though the natives were considered barbarians, according to Fr. Coomans, they were not so inhuman and in fact their ingenuity comes through. He said that the natives on the island number up to 12,000, and not more.⁴³ They were distributed among 180 villages. The largest village contain up to 80 or 100 houses or families and the smallest ones from six to ten. Whenever someone comes to the house he first thing the native does is to salute in terms that are exquisite *Ate umorin*- “Do you wish to have your feet washed? To make the visitor’s stay bearable, they take out and use some tobacco leaves and some leaves whose qualities are found everywhere in these parts.⁴⁴ Then the natives look for a quiet place to have lunch or supper. Hospitality is a sacred word among the natives. If one should be overloaded they offer themselves to share part of the work. In short they neither eat nor drink or presume to take for themselves anything, unless it be politely offered to them by another companion. If they were to do it themselves it would be considered not simply impolite but would be taken everywhere as an enemy.⁴⁵

In his work, Fr. Coomans wrote about the deaths of the members of the mission such as the Philippine indios Pedro Basijan, Francisco Maunahan, Juan Marinduque, the Mexicans Jose de Torre, Juan Beltran and Fr. Ezquerra in the hands of the Chamorros in 1672 and 1674. Fr. Coomans authored the Jesuit annual report for the islands for 1673-1674 and for 1680-1682.

Fr. Bouwens took over after Fr. Cooman’s death. He wrote eulogies for several members of the Mariana mission. Among these was for Fr. Sebastian Monroy who was killed by the Chamorros on September 6, 1676 along with five of his escorts. Another eulogy was for Fr. Coomans who was killed in 1685.

⁴³ This account disputes other Jesuit sources which indicate that the population of the Mariana Islands was 40,000 at the arrival of the Sanvitores mission. Twelve thousand inhabitants was the likely population of Guam and there were lesser people in other islands. The acceptable number of the Mariana population is in the maximum of 25,000 to 30,000 people if one bases it on Fr. Cooman’s account. It was highly likely that Fr. Sanvitores exaggerated the population of the Marianas to justify additional subsidies for the mission.

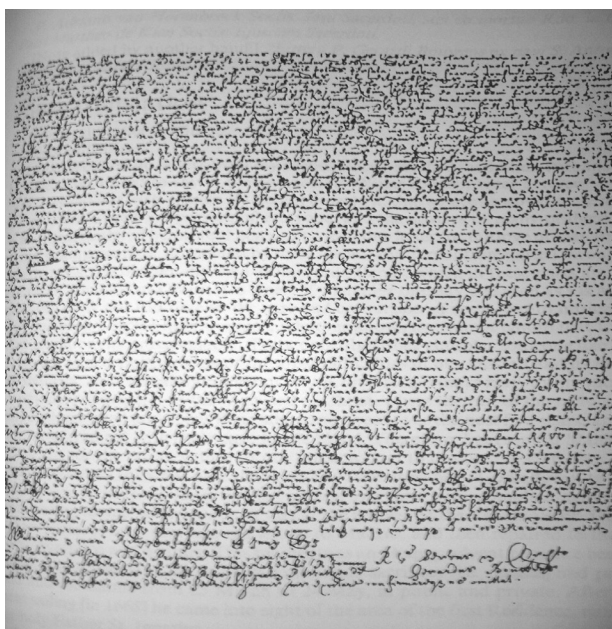
⁴⁴ Tobacco was already introduced even before the establishment of the Mariana mission by foreigners who stopped by the island. The other leaves referred to was ikmo not *buyo* as mentioned by Levesque. *Buyo* is betel or areca nut which is a fruit of certain palm trees.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

For a more complete treatment of the description of the Chamorros see Document 1673L2. In BR. PP. 51-62. Here Fr. Coomans describes the foods of the natives, their houses, canoes, their method of fishing, social classes, their creation myth, religious and burial customs, the beginning of the mission, the weapons of the natives, war making, the martyrdom of Fr. de Medina, the Tinian war of 1670, the non-arrival of the galleon in 1670, the peace negotiations of May 1672, the martyrdom of Fr. Sanvitores and his eulogy in 1672, the arrival of the 1672 galleon, the battle of Tumhon in 1672, the death of Fr. Sanvitores’ interpreter, the death of Fr. Solano and the Agaña war of 1672.

He also wrote various letters to his fellow priests and superiors narrating the situation in the mission. Some of the letters were addressed written to Spanish religious officials while others were intended for the Flandro-Belgian province. One of his letters concerned the leaders of the Chamorro rebellion of 1684. Bouwens knew its leaders, Mathias Yay and Ignacio Osi intimately being students at the Jesuit college in Guam. He narrated in a confidential letter the abuses by soldiers from the Philippines. Copies of this letter can be found at the Belgian archives and at the Jesuit archives in Rome.⁴⁶ The letter exposed the excesses of the governor of the islands particularly Damian Esplana. Esplana abused his power by forcing native boys to work in his plantations for free while reaping great profits with the sale of food to the galleons. Fr. Bouwens also reported that the *indios* from the Philippines became arrogant because they asked that the captain of the Spanish company be punished because he styled himself with the same rank as the governor of the islands.⁴⁷

Some of Fr. Bouwen's writings contradicted with other accounts. One story was about the Pampango *donado* Felipe Sonson who was reported killed in the rebellion by Fr. Luis Morales. Fr. Bouwens reported that Sonson who was one of the oldest men in the mission at 75 years old, actually recovered from his wounds. He was described as a veteran of the Chinese revolt in the Philippines in 1662, a master carpenter and an expert in the use of the arquebus. According to Fr. Bouwens, Sonson died of natural causes in 1686.⁴⁸



Facsimile reproduction of a part of a letter made by Fr. Bouwens to Fr. van Horenbeeck. The letters were so small that there were 127 lines in the page, probably to conserve paper (Levesque, *Belgian Jesuits in the Marianas*)

⁴⁶ RAH Jesuit tomes no. 9/3631, *Confidential report from Fr. Gerard Bouwens to Fr. Francisco Garcia, dated Guam 20 May 1685*, cited as Document 1685K in HM 8:229-254, op. cit..

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Also. Ferdinand Marcos, *Tadhana Formation of the National Community 1565-1896* (Manila: 1977), p. 45.

⁴⁸ RAH 9/2677, *Noticia de la vida exemplar de H. Felipe Sonson Donado de la Compania de Jesus Agana, Pebrero 10 de 1686*, cited as Document 1686H. in HM 7:555-573.

Another eulogy most probably written by Fr. Bouwens was that of Pedro Pavon, a *donado* who served as an overseer of Governor Esplana's hacienda. It was written that he was from the Philippines but it later turned out that he was a native of Palencia, Spain. He was attacked in the 1684 rebellion because of his stern treatment of Chamorro youths forced to work in the plantation. Among his attackers were boys educated by the Jesuits. He died of natural causes on March 24, 1686.⁴⁹

Among Fr. Bowen's work was his authorship of the annual report of the mission in 1697-1698. Here he narrated the events following the last great battle at Aguiguan including the depopulation of the northern islands. The authorship of the different annual reports were written by various priests of the mission. Some reports were composite and had several authors.

Aside from writing works that narrate the early history of the Mariana mission, the Belgian missionaries along with the others contributed to its general progress. They proposed the bringing of weavers from the Philippines to weave cotton from the fruits of the kapok trees. They were sturdy men who helped build what was called by historians as Guam-type buildings. They also gave up their lives in the performance of their duties. Aside from Fr. Coomans, another Belgian missionary who died a martyr's death in the Marianas was Balthazar Dubois who was killed during Yura's attack on the mission on July 23, 1684.

Conclusion

The works of Belgian missionaries particularly Fathers Peter Coomans and Gerard Bouwens provide historians with reliable historical accounts of the history of the Marianas at the time of the establishment of the Christian mission. The volume of their letters and reports convey to us their level of scholarship, zeal and dedication to their vocation despite conditions prevailing at that time. As missionaries they endured difficult conditions such as crossing seas, enduring frailties of the body, and climbing cliffs in the face of a hostile native population. As Jesuits they remained steadfast to their four vows and were ready to die for Christ. In fact they considered martyrdom a special privilege. The missionaries also helped plant the seeds of colonial rule as they were partners of lay officials in establishing and maintaining Spanish rule in the islands.

On the other hand, the Jesuit missionaries contributed to the destruction of the native culture. Considering native religious practices as the work of the Devil,

⁴⁹ RAH 9/2677, *Eulogy of Bro. Tomas (Pedro) Pavon*, nd. Cited as Document 1686I in HM 7:574-582.

they endeavored to work for their elimination. While Fr. Coomans wrote about some of the aspects of the way of life of the Chamorros, such as native food, houses, canoes, social classes, myths, he failed to document most of their religious practices especially their chants. This aspect of Chamorro culture is lost forever.

Whatever religious practice that was recorded was described in unfavorable terms. The Chamorro word *aniti* was described as the devil or evil spirit. Actually these were ancestral spirits to whom the natives pay reverence. The word *aniti* is similar to the Tagalog word *anito*. *Manganiti* is also similar to the word *mga anito* –or the spirits. The missionaries sought to destroy worship of the ancestral spirits by destroying the special houses which housed the skulls of the deceased which caused widespread opposition among the natives.

The missionaries also considered some of the native practices as blasphemous such as the practice of Chamorro bachelors of cohabiting with young girls whom the missionaries claim, were rented from their parents. The bachelors according to Fr. Coomans live in public houses along with the girls. To be invited by a member of the other sex and to come is considered praiseworthy. The young men present the girl's parents with a tortoise shell or something precious that they valued. During the relationship the couple would mutually bloody themselves with bites leaving scars upon healing, as to remember their love. After this relationship the girl is returned to her parents. Her reputation and value is not sullied but increased by the experience as she is viewed to be more mature for future relationships. The missionaries consider this practice an abomination and sought to replace it with Christian marriage.⁵⁰ However marriage in the Christian sense was unheard of in Chamorro society. It would also deprive the parents of the girl of income. Abolishing this practice caused opposition from the bachelors as well as from the parents of the girls. It was one of the causes of the Chamorro revolt led by Aguarin in 1676.⁵¹

Another activity which caused opposition from the natives was baptism and extreme unction. The Chamorros suspected that the holy water and oil used in these sacraments were poison since the babies and old people died after being administered these sacraments. The superiors of the missionaries ordered their colleagues to seek out babies in the homes of the natives to baptize them. During the

⁵⁰ Fr. Coomans, *History of the Mariana mission for the 1667-1673 period*, op. cit., pp. 65-66.

⁵¹ RAH 9/2677 *Relacion lo que sucedido en las Islas de los Ladrones ya Marianas desde Junio 74 hasta Mayo de 76*, cited as Document 1676A in HM 6:327-345.

Aguarin incited the inhabitants of Sumay to revolt on August 30, 1676 in reaction to the hanging of a ma'agas who opposed the marriage of a Chamorro woman to a Spanish soldier. One Spaniard was killed in the riot that followed. He was summarily tried and hanged in public. After the hanging the lifeless body was attacked by the Christianized Chamorros for refusing baptism while the others swore vengeance on the Spaniards especially on the priest who officiated the marriage.

first year of the mission around 100 babies died after being administered baptism. Fr. Coomans simply described the dead infants as “the fruits of the new Mariana tree who presented themselves at the heavenly table.” The ones who died after being administered the Last Rites were referred to as “having secured the afterlife.”⁵² Since germs could not be explained as the cause of the deaths, suspicions that these were caused by the missionaries was strong among the Chamorros. Fuelling their fears were the rumors spread by a Chinese castaway from Manila named Choco who said that he saw for himself that the people died after being the two sacraments.

In the study of the history of the Marianas the documents left by the missionaries can now be analyzed in today’s perspective. Historians can now view the clashing belief systems of the missionaries and the natives and with modern developments such as in medicine, it is now possible to explain phenomena such as the unexplained deaths of natives then attributed to “poisonous” holy water and holy oil. We can also use these documents to see the views and motives of the missionaries who were at that time believed were carrying out their sacred mission.

⁵² *Op. cit.*, pp. 23-24.