

Juan de Archedera: A Study of His Life and Impact in the Philippines

The 1700's saw the Philippines in the firm possession of Spain. A central government had been established that placed the scattered native tribes under one rule over the last hundred years.

Meanwhile, the Catholic Church had succeeded in implanting the faith in most of the islands, and had converted many. Churches had been built; the number of schools and hospitals built by religious societies were fast increasing. The Spaniards, however, were not able to conquer the entire archipelago. There were islands in the south that refused to accept foreign rule. The inhabitants of these independent islands remained Muslims. Still, a considerable number of religious kept going every so often to the islands to help cope with the demands of a growing number of converts.

In the year 1713, there was sent to these islands one Fray Juan de Archedera of the Dominican order, who was to play an important role in the Philippines. From Vicar of the House of San Telmo in Cavite when he first came, he became Bishop-elect of Nueva Segovia, and finally, Governor-General ad interim of the Philippines. This man lived a colorful and most active life in our country, and, in the performance of his duties, wrought

many achievements that caused changes for the better. One achievement for which he is greatly admired and, perhaps, even envied, was the baptism of Alimuddin, King of the Muslim Kingdom of Jolo. A study of Father Arrechedera's life in the Philippines would, without doubt, reveal that he was a great man.

I aim to present a study on Father Juan Arrechedera's life in the Philippines: his activities and achievements. Although I have tried to collect as much necessary data as possible, the lack of certain information has presented limitations. However, with the materials available to me I have made a great effort to make this article as complete and accurate as possible.

JUAN DE ARRECHEDERA: A STUDY OF HIS LIFE IN THE PHILIPPINES

Father Juan Arrechedera was a native of Caracas, South America. He donned the Dominican habit at the Santa Cruz Convent in Caracas. He received his Doctorate from the University of Mexico and was a Master of theology in his Order before he came to the Philippines.

When Father Arrechedera first came to these islands in 1713, he had, perhaps, little notion of the importance of the role he was to play here. The positions he held speak of an accomplished man, which he was.

His first appointment upon reaching the Philippines was to be Vicar of the house of San Telmo in Cavite. This was in 1714. In 1716, he became president of the House of San Telmo, holding that office until 1718 after which he was appointed Superior of the Dominican Province in the Philippines and held that position until 1722. While still serving as Superior of the Philippine Dominican Province, he was also appointed as Commissary of the Holy Office of the Inquisition. This was in 1720. While he was holding this office, an incident seriously affecting the commercial interests of the islands took place. This incident in which he was to play an important part was to reveal an aspect of Father Arrechedera's personality: that he was a man of intelligence who saw at once the root of the matter in any situation.

In 1729, the consulate and merchants of Cadiz sent to the King of Spain a formal complaint stating that Manila's participation in the Acapulco trade was being carried to such an extent as to endanger the very existence of the Spanish commerce with Nueva España.¹ They said that Manila was flooding Acapulco with too much Chinese silk that it deprived Cadiz of a market for its Spanish fabrics and could result in the destruction of its commerce and its manufacturers.

Consequently, the King ordered the viceroy of Mexico to conduct an investigation on this matter. The viceroy, later gave the opinion that the Manila-Acapulco trade should be restricted. He, therefore sent a despatch to the governor of Manila, Don Fernando Valdés Tamón, informing him to that effect. This caused a furor among those concerned in Manila. The matter was discussed lengthily by the royal officials, consulted by the governor. Finally, the governor called a conference of the religious superiors and the leading citizens to discuss the situation.

x x x "The sense of the meeting was expressed by the Dominican Fray Juan de Arrechedera, commissary of the Inquisition, who...took the position that the viceroy's notification was not a formal royal decree. If carried out it would mean the ruin of the islands, which surely the King could not intend or mean. That the matter should be properly decided by the King himself, after Manila had the opportunity to be heard before him. The viceroy could only regulate the commerce according to the royal orders, and had no authority to change the present conditions without those orders."³

This idea was followed by the council, and the Philippines sent representatives to the court to give its side. In the end, the matter was resolved by a royal decree which revoked the viceroy's orders and permitted the Philippines to carry on its trade with Acapulco.

In 1742, Father Arrechedera became president of the hospital of San Gabriel, a Chinese hospital located within the area

¹ Blair, E. H. & Robertson, J., *The Philippine Islands*, 1492-1898, (Cleveland: 1905-1909), Vol. 45, p. 29.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

of Binondo. He held this position for one year. From 1743 until 1745, he was rector and chancellor of the University of Santo Tomas. On July 23, 1744, he was appointed Bishop of the province of Nueva Segovia (Northern Luzon), that seat being made vacant by the death of the former Bishop, Jerónimo Herrera y López. A year later, on September 21, 1745, when Don Gaspar de la Torre, Governor-general of the Philippines, died, Bishop Arrechedera became Governor-general of the islands, *ad interim*. This was in view of the fact that the position of Archbishop of Manila was then vacant, and thus in accordance with the law, the Royal Audiencia acknowledged Juan de Arrechedera, Bishop-elect of Nueva Segovia, as acting governor-general, for his was the seat closest to the central government.

As governor of the islands, Arrechedera was faced with vast responsibilities, bringing with it numerous problems. He handled these responsibilities with utmost skill, unconsciously bringing upon himself an admiration not only from his colleagues, but from his superiors in Spain as well.

One of the first things that he did as governor was to fortify the cities of Manila and Cavite, for there was a threat of an English invasion. Governor Arrechedera visited these fortified places to inspect the defenses and supplies. Finding defects, he had the fortifications repaired. He also purchased arms and collected metals of different kinds and melted them to make into cannons of different calibers. He turned the once neglected army into a well-disciplined company of soldiers that could be relied upon in times of crisis.

In October, 1739, as a result of injuries inflicted on British commerce in the West Indies⁴ war had been declared by England against Spain. Because of this, an order had been issued (by the government in Spain) that while Spain was at war with England, no galleon should sail from Manila to Acapulco for fear that those rich cargoes would fall into the hands of the English. There was a danger of their being waylaid by the enemy. Reasonably so, the merchants petitioned Governor Arrechedera to suspend this

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

decree. They asked that they should at least be permitted to send to Acapulco those goods already registered for export since some years back. These goods, already damaged by the delay, could still be damaged further if not sent immediately. Governor Arrechadera, while understanding the reason behind the decree, also saw the point of the merchants. He agreed to the petition of the merchants and sent two ships to Acapulco, one acting as escort for the other. The voyage was successful, and both returned safely to Manila. When confronted with what appeared as obvious defiance of the royal decree, Arrechadera replied that the said decree had stipulated that not one vessel was to be sent; and he had sent not one but two. It was ingenious reasoning, and no one had anything to say to this argument.

Considered praiseworthy was Governor Arrechadera's prevention of the expulsion of the Chinese from the islands. A royal mandate had been issued, calling for the absolute expulsion of the Chinese from the Philippines. Arrechadera was against it. Out of deference to his position, the Archbishop Pedro de la Santísima Trinidad who had been given the mandate, never enforced it. Regarding this matter, historian Father Joaquín Martínez de Zúñiga said that the reason behind Arrechadera's reluctance to have the Chinese expelled was that they were paying him (Arrechadera) a contribution for his forbearance.⁵ Whether or not Father Zúñiga is correct we are not in a position to say, but the fact remains that he did prevent the Chinese expulsion. The Chinese had after all proved to be of tremendous help to the Philippine economy through their business and trade. They had also socially and culturally enriched the Filipinos.

Meanwhile, an insurrection in Bohol led by a native chieftain, Francisco Dagohoy, compelled Fray Arrechadera to send Captain Lechuga there with an army to force the revolutionaries into obelience. Being a Spanish civil servant, he may have been correct in doing so. This, however, marred his standing as a religious.

Perhaps his most celebrated achievement not only as governor of the islands, but also as spiritual leader, was the baptism of

⁵ Fr. Joaquín Martínez de Zúñiga, *An Historical View of the Philippine Islands* (Manila: Filipiniana Book Guild, 1966), p. 158.

Alimuddin, King of Jolo. This achievement was a distinctive feather in Arrechedera's Cap because in those days (perhaps even now) it was extremely hard to convert a Muslim to the Catholic faith, much less a Sultan.

THE STORY OF ALIMUDDIN, KING OF JOLO

King Philip V wrote Alimuddin, Sultan of Jolo, requesting permission for the missionaries to be allowed to preach freely in the sultanate of Jolo. Permission was asked for any convert among Alimuddin's subjects to be allowed to freely embrace and practice the Catholic faith if they should so desire. To this, Alimuddin replied that he was granting this request. Furthermore, he was going to allow his son and heir, Muhammad Israel, to receive religious instructions from the missionaries. As for himself, he would remain open to the Catholic faith, and, if so moved, might even embrace it.

Alimuddin's favorable attitude towards Christianity, plus the presence of missionaries in Jolo, however, brought upon him the ire of his people. The principal datus particularly... found it intolerable that their Sultan, who was their religious head as well as their temporal ruler, should harbor in his own household priests of the Christian faith.⁶ Even as protests became stronger and more violent, Alimuddin would not send the missionaries away. He tried to appease his people by withdrawing his son Muhammad Israel from religious instructions but affairs worsened. Alimuddin was forced to seek aid against his brother Bantilan, who had emerged as leader of the opposition. Thus in 1748, he came to Manila for that purpose.

Alimuddin was warmly received in Manila by Governor Arrechedera. It was a royal welcome.

"All houses and streets were decorated and filled with welcoming throngs, singers and musicians. A guard of 2,000 soldiers on foot and 800 on horseback lined the streets, which

⁶ Horacio de la Costa, S.J., *Asia and the Philippines: Collected Historical Papers*. (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1967), p. 87.

were decorated with arches and buntings. Salvoes were fired in his honor.”⁷

A house fit for his position was made ready for him. There he stayed as guest of the government.

In the course of his visit, Alimuddin expressed his desire to be baptized. Accordingly, it was arranged for him to take instructions in the faith. Two Jesuits, Patricio del Barrio and Fulcher Spilimberg, were appointed as his tutors. In the course of time, Alimuddin finished his religious instructions, and his tutors declared that he now possessed adequate knowledge of the Christian doctrine. However, they were of the opinion that Alimuddin was not animated by the proper disposition to receive baptism. The Archbishop of Manila, Pedro de la Santísima Trinidad Martínez de Arízala, shared this opinion. Furthermore, he was suspicious of Alimuddin’s motives; feeling that the Sultan’s desire to be baptized was influenced by political reasons. Therefore, when Alimuddin wrote personally to the Archbishop, the latter politely but firmly declined to give the sacrament, saying that he was postponing it to a later date to test his sincerity. The Sultan was, however, insistent, and wrote several other letters, reiterating his wish to be baptized. To these letters, Archbishop Martínez de Arízala replied in the negative. Following are excerpts of the letters exchanged between Alimuddin and the Archbishop of Manila, Martínez de Arízala. Alimuddin wrote a letter to the archbishop, dated March 21, 1750 saying:

“This letter is to communicate to your Reverence my great desire to embrace the Catholic faith for which I have been instructed in the past . . . I have already accomplished all the requirements. I ask from your most Reverend fatherly kindness your consent so that I may be numbered among those who already profess such holy doctrine.”⁸

The Archbishop replied to the Sultan on March 27, 1750:

“I received your letter in which you applied for the (sacrament of) baptism. For the better success of your request

⁷ Antonio M. Molina, *The Philippines Through the Centuries*, Manila, 1960, Vol. I. First Edition, p. 173.

⁸ MSS. Archivo de Provincia del Santo Rosario (APSR), “Provincia Asuntos Particulares”, Tomo 3, Doc. 23, Fols. 147-150.

I must do some proceedings that once done I will decide on what is more convenient and agreeable to our Lord."⁹

Once again Alimuddin wrote Archbishop Martínez de Arízala on April 3, 1750:

"I received your letter dated March 27. In spite of your words which I venerate with respect, I feel obliged to repeat my request... so that... your most Reverend Lordship grant to me this privilege for which I will always be grateful."¹⁰

Another letter of Alimuddin to Pedro Martínez de Arízala reads like this:

"...I hope not to embarrass your pastoral concern if I insist again asking for the same request. I would like your most Reverend Lordship not to delay in your concession for God's great glory and for the good of my soul. You know already my wish of being numbered in the holy church. It is more than 17 years now that I awoke to the yearning of knowing the true Religion and at present this yearning has increased...

"I wish to be worthy of being granted your consent for receiving baptism since I am already well-prepared as it is attested in the certificate of Father Patricio del Barrio..."¹¹

This was the reply of the Archbishop to Alimuddin:

"I have received your second letter and memorial... regarding the matter of your baptism. This sacred action requires time, if it is to be given its dignity, as I told you in my first letter, March 27. Thus, you must be patient, but do not have any doubt that if the effects correspond to my good intentions... I myself will grant the permission and I will be the minister of the sacrament."¹²

The truth behind Archbishop Martínez de Arízala's refusal to grant Alimuddin's request, was, as already mentioned, the former's suspicions that the Sultan was merely after political advantages. This suspicion he confided to Governor Arrechdera who had endorsed the matter to him. The Archbishop wrote on January 26, 1750:

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

"I heard some rumors about the baptism of the Sultan of Jolo and I would wish us not to hasten in this matter least we will regret it later. Regarding the moral matters we cannot attain security by our own judgments since only God penetrates the heart of man, but regarding the political aspect, we will be affected since once he will be a Christian he will depend on us for self-support and we may have to help him in the returning of his kingdom of which he is said to be dispossessed by the army for the only reason that they saw him inclined to the Spaniards in order to introduce in his isle the faith of Jesus Christ; but if that would not be the reason for his disposition as others say, we venture to profane the sacrament of baptism, because his reason to receive it is a pretext for his temporal dependence...

...Let your Excellence reflect over this matter and you yourself will see that my reasoning is not far away from the truth...

...Will it not be better to temporize a little and suspend his resolution under the pretext that he must give more time to meditate in solitude and freedom about this arduous matter...
...If you can, send him back to Zamboanga and Jolo and we will see the way he behaves...

...By his behaviour he himself will say if he is fit for the baptism which we will foster with reserve and sly, being cautious in order to defend our boundaries in case we would be insulted by this crowd of moors that only makes trouble in our provinces...

I hope that your Reverence will take well this discussion which I could not omit because of our fraternal love and the total trust in your wisdom as governor."¹³

Governor Arrechedera, however, was convinced of Alimuddin's sincerity. He favored an early baptism. Thus, he replied to Archbishop Martínez de Arízala on January 27, 1750:

"...In (your) letter you talked to me about the baptism of the Sultan of Jolo and for what I am observing in him, he is very serious about his decisions. Trying to trap him, he shows himself steady and resolute. He gave up his concubines without any resistance. He mentioned many times that if needed, he will leave his kingdom but he will remain in those domains for the mere fact of being a Catholic. **Re-**

¹³ *Ibid.*

garding the moral aspect of his life, as you yourself said, only God can judge and the time itself is a great discoverer of man's innermost being. Even though some people may think that the matter of the Sultan's baptism is rash, that is not true...

... I hope you will accede to our decision if that is for God's glory..."¹⁴

Meantime, to show his sincerity in asking for baptism, Alimuddin shaved off his beard, which was a symbol of the Muslim faith. With devotion, he would kiss the foot of the Holy Cross. Also, as Arrechedera mentioned, the Sultan gave up his concubines without complaint. And, as the governor mentioned in another letter to the Archbishop of Manila, he said:

"... He did all that with joy, showing himself ready to give up his life before giving up the Christian religion... he told me that he wanted to live in Binondo, that he was not thinking anymore of those who ask for it and have acquired the proper instructions... I am surprised that you, who have the power of the church in these isles will favor to extend the time or if not, deny the sacrament of baptism. If he goes to Zamboanga or Jolo, the danger of perversion is obvious because of his own people's influence; but not only that, but also the regret that the Sultan himself may feel if he sees that we mistrust his own word... he is aware that he is a king... and as a king he is treated by Felipe V, king of Spain. If the Sultan will go astray in Zamboanga or Jolo, we will have a lost sheep and a lost soul.

... Our king... Felipe V promises his protection and help to the Sultan if he allows the free preaching of the gospel in his kingdom, how much more if the Sultan himself is the one to ask for baptism..."¹⁵

Archbishop Pedro Martínez de Arizala, however, was not convinced. His suspicions regarding Alimuddin's motives remained. Thus, he replied to Arrechedera:

"I was surprised at your answer to my last letter... in which I talked to you about the matter of the Sultan... I think I have already a steady and firm judgment on it as I explained to you in the last letter... I am afraid I cannot please you..."¹⁶

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Because the Archbishop of Manila would not consent to the Sultan's baptism taking place in the immediate future, Arrechedera sent Alimuddin to be baptized in Paniqui, Tarlac because as Bishop-elect of Nueva Segovia, it falls under his jurisdiction.

Here in Paniqui, the Sultan Alimuddin was baptized at the church of Sta. Rosa in the early morning of April 29, 1750¹⁷ amid great splendor. The sacrament was administered by Father Enrique Martín, of the Dominican Order, with General Ignacio Martínez de Faura acting as the Sultan's godfather. Thus, Alimuddin, King of Jolo was now Fernando I, Christian King of Jolo. There was great rejoicing and lavish celebration of this event.

"When the news became public, Manila went wild with joy. It was a storybook event, the happy ending of a hundred moro-moro plays come true... the people of Manila gave themselves up to four days of illumination, three of masquerades, three of bullfights, four nights of fireworks, and three days of comedies."¹⁸

"Grande y entusiasta fue el Recibimiento que le esperaba al neófito en la Capital de Filipinas... hasta el magnífico templo de Santo Domingo de Manila en donde fue recibido por los Padres del convento con un solemne Te Deum."¹⁹

The Sultan's baptism was not only a significant and happy event; it was also a great success for Governor and Bishop Arrechedera. He had just "...scored a resounding diplomatic and political victory enhancing Spanish prestige in the Philippines."²⁰

On July 20, 1750, just a few months after the Sultan's baptism, Arrechedera turned over the post of governor to the new governor-elect, Francisco José Ovando. On November 21, 1751, Arrechedera passed away; his death was mourned by all who knew him.

¹⁷ Horacio dela Costa, S.J. says April 29, 1749 *op. cit.*, p. 89 while Antonio Molina says April 28, 1750, *op. cit.*, p. 174 Fr. Joaquín Martínez de Zuñiga says April 29, 1750, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

¹⁸ Horacio de la Costa, S.J. *op. cit.*, p. 90.

¹⁹ Fr. Juan Ferrando, *Historia de los P.P. Dominicos en las Islas Filipinas y en sus misiones del Japón, China, Tungkin y Formosa*, (Madrid 1871), Tomo IV, p. 540.

²⁰ Antonio M. Molina, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

In 1755, this new governor, Marques de Ovando dispatched a squadron to accompany the Sultan back to Jolo and reinstate him as king. However, he was suspected of being an apostate, and was arrested together with his entire retinue in Zamboanga and sent back to Manila. The Sultan's family and retinue were later allowed to go home. But Alimuddin and his son and heir, Muhammad Israel, were made to remain in Manila. Later, the English, who briefly occupied the Islands in 1763, reinstated Alimuddin. After some time, the Sultan abdicated in favor of his son, Muhammad Israel. Thus, ends the story of Alimuddin, Christian King of Jolo.

CONCLUSION

What was Fray Juan de Archedera like? He was a man who came to stay and die in those isles, far away from his own land, in order to preach Christianity to our people. In coming here he made a great sacrifice.

The responsibilities that he assumed, and the way in which he handled them, speak well of him. For to occupy the highest position in both spiritual and temporal aspects is to possess a capacity and a versatility not possessed by everyone. At his death, they took his residencia, and he was declared:

“a good judge, vigilant rector and a zealous minister in the service of both majesties; worthy to be emulated, rewarded and employed as well in the most extraordinary jobs.”²¹

This judgment was unanimously confirmed by the Supreme Council of the Indies and by a Royal Cedula of January 20, 1754.²² Even Joaquín Martínez de Zúñiga who criticized him and accused him of mercenary reasons behind his prevention of the Chinese

²¹ “Biographical Memoirs of the Famous Father Ormaza and of the Most Illustrious Sir Archedera”, *Cedulario 1746*, Bureau of Records Management Archives Division, Manila.

²² *Ibid.*

expulsion, admits that this matter of the Chinese "...seems to have been the only error committed by this illustrious prelate during the time he held the government. In all other respects, his conduct reflected the highest honor on him."²³ We may never be able to give Juan de Arrechedera his due; but we speak truthfully when we say that, indeed, he was a great man.

"His remains are buried in the church of his order, the Sto. Domingo Church in Intramuros so that his ashes would rest in the bosom of his mother church, his order, among his fellow Dominican brothers."²⁴

MARGARITA R. COJUANGCO
University of Santo Tomas
Manila

²³ Joaquín Martínez de Zúñiga, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

²⁴ Juan Ferrando, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p., Santo Domingo was razed to the ground in 1941. Nothing remained of Arrechedera's tomb.