

# FELIPE SONSONQ

of Macabebe, Pampanga

17th-Century Filipino Jesuit Missionary  
to the Marianas



From a letter dated February 1, 1686 by  
**Fr. Lorenzo Bustillo, S.J.**

[Original Spanish text taken from *Cartas Anuas Phelipinas*, leg. 11, 2677  
Real Academia de la Historia de Madrid, Colección Cortes, 567.]

English Translation by  
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## Introduction

The document here transcribed and translated is perhaps the most extensive contemporary account of the life of any Filipino before the nineteenth century. It is of interest not so much for the history of the Marianas, but for the view it gives of seventeenth-century Filipino religious attitudes and practices, at least among the more Hispanized Pampango and Tagalog *principales* in the vicinity of Manila Bay.

The document is one of the *Cartas Anuas*, letters written for the edification of others on the various events of the year in each Jesuit mission. Among them are found obituaries of Jesuits who had died within the past year. The particular letter here reproduced is from the year 1686, and recounts the life of a Filipino Jesuit *donado*, who had volunteered in 1668 to accompany Blessed Diego de Sanvitores in his mission to the Marianas, and who had died the previous year as a result of the injuries suffered at the hands of the wws who had risen in revolt in Guam in 1684. Though no Filipino was admitted to the Society as a full-fledged member during the Spanish regime, Sonson was admitted as a *donado*, a layman who, without actually entering the novitiate of the Society, was in a permanent way committed by vows to sharing in the work of the missionaries.<sup>1</sup> Such a status was apparently not uncommon among all the religious orders in the Philippines, and other Spanish *donados* are recorded to have accompanied Jesuit missionaries in the Philippines from early years. Sonson, however, is apparently unique in several respects, not only in the fact that he is the only Filipino of whom we have records, but also in the fact that he was admitted to a kind of membership in the Jesuit community which could scarcely be distinguished from that of the Spanish Jesuit lay brothers. Not only did he receive a Jesuit habit (though slightly different from that of lay brothers), but he is also listed in the Philippine Jesuit catalogue for 1681-82, assigned to the Jesuit community of the Marianas mission.

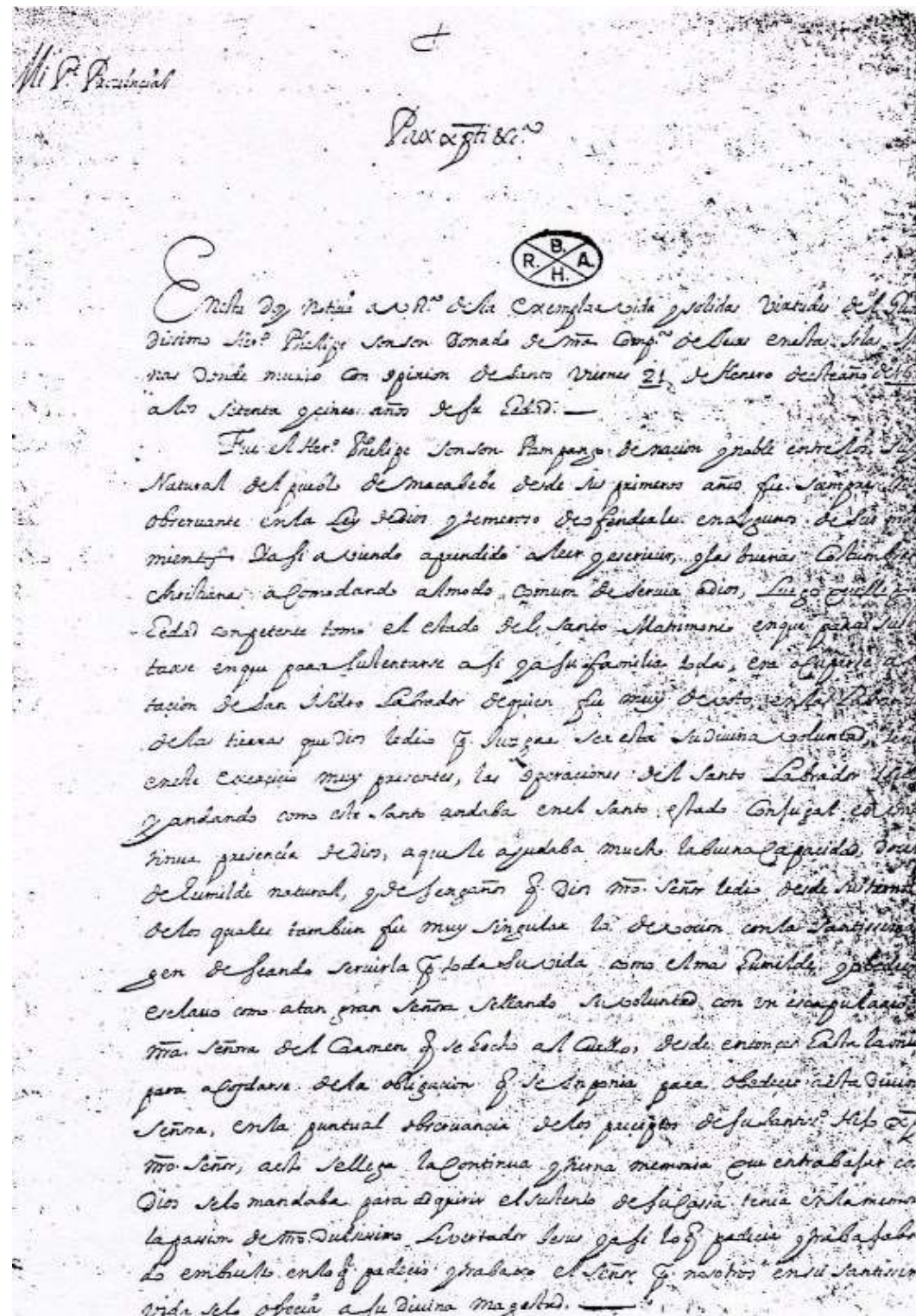
In addition to the facts contained in the account here published, something is known of Sonson's family and background. Born in Macabebe, Pampanga in 1611, he was probably the brother

of Don Augustin Sonson, who was at various times *governadorcillo* of Macabebe and held the rank of *maestre de campo* in the Spanish army.<sup>2</sup> The family was the most prominent among the *principales* of Macabebe during the lifetime of Don Felipe, members of it holding the position of *governadorcillo* fourteen times between 1630 and 1685.<sup>3</sup> Since it is mentioned that he was skilled in using firearms, it is likely that Felipe had participated in military expeditions in the years before he decided to devote himself to a religious vocation. Nonetheless, it would appear that it was only in time of crisis that he took an armed role in the Marianas, unlike the regular troops, who were mostly Filipinos, but not part of the mission as such, as Sonson was. It appears likewise that his status was different from that of other Filipinos, such as Pedro Calongsor (Calungsod), apparently a catechist, who was killed with Sanvitores, but of whom there is no indication that he was a *donado*.<sup>4</sup>

The document here transcribed and translated is a contemporary copy of the original, and is to be found in the Real Academia de la Historia in Madrid, Colección Cortes, 567, Cartas Anuas Philipinas, leg. 11, 2677. The copy is unsigned, but from internal evidence its author must be Fr. Lorenzo Bustillo, S.J., who had been one of the original companions of Sanvitores and Sonson, and who was still in Guam in 1686 when the letter was written. In the transcription I have placed in brackets my own conjectural reconstruction of the text where the document is either illegible or the word is missing due to the breaking off of the outer margin of the manuscript. To judge by the phonetic orthography of the letter, the copy must have been made in Manila by a scribe not proficient in Spanish.

I am grateful to Fr. Francis X. Hezel, S.J., for first calling my attention to an incomplete copy of this document in the Micronesian Area Research Center in Guam, and to Fr. Francisco Mallari, S.J., for obtaining a complete copy from the Real Academia de la Historia in Madrid.

**John N. Schumacher, S.J.**  
Ateneo de Manila University



My dear Fr. Provincial

Peace of Christ

In this letter I give Your Reverence news of the exemplary life and solid virtues of the very humble Brother Felipe Sonsong, *donado* of our Society of Jesus in these Marianas Islands, where he died with the reputation of a saint on Friday, 11 January of this year of 16[86] at 75 years of age.

Brother Felipe Sonsong was of the Pampango nation and of the nobility among his people. A native of the town of Macabebe, from his earliest years he was always very observant of God's Law and careful not to offend against any of His commandments. And so, having learned to read and write, as well as good Christian customs in accordance with the ordinary way of serving God, once he had reached the proper age he entered the state of holy Matrimony. In this state, in order to support himself and his family, his whole concern was to occupy himself, in imitation of St. Isidore the Farmer to whom he was very devoted, in working the lands which God gave him. For he judged that this was His divine will. In this occupation he kept present before his mind the actions of the Holy Farmer Isidore, living as this saint lived in the holy married state, with God ever present to him. In this he was greatly helped by his good natural ability, the docility of his humble disposition and the lessons of experience which God our Lord gave him from his tender years. Among these qualities, his devotion to the Blessed Virgin was also very extraordinary. He desired to serve her all his life as the most humble and obedient slave would serve such a great lady. He put a seal on this desire of his with a scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel which he wore around his neck from then until his death, to remind him of the obligation he was imposing on himself to obey this divine Lady by the exact observance of the commandments of her Most Holy Son, Christ our Lord. To this he joined a continual

and tender reminder that in working as God commanded him to obtain the support of his household. He kept present in his mind the Passion of our most sweet Liberator, Jesus, and thus whatever he did and suffered, all enfolded in the work and suffering of the Lord for us in his most holy life, he offered to His Divine Majesty.

[fol. 1v] When the uprising of the Chinese whom they call Sangleys, enemies of our holy faith, took place, for the defense of that faith he took part among the companies of Spaniards with an arquebus. He became quite skillful in the use of the arquebus, as was noted here in the way he handles it in the uprisings of these people of the Marianas. The reason for this skill was that since in everything he undertook he looked only to the service of God and of His Blessed Mother, he easily became skilled in what he saw, or what he needed to occupy himself in accordance as the times demanded, as will be related below.

When his wife died and he had placed in his state of life a son he had, leaving him all he possessed, he determined in his soul

to seek some place of retirement so that with greater ease and freedom he could [serve] God our Lord under obedience to someone to whom in place of God he would subject his will. For this purpose he went to offer himself to the Fathers of St. Augustine, as being the one he knew best, since they are the ministers of his Pampango nation, to serve them out of love for God in whatever they might wish to occupy him. Recognizing the good



Seal of the Augustinian Order

will and humble resignation of Don Felipe Sonsong, these Reverend Fathers admitted him with understandable pleasure. To this Phelipe corresponded by serving them in all they ordered him, with great promptness and attentiveness. He imagined himself as a slave of the religious, and in token of this he took the Cord of St. Augustine, which

he used to say was the badge and mark of being a slave of the family of the holy Doctor in whose service [.....]. Inasmuch as the principal part of the building of the houses, *conventos*, and churches of the Philippines is of wood, and since many times there was no one to help the religious in building, the love he had for the Lord whom he was serving with great humility and exactness made him in a short time a master [carpenter], with the singular desire he had of pleasing Him in all that belonged to His service, and of employing himself in tasks so necessary for the worship of His Divine Majesty and for the dwelling of His ministers. As a result, when the Fathers of St. Dominic needed to build a church and house in the *Parian* of the Sangleys for their ministry to those who were being converted to our holy Faith, with the fraternal relations existing between the Augustinian Fathers and those of St. Dominic, the opportunity arose for our Don Felipe Sonsong, with the permission and approval of the Augustinians and the extraordinary esteem of the Dominicans, to be more closely employed in, and to help toward, the conversion of the souls which cost His Divine Majesty His very life.

And so, assigned by the Augustinian Fathers to the building which the [fol. 2r] Fathers of St. Dominic needed, the Lord disposed matters so as to give him as the one planning that task a Dominican religious, as holy and gentle as our Don Felipe desired, so that he might direct his spirit along the true road of serving God in truth and humility, which was what he especially longed for. That religious Father saw the profound humility and the holy manner of proceeding of our Don Felipe and perceived his humble request that he be so good as to designate him a slave of the glorious Father and Patriarch St. Dominic, granting him for the love of God, because of whom he asked for it, the favor of the holy scapular and habit of his sacred Order, so that he might serve it as a slave, in the category of *donado*. Thus, after testing and coming to know very well the virtues of Don Felipe, that very religious Father with great joy of soul granted this request of his. Don Felipe served him in that house and *convento* built by himself. The construction turned out to be as good as if it had been done by a master craftsman in that trade. For to obtain

this skill, from the time he took its tools in his hand to exercise it in imitation of the glorious spouse of the most pure Virgin Mother of the Lord, he dedicated himself also as a slave of this most glorious Patriarch, ordering and offering all his works to the Blessed Virgin through the mediation of our St. Joseph and by means of this same Lady to her most holy Son in [reverence] of His most Sacred Passion.



Seal of the Dominican Order

In this fashion Master [sic] Don Felipe Song, progressing in the company of that holy Religious more and more each day in virtue and in devotion to the saints whom by an interior impulse he chose for his masters and lords, as he called them, without ever losing sight of them there in his inmost soul. He tried his best to imitate in all he could the model of virtues which he saw in the holy Dominican with whom he lived. The latter, seeing the good disposition of Don Felipe, marked out for him the manner of prayer and mortification he was to maintain, while moderating the disciplines he was taking, telling him that in place of those he took away from him he should do for God the work of the office he was exercising.

When the work of building the church and *convento* of the *Parian* was finished, he continued right there serving that holy Dominican religious. With much humility and promptness he did everything which he saw as a hint of that religious Father's will, trying to assist in every way that [holy] priest in whom with interior humility he revered Christ Himself.

[fol. 2v] The time came when the Venerable Father Diego Luis de Sanvitores was trying to go to this spiritual conquest of the Marianas Islands. And inasmuch as in all the saints there is a certain bond of charity and similarly in [the matter of] the salvation of souls, the Venerable Father Sanvitores communicated his proj-

ect to the Dominican religious in whose company our Don Felipe Song lived. Since people were needed who would accompany the Venerable Father to help him plant the faith in these Marianas Islands, but their number then scarcely reached four persons, that fervent Dominican wanted to help in this matter. He knew the humble and prompt obedience of Don Felipe and his good inclination and desire to help in any part of the world those priests who are engaged in new conversions. He likewise knew that he would be of great use for his purpose and thus offered him to the Venerable Father Sanvitores of the disciples of Our Lord Jesus Christ [sic].

With this, since the good Don Felipe was so perceptive, on the following day he asked permission from his master (this is what he called that Dominican Father) to present himself to the Venerable Father Sanvitores. He came that same morning to our College of Manila at the time when the Venerable Father was leaving the confessional for his room, Don Felipe went out to meet him, and on coming before him, prostrated himself at his feet and with many sighs and sobs begged him to be so kind as to bring him with him to the conversion he was attempting. This act did not fail to move the Venerable Father Diego Luis de Sanvitores and immediately, with great joy of his soul and no less affection, he raised him from the ground. On learning who he was, he consoled him saying that he would commend him very much to God our Lord so that His Divine Majesty might dispose what would be for His greater glory, and that he should be prompt to do in everything what God might dispose. The Venerable Father sent him away with a note which he wrote to the religious Dominican Father who had sent him. A few days later Don Felipe came to live permanently in our College of Manila until the departure of the Venerable Father Sanvitores for this new conversion of the Marianas.

When the humble Don Felipe saw himself with the hope so near of obtaining the desire he had always had of employing himself in serving the priests engaged in converting souls, especially those souls who did not yet have the light [fol. 3r] of the Holy Gospel, and that he had already been admitted for that purpose, the joy his soul

received is impossible to express. To oblige God the more to the fulfillment of his desire, all the time he had free from the occupations I am about to speak of, and even in the midst of these occupations, he employed in prayers and petitions to His Divine Majesty for the salvation of the souls of the people of the Marianas. To these prayers he joined not a few penances, especially disciplines and hairshirts.

And so as not to lose time in immediately obtaining his desires, and to help in all that depended on him to make this undertaking a reality, he began with much earnestness and humble submission to the Venerable Father Sanvitores, to seek out what he might occupy himself in, even if it had not been of great help and edification of those with whom he was living. And so, the first thing he did on this occasion was to apply himself with great docility to execute all that the Venerable Father Sanvitores commanded him, and in particular to sew and mend the clothing which was needed. For though he had not previously exercised this occupation, the good will and charity with which he burned to serve God in whatever they charged him with made him succeed in everything.

When, therefore, the Venerable Father Sanvitores, with Father Tomas Cardeñoso and all his other lay companions, had embarked in Cavite to come to plant the faith in these islands, it is impossible to describe the attention which our Don Felipe gave to assisting everyone in whatever the Venerable Father entrusted him to do. He presented himself for the execution of every task with great charity, as one who served the Lord of all, in particular in sewing and mending the clothes of those who needed it. And he did not go out of his little corner until he had finished what he had been entrusted with, except to go to some other necessary task to which he had been newly assigned. When with great promptness he finished one task, he went on to another, and the more so if it was work on clothing of which there was need or some other similar task. Immediately he handed it over to the Venerable Father so that the latter might occupy him anew, without ever giving in to idleness.

And if on some day he had no occupation, or on feast days, he was totally occupied in devotions and spiritual books, in having many periods of prayer, and in giving good advice to those of his nation that they might employ their time well and accomplish the tasks they were doing, so as to do their best in serving God. In passing, in his ordinary conversations he instructed them in the mysteries of our Faith. These were his ordinary conversations when he spoke with those of his [fol. 3v] nation or with Spaniards, in the one language or the other. At the end of such conversations, bowing his whole body with much affability and notable humility and submission, he asked them to pardon him for the love of God for whatever errors he might have made, because he was an ignorant man. Bowing his head and his body deeply, showing reverence to all, he bade them farewell. He did this all his life, right up till he died, because he was extremely humble from the time he became our *donado*, whenever he was speaking with another. If some priest spoke to him, both on beginning to speak and again on bidding him farewell, he knelt down and kissed the priest's hand with notable submission, bowed to the ground and asking him to pardon him for the love of God (without there being, in fact, anything to be pardoned, but rather, much cause for edification). And thus, everyone had something to learn and imitate in this servant of God, both before and after he was our *donado*.

On arriving in Acapulco and again on the return trip directly to the Marianas, he continued with the same tenacious pursuit of virtues and of occupations which I have spoken of, humbling himself before all. Nor did he fail to attend the Masses which were celebrated both on land and on the sea, hearing them all on his knees with remarkable fervor and simple devotion in the most hidden corner of the church or ship. But it was always with the proper attentiveness not to fail in anything which he had been entrusted with. Thus, if there was a need to hurry in dispatching or doing something, he redirected his intention, leaving God for God.

Finally the longed-for goal of his desires was reached. Having arrived on 3 June 68 in these Marianas Islands, it is incredible how

much he worked here over a period of eighteen years in various occupations, to cooperate with and assist toward the salvation of these natives. He helped the preachers of our holy faith untiringly in all that his state permitted, without refusing anything of all he could work at and do with his hands, with remarkable application, humility, fervor of spirit and submissiveness to any religious and especially to superiors.

And so, as soon as the missionary Fathers whom he was accompanying for this work of conversion went ashore, he prostrated himself at the feet of the Venerable Father Sanvitores, offering himself to his will so that his Reverence might occupy him in whatever he should see could help in this mission, because he would do it even to giving the blood of his veins for the salvation of these islanders, and that all this would be a small thing because he owed much more to God for having brought him to this society and to his work within it. With great joy the Venerable Father raised him up from the ground. Seeing the humble Don Felipe so desirous of working at and assisting in the conversion of these poor people, he entrusted him with disposing them well, commending them [fol. 4r] very earnestly to God, while on his part exercising all the virtues and practicing well-ordered charity.

The missionaries and all those who came in their company had now been admitted by these islanders, who had given them for their dwelling a large shed which was divided into living quarters sufficient for all and a decent place for sacred worship. The devout Don Felipe had no small part in its arrangement and adornment since it was an occupation in which he found such pleasure. In order that these natives should be well disposed toward the teaching of the sacred mysteries which they had to learn in order to be baptized, and that they should show a proper appreciation of such a lofty Sacrifice, the first thing that the Venerable Father Sanvitores occupied him in was to adorn and sew some pieces of colored *sinamay* cloth for the ornaments and hangings of the altar. In the midst of so much nakedness, they seemed like hangings of silk. Afterward he occupied Don Felipe in fashioning and sewing

some clothing to cover the nakedness of some chiefs of these poor people. When all was ready for the feast of St. John the Baptist, patron of this island, the feast of Corpus Christi was celebrated with a procession in which our Sacramental Lord was accompanied by the images of the same St. John the Baptist and of Our Lady in the sight of a great multitude of these natives. Our Don Felipe was filled with great emotion and fervor, so that afterwards he occupied himself in sewing and mending the clothing of the religious and their lay companions, and then in making some rosaries, so that they might be given to some of those more worthy of baptism.

The year 69 came, in which the natives constructed for our dwelling and church another building of greater capacity. Don Felipe



Seal of the Jesuit Order

took great pains in adorning it. First of all he built a good sanctuary of boards hewed from coconut trees more than a *vara* in [width?]. Then he decorated some frameless canvases of which he made a large number. He placed on them many holy pictures of paper, thus creating an altarpiece quite beautiful for this land. Then he made another floor in the living quarters of the missionaries which his great charity fitted

out quite well. All this he did with such promptness that for the second of February of that year, the day of the Purification of Our Lady, in which the Venerable Father Sanvitores who had gone to look over the other islands and was now back in Guam, dedicated this new Marian church to the Holy Name of Mary, universal Patron of these islands. Many of the baptized and catechumens assisted at the dedication, which brought great interior joy and tender emotion to Don Felipe, who on such days would be completely absorbed in God.

Daily the humble [fol. 4v] Don Felipe progressed more and more in fervor and virtues. With the desire to serve God more closely he threw himself at the feet of Venerable Father Sanvitores,



*Chamorro natives of the Marianas (now Guam)*

begging him with tears to be so good as to direct him by the true path of mortification and prayer and other virtues so that he might not go astray on the path of serving God. For this reason he asked him with deep sighs coming from his fervent heart that he be so good as to designate him a slave of our Father St. Ignatius and of the holy Society of Jesus. The Venerable Father with interior joy answered him that he was already designated such interiorly, since he so earnestly offered his will for this end, and that he accepted it on his part in the name of St. Ignatius for the effect of which he spoke. He questioned him on the penances he performed and his manner of prayer and found great depth in the spirit of Don Felipe. He saw that his penances, disciplines, and hairshirts were severe for his age and for the intensity with which he gave himself to the corporal work needed each day in this new mission. And so he took away those penances and [said] that in place of them, so as to please God more, his tireless work sufficed, so that he might

not become useless for matters of greater service to God. He gave him the manner of his prayer, and showed how in his exterior work he should walk in a continual presence of the Lord, working in everything solely for love of His Divine Majesty. He likewise instructed him in the practice of other virtues related to his state and in the practice of fervor and devotion in Communication [i.e., Holy Communion]. The humble Don Felipe submitted to everything without the least disagreement though he regretted being deprived of the practice of the penances which he was doing. But he conformed himself to the will of the Venerable Father, who was his spiritual father, sacrificing his own will in this to God our Lord.

With this he remained grateful and consoled and so was progressing with new manifestations of fervor until the pasch of Pentecost was already approaching in that year 69. Some days before it he again prostrated himself at the feet of the Venerable Father Sanvitores with his eyes bathed in tears. The Venerable Father threw his arms around him to raise him up from the floor and Don Felipe, motionless on his knees and kissing his hand, continued sighing and saying with deep feeling: "The pasch and feast of the coming of the Holy Spirit is already near, and to dispose myself as I would wish for that holy day to receive the Divine Spirit when, though unworthy, I receive Christ our Sacramental Lord, I would desire, my Father, to find myself for the day clothed with the insignia of a slave of our Father St. Ignatius and of his holy Society." The Venerable Father replied that this has already been done interiorly since the other time that he had asked for it, and that there was [fol. 5r] no further need, because God had already accepted that oblation of his submissive will and good intention through the hands of our Father St. Ignatius. In answer to this, with much sobbing and once more prostrated before him, the humble Don Felipe replied: "My Father may it be true that the Lord has accepted and granted the slavery of this vile little worm. [.....] to our Father St. Ignatius and to his holy Society. But you know well, Father of my soul, that slaves always wear the insignia and livery of their masters. Although I in no way deserve it, still it befits the generosity of masters to grant it to the slave who is proud to be slave of such masters, and who, as a sign of his fidelity and his desire to serve until death, earnestly requests it." As he finished saying these words, the Venerable Father embraced him, and compelled by the great fondness and longing shown in such humble and convincing reasons, spoken with such feeling, he told him to be of good spirit and place all his hope in God, obliging Him through many acts of humility and resignation and entrusting his petition very earnestly to the Holy Spirit so that on the day of His coming, He might console him, and His Most Holy Will be done in everything. With this reply, once again kissing the hand of the Venerable Father, Don Felipe retired to his little corner and from that moment until the evening of the vigil of Pen-

tecost the fervor, recollection, acts of humility and self-abasement with which Don Felipe conducted himself were quite remarkable.

Then on the night of the vigil of Pentecost of that year 69, once the litany was finished, the Venerable Father called him. On coming into his presence he went on his knees as directly as he could and then prostrated himself before him. But the Father told him to rise up and just remain on his knees. While he knelt there, filled with desire and with his hands folded, the Venerable Father, knowing the intention of the humble Don Felipe, for his greater devotion blessed a kind of *sotana*, of narrower collar and much shorter than that which the religious use, together with a cincture. When he had blessed it he put it over his shoulders and vested him in it, with great self-abasement and humility on the part of our Brother Donado Felipe Sonsong. He was filled with emotion and fervor, as may be imagined, for this singular gift the Lord was making to him, and because he now saw fulfilled his great yearning and desires. In keeping with all this, the fervor and emotion with which on the following day he came to receive our Sacramental Lord was quite extraordinary.

From that day on he was more and more humble, placing himself below everyone as being the most vile creature in the world, and on this foundation, right up to the hour of his death, he was acquiring more and more virtues of all kinds in accordance with his humble state, which he knew very well how to recognize as such, with notable edification of all of us who knew him. I will say something in passing about all those virtues [fol. 5v], though it will not be possible to say everything. For they would require a better pen than mine, and also because the brevity of a letter does not permit it, and moreover, his profound humility hid from human sight all that he could.

Concerning his humility we have already said something in general. Coming to particulars of this virtue, the following manifestations were observed in him. Never did anyone hear words from him nor even remote indications which could

redound to his praise or esteem. As a result of this disposition, he could not bear to hear others praise him and speak well of him. Rather, he took occasion from such words to humble and abase himself the more, judging that he was not the kind of person others thought, nor was he such as he ought to have been.

He was never seen to do anything which had any trace of human respect, nor did he do anything to be seen or esteemed by men, but only by God. One did not see him make excuses in anything nor put the fault on others, either exteriorly or interiorly. He considered all as superiors, not only theoretically but in practice and in deeds, dealing with everyone with such humility and respect as if they were his superiors. When superiors entrusted him with something to be done in company with others he indicated it to the latter with humility and even with firmness, when he saw in them a repugnance to carry out what was ordered by superiors. He did this, however, with the proper respect and submissiveness on his part, asking them pardon at the end, for love of God, for whatever he might have offended them in. So much was this so that it seemed he wanted to place himself beneath the feet of everyone.

He did not let pass any occasion which offered itself for the exercise of humility, both in interior and exterior acts. As a result, whenever he could and occasion offered, bowing and kneeling, he showed reverence to the religious and the priests, always kissing the hands of the latter, with much devotion and submission, bowing his whole body thus to the ground even when on his knees, as has been said above.

His charity was a good match for his humility, since he had much of it for all and showed it in deeds, responding to and giving satisfaction to all, as far as he could, especially to the religious. When they entrusted something to him, immediately, without refusing anything, he carried it out until it was finished, with admirable diligence. If he had another task from someone else on his hands, with his polite manner and courteous reply in words full of humility and charity,

he made up for what he could not do because of the work he was engaged in. But once the latter was finished, he promptly turned to the other one. Thus he gave its full scope to this virtue, and to the earnest desires he had to help everyone and to give much pleasure and assistance to those who work for the salvation of souls.

The deeds in which he exercised this virtue were many, because the ardor of charity he possessed in his simple heart applied itself to plan and effect many acts which, though so small, and for the reason impossible to relate, were not [?] of much assistance. The first works [in] which our Brother Donado occupied himself from the time he began to work were in sewing, [fol. 6r] repairing, and remaking many vestments and ornaments for divine worship. These works turned out as perfect and faultless as if they had been made and adorned by a perfect master of the trade. This was so because, though these tasks did not belong to his proper office, he applied himself so intensely to what he saw to be so immediately for God, and also because of the reflection he made on them that they represented the insignia of the Passion of our Redeemer. He showed the same skill with the other necessary clothes he sewed or mended. The last days of his life, after the uprising of these natives, there was a greater need, because the natives had robbed and burned our store of clothing. Hence he sewed and mended the clothes of all of us like a solicitous and loving mother with many children to take care of. Since it was so necessary for the community and he did not have enough clothing for all, he made, mended, and repaired clothing so that even though poor, they might go about with neatness and propriety, and occupy themselves without worry in whatever they were supposed to do according to their state. It was in this charitable occupation that he was caught by the last days of his life. As his life was coming to an end because of his great age, labors, and sweat, he finally laid down the needle with which he was working and said: "I cannot do any more, blessed be the Lord." With that he let himself fall into his poor bed, no longer having any more strength. And though he was assisted with all possible remedies and encouragement, finally his

weakened nature surrendered itself to pay its debt, as I will tell later.

This was the principal occupation in which the great charity of this humble servant of God occupied itself in these Marianas Islands. Alternating with it was another occupation, no less important in accord with the needs of the times and the disposition of superiors, namely, building churches and houses. In this he was tireless, because he imagined himself building castles and temples where God Himself was to dwell with a special presence, and where the souls of these poor Marianos would be nourished with the blood of the Lamb.

It was wonderful to see in a man of his age, short in stature and already grown thin, the earnestness and energy with which he undertook work sometimes so excessive, and not rarely in the worst heat of the sun, rolling over, hewing, and carrying logs, all bathed in sweat which ran down to the ground like streams over all of his thin and delicate body. Yet his spirit remained as tireless as if no such thing were happening. Rather he had fervor of the love of God which burned in his heart, so that he seemed not to feel all these excessive labors. One time, being all withdrawn into his interior, it happened that while he was making measurements for the building he fell down from the scaffolding. It was a miracle he did not kill himself, since he fell from quite a height. Though he did soon recover from this fall, from then on for the rest of his life he always had to use a cane while walking because of how crippled he remained. It is impossible to describe the fervor with which he returned to finish this building and to begin many others, as fearlessly as if no such thing had happened to him. For he knew how to overcome everything with his boundless charity and his earnest desires to serve God more and more even to the point of giving his life if that were asked for.

And even when he had these works on hand, he heard one or two or more Masses every day, depending on the time he saw to be necessary for the one and the other. He arranged everything attentive [fol. 6v] not to fail to perform these and other de-

votions with repose of his spirit. Nor on the other hand, did he fail in punctuality in his building. It was a source of wonder to see the growth of these buildings side by side with the time he spent in the spiritual exercises he practiced without fail every day.

Various churches and [.....] houses which he built while he was in the Marianas, with all the necessary equipment of altars, tables, seats and chairs [.....] and times of the uprisings of the natives, because some were destroyed by the typhoons, others by the malice of the devil in the rebel natives, and others by ourselves in order to defend ourselves during those same uprisings. During these uprisings he also handled a firearm, with the permission of Father Superior, for the purpose of defending the Catholic faith and its preachers. He could not do that, however, in the last uprising because of already being of such advanced age and having been left much weakened and crippled from the wounds they inflicted on him. Finally, while finishing the last building he built, which was a good house of two rooms, quite ample for the missionaries in Agana, our good Brother Felipe Sonsong was caught by the last uprising of this island on 23 July 84. The unworthy natives wounded [him] cruelly, beginning at his throat in an effort to behead him. He would have been in danger of death from this wound or even been beheaded, if God had not permitted that the weapon cut badly. Then they gave him two wounds on the head and one in the socket of his left eye, such that when his wounds were being dressed later, a piece of the bone came out. They left him for dead, all covered with his own blood, like the religious who died in this attack. Since Brother Phelipe had little strength, due to such an advanced age and such labors, and since a great deal of blood had flowed from the wounds, he lay there so still that he seemed to have died. On ascertaining that he was still breathing, they administered Extreme Unctions to him, and when he had further recovered consciousness, also the sacrament of Penance. The first words he spoke were the names of Jesus and Mary, and day and night he did not cease naming these sweet names as long as he was recovering. Truly it was a miracle that he did not die, being so weakened and

having lost so much blood that it seemed impossible he should live.

But since the Lord saw the need we had of his person for the charity which, as I have described, he exercised toward us after he recovered, he gave him the gift of life. For this, as such, he knew well how to show himself grateful. The fervent Brother from then on united himself more and more with God, and exercised all the virtues which were possible to him in the current circumstances. Certain things stood out in these last days of his. The first was that he sought out a hidden spot in the place where Masses were being said, and from there, fixed on his knees and without being seen by anyone, he heard all nine Masses. The second thing was his most exact obedience to everyone. Like a dead body he let himself be used for whatever purpose each one wanted to make use of him. This attitude sprang from his interior dispositions, for he considered himself as already dead for everything created and living only for Christ crucified. The third was that as long as he had no occupation, to be on his knees in prayer was everything for him. But though this was what he found pleasure in, he left it immediately when he saw that it was necessary to mend [the clothes of] the poor religious of Christ, or to do something else to assist them.

[fol. 7r] Now [.....] which he exercised of the virtue of charity since our Brother Phelipe was [.....] excessively in serving God, if one can speak of excess in this matter. Continuing with his virtues I say that in none of them did one note any singularity. In nothing nor concerning anyone was he known to condemn the least fault. Rather he tried to excuse those of others with himself and with others, showing remarkable esteem and veneration for all.

He desired not to let pass any occasion of mortification which might occur without taking advantage of it, and much more was this true of those occasions which came to him without his seeking them. He bore them with a patience [.....] they came from the hand of the Lord.

In doing well the ordinary things of every day, both spiritual and external, and of his tenacity in this regard, and in seeing other extraordinary ones which presented themselves, we have already spoken.

In the custody of all his senses, and especially of his eyes, ears, and tongue, his self-control was quite extraordinary, as were the good examples he gave us in this regard.

Nor did he show less solicitude in mortifying himself in some things which he could licitly do. An example of such was his not going out of his room unless it was for some good purpose, nor looking at some curious thing, if there should be any such in the Marianas, nor ask nor want to know what was not of concern.



Fr. Diego Luis de Sanvitores

For his lodging in the six houses which we had for our dwelling in Agana ([except for] the first which was the shed in which the natives received the Venerable Father Diego Luis de Sanvitores, the other five being built by Brother Phelipe with his own hands), he always sought the corner which was most unused or set apart, and was not needed for anything in the house. Thus even in the lodging which had to be fitted out for his rest from so much work in the last house which, as I have said, he built in Agana, he sought his greater mortification and inconvenience. The building being so large, Father Vice-Provincial was giving him lodging in one of the rooms. But with remarkable humility and reasons he persuaded him that for his infirmities, with which, as he also said, he would disturb the Fathers, none of those rooms was apt. Thus, with the approval of the Superior himself, he made a little hut for his living-quarters in the place which was most uncomfortable, because it was above the kitchen.

When he took food for his body, he used to say, "Let us eat not for pleasure, but because God commands it, so as to be

able to live, work, and serve Him." Thus his temperance was quite severe, and he was never found talking of food, and much less did he, in the midst of such great need, complain [fol. 7v] of the lack of it. Rather, he continued more content and joyful when, because of the poverty of the land, there was a greater lack of food.

His patience was admirable, so that in his exterior no signs of impatience were seen. Although when he had a building job underway and sometimes spoke loudly to his helpers about what they were to do, this was on the one hand because he was very deaf, and on the other, it was rather seriousness and energy, so that such people might not commit irremediable errors, rather than signs of impatience. And when they committed some mistake, his voice was loud so as to correct them, in order that they might not make other mistakes, because of the difficulties that followed. Immediately afterward, with great humility and submission, he asked them to pardon him for the love of God if in anything he had offended them.

In his heart he never gave way to being upset or to grief or sadness. All the occasions and things which came to him he took as sent by the hand of God, no matter in what manner or by what means or way they might come. In this virtue he exercised himself in three degrees: first, in bearing with patience all that came to him; second, in doing it promptly; and third, in receiving it with joy and gladness, because he judged that that was the will of God.

In the vows which make one a perfect religious, although he had not made profession of them, he left us such distinguished examples from the time he was in our Society that all of us had something to learn and imitate in Brother Phelipe. Since something has already been said about his obedience, and time does not permit us to say more, I will say something of his great poverty and angelic chastity.

Not only was he most remarkable in not receiving anything from inside or outside the house, nor lending or taking anything, however small it might be, from the house or anywhere else

without permission, in fact many times it was necessary for superiors to insist that he receive what was necessary to live. Thus in his little corner or place of retirement, in his clothing neatly mended like a truly poor man, in his food and in everything else, the virtue of true poverty shone forth. Moreover, pretending he was not doing anything, he helped repair, clean, and adorn any things of the house, however little and insignificant they might be, for whatever purpose they could later serve in a land so poor.

The modesty in looks, words, and manner of acting in all things that Brother Phelipe showed made manifest his angelic purity of body and mind. Moreover, to such an extent had he made natural to himself the means by which one acquires this great virtue, so pleasing in the eyes of God, that he seemed in every respect an angel in a mortal body.

Concerning the right intention in all he did, purely for God, he put it into action by directing it to His Divine Majesty in the morning, at the beginning of each task, and also during the task often raising his heart to God, for whom [fol. 8r] alone he was doing it. He was as one who serves God and not men, with great joy that he was there doing the will of His Creator and Redeemer. To such an extent was this true that he seemed to be loving rather than working.

As to his conformity to the will of God, there was much to say, because of the many examples he left us. This we see in the many labors he endured, in addition to what has been said of the hunger, thirst, exposure to the sun, humiliations by these natives in the various uprisings, and especially in this last one in which he suffered so much from the blows and wounds inflicted on him by the rebels and apostates from our holy faith. All this he suffered with great courage and joy for the love of God, as gifts from His Divine Majesty, according to the example of the Crucified Christ, for love of whom, and [because of his] faith in our Holy Mother, the Catholic and Apostolic Roman Church, the only and true spouse of the same Lord [.....] this humble and fervent servant of

His to give his blood and life. This could be clearly seen when these barbarians wounded him, and much earlier, in the time of Venerable Father Diego Luis de Sanvitores, when there was a report – though it was false, as was seen later – that Dutch ships had arrived at these islands; and again most recently, in the past year of 8[5] on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March, after the siege under which the natives had us, when a ship arrived in these islands. In the beginning it was said that it belonged to heretics, enemies of our holy faith. Our Brother Phelipe, raising his eyes and hands to heaven with great joy and gladness, said: “What could be better! [By] that they will send us straight to heaven.”

Finally, full of such great virtues and merits, it seemed to him that the Lord was letting him know that his reward was approaching by means of his infirmities, especially by the phlegm which from time to time bothered him greatly. Given his great age, this was increasing and filling up his chest. Since it was taking away all desire to eat, the possible remedies were applied, and recognizing the danger, they then came to him with the sacred Viaticum, which he received with the devotion and fervor that one can understand. He seemed to have intimations from on high that that was the last crisis in which his infirmities were placing him. Hence he did not pay any attention to what they prescribed for him, and when they wanted to administer some medicine to him, he said with great simplicity: “What for, if I must die?” Other times when some food was brought to him, he said with great determination, “I have to die, why eat?” But when he was told that holy obedience commanded him, he left everything in the hands of those who were taking care of him and assisting him. Closing his eyes, he made efforts to [swallow?] the food until he no longer had strength for anything more, though he did not lose the use of his reason and senses until he died. He received Extreme Unction, [fol. 8v] responding to the prayers with great joy. Friday, 11 January, arrived and at 11 A.M. when he suffered a seizure, they recited the recommendation of the soul for him. Before it was finished, he came to himself with all his senses, responding to what remained of the prayer. Then he looked for the crucifix and the holy rosary, which he removed from his arm around which he had wound it.

Taking them all together in both hands, he did not cease kissing the crucifix, rosary, and medals all together. It seemed to us that he was not going to die so soon, at least not on this nor the following day. Nonetheless, from then until one o'clock of that day, one Father was always accompanying him. But as he was still conscious and with the use of his senses, and without any anxiety, while we were resting he expired. For when I went to see him before two o'clock, I found him out of his bed and kneeling on the floor with his arms on the bed and his head on top of them. Thinking that he was still alive, I spoke to him to get him back in bed, but he was already dead.

It was thought that since he was such a servant of God, it could be that his guardian angel and the Blessed Virgin, to whom, as I have said, he was very devoted, together with the saints of his devotion, had come to tell him that since it was now time, he should get on his knees and go away with them. Since his profound humility always hid from people the great graces which one may presume Our Lord favored him, it seems that on this occasion His Divine Majesty wanted to accommodate Himself to that humility or with his prayers to wait that we might not come together at that hour to do him our last favor. Everything can be supposed from his great virtues and merits, and from his exemplary and angelic life. He spent himself untiringly in this mission, as has been said, for the space of eighteen years and with great ardor, keeping very much present in all his works God, for whose love alone he worked. The insignia of the different vows of slavery, which, as I have written, he made in his heart to the saints of his devotion, such as to the Blessed Virgin, St. Augustine, St. Dominic, and our Father St. Ignatius and his religious – that is, the two scapulars I have mentioned, the cord of St. Augustine, and the habit of the Society – all these he always carried with him. He died and was buried with them on the following day, 12 January. Since all revered him as a saint, the Governor with all his soldiers attended his burial, the Governor himself with Sergeant-Major Don Joseph de Quiroga and two adjutants carrying near the body from the fort where he died to the church recently erected near the sea. Two other adjutants received him into the

grave from the hand of Captain Joseph dela Cruz and Adjutant Joseph de Carabajal. With this may he rest in peace, as we hope from his blameless life. Beloved of God and man, whose memory, etc.

Agaña, 1 February 1686

Notices of the exemplary life of Brother Felipe Sonson, Donado of the Society of Jesus.

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#### Endnotes

1. See the sketch of Sonson's life in my "Early Filipino Jesuits, 1593-1930," *Philippine Studies* 29 (1981) 281-83. However, my supposition that Sonson was of Chinese mestizo origin is incorrect, as indicated below.
2. Luciano P.R. Santiago, "The Talangpaz Sisters: Foundresses of the Beaterio of San Sebastian de Calumpang (Now the Congregation of the Augustinian Recollect Sisters) 1691-1732," *Recollectio* 13 (1990) 61-62, 93. Sonson would have been the great granduncle of the Talangpaz sisters.
3. John A. Larkin, *The Pampangans* (Berkeley, 1972) 36. Larkin gives the surname as Songsong; Santiago uses the form Sonson, based on ecclesiastical records. Contemporary Jesuit sources use the spelling Sonson, though Fr. Pedro Murillo Velarde, in his *Historia de al Provincia de Philipinas de la Compañia de Jesus* (Manila, 1749), f. 360v, spells the name Sanzon. As Santiago notes, the name Songsong is a Tagalog and Pampangano word, and not of Chinese origin, as I mistakenly surmised in my "Early Filipino Jesuits," pp. 281-83.
4. See the various accounts reproduced in the *Beatificationis seu declarationis martyrii Servi Dei Didaci Alisi de SanVitores...positio supervita et martyrio*.