

RECOVERING PEDRO CALUNGSOD

*Special Commission on the Development of the
Devotion to Blessed Pedro Calungsod**

Pedro Calungsod, a young native of the Visayas region in the Philippines, was speared and struck to death with a machete on 2 April 1672 in the village of Tumhon, Guam, on account of his Christian faith. His body was thrown into the sea and was never recovered. While we have certain and sufficient information about his martyrdom, our knowledge regarding his life prior to his heroic death can only be limited to conjectures.

To recover information on the pre-martyrdom life of the now Blessed Pedro Calungsod, three authors made separate studies on authentic relevant documents and presented serious conjectures:

In 1997, Fr. Ildebrando Jesus A. Leyson, the vice-postulator of the Cause for the beatification and canonization of the young Visayan martyr, composed the official *Positio Super Martyrio*, entitled *Beatificationis seu Declarationis Martyrii Servi Dei Petri Calungsod*, for the Vatican. The first chapter of the *Positio* presents a probable background of Pedro. Since the *Positio* is not readily available to many

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people, Leyson wrote in a semi-popular and less technical style the handbook *Pedro Calonsor Bissaya: Prospects of a Teenage Filipino* (Claretian Publications, 1999). After the beatification of Pedro last 5 March 2000, Leyson came up with a second and more extensive edition of the handbook, published this time by the Archdiocese of Cebu in March 2001.

In 1998, renowned Filipino theologian, Fr. Catalino G. Arévalo, S.J., wrote the pamphlet *Pedro Calungsod: Young Visayan "Proto-Martyr"* (Office for Publications of the Archdiocese of Manila) which saw a second printing in 1999.

In the year 2000, veteran historian, Fr. John N. Schumacher, S.J., wrote "Blessed Pedro Calungsod: An Historian's Comments on His Life Prior to His Martyrdom" as the Jubilee feature of Loyola School of Theology's journal *Landas* (Volume 14, 2000, 1-97).

Pedro's Provenance

Based on the places where the family name "Calungsod" is common today, Leyson identifies Ginatilan in Cebu, Hinundayan and Hinunangan in Leyte (in a separate unpublished article, Leyson includes Baybay in Leyte where the Calungsods also abound) and Molo district of Iloilo City in Panay, as the more probable places in the Visayas from where Pedro may have come (Leyson 1999, 9). Arévalo mentions Cebu, Bohol and Iloilo in Panay (Arévalo 1998, 6-7, 9). Schumacher does not say any more than that Pedro "was a Visayan, and came possibly, but very doubtfully, from the island of Cebu. He could have come from any other of the Visayan islands" (Schumacher 2000, 56). Schumacher comments that Leyson "cannot arrive at any certain conclusions" regarding the birthplace of Pedro (Schumacher 2000, 2). However, a careful reading of Leyson's work can lead one to discover where the author thinks Pedro most probably came from. Leyson, nevertheless, strictly holds that only the baptismal record of Pedro, which unfortunately cannot be found anymore, can best indicate his true birthplace in the Visayas (Leyson 1999, 13).

Pedro's Life Before the Mariana Mission

Leyson and Arévalo think that Pedro may have been recruited while still a young boy and trained by the Jesuits—if not in a Jesuit school, probably in a Jesuit residence or mission station—in the Visayas to be a mission assistant (Leyson 1999, 19-26; Arévalo 1998, 6-7). This they say because during that time it was the strategy of the Jesuits in the Visayas to have young boys as mission helpers and assistant catechists. Indeed, in the Visayas, even as late as 1682 (ten years after the death of Pedro), when the Jesuits had most likely ceased running boarding schools for the training of boys to be catechists, boys were still employed on Sundays to form a procession and chant the catechism (see H. de la Costa, *The Jesuits in the Philippines, 1581-1768*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1961, 467-68). With this background, it is easy to understand why Pedro was among those brought by the Jesuits to serve the Mariana Mission.

The said Mission was organized by Fr. Diego Luís de San Vitores, S.J., in Manila. The group parted for the Marianas via Mexico from the port of Cavite in 1667. Since Fr. Diego never set foot in the Visayas, Leyson thinks that Pedro and the others from the Visayas may have volunteered or were sent to Manila or Cavite as a gesture of support by the Jesuits in the Visayas or by the Diocese of Cebu, to which the Marianas at that time belonged by ecclesiastical jurisdiction (Leyson 1999, 30-32).

Schumacher doubts whether Pedro had any contact with the Jesuits in the Visayas before going to Cavite since there were only a few Jesuits in Cebu and Panay (Schumacher 2000, 22 & 81, n. 43). Indeed, the activity of the Jesuits in the Visayas was rather concentrated in Samar, Leyte and Bohol. Schumacher, however, does not discuss the possibility of Pedro having contact with the Jesuits in these said islands as if Pedro could only have come from Cebu or Panay. In any case, he thinks that Pedro may have been a sailor, a crew of one of the ships that traded between the Visayas and Manila at that time. It may have been at the port in Cavite where Pedro was recruited by Fr. Diego for the Mariana Mission. However, Schumacher

says that for Pedro to be a sailor, he had to be at least a young adult and not a young boy (Schumacher 2000, 21-22).

Pedro's Age

Pedro Calungsod served the Mariana Mission from 1668 to 1672. The documents do not mention his age but describe him generally as only a youth, a young person when he was martyred. Using the ages of the boys the Jesuit missionaries in the Visayas recruited as their mission assistants—as reported in *The Jesuits in the Philippines* (de la Costa 1961, 119, 288)—and on the ages of some teenage boys who served the Mariana Mission, both Leyson and Arévalo suggest that Pedro may have been only between 12 and 14 years old in 1668 and, thus, was only between 16 and 18 years old when he died in 1672 (Leyson 1999, 17; Arévalo 1998, 7). Schumacher opines that Pedro may have been about 18 years of age, or just possibly 16 in 1668—since “in this period, Filipinos normally were not easily allowed to move from their own village to another, least of all young people”—and so, was about 22 or 23 years old at the time of his martyrdom (Schumacher 2000, 5-6, 55-56).

Schumacher was rather too hasty in brushing aside the testimony of Fr. Pedro de Casanova, S.J., who was with Pedro Calungsod from 1668 to 1671 (*Positio*, 117-18). Casanova described Pedro at first as a *muchacho*, a term which Schumacher rightly explains as generally used for a male servant regardless of age (Schumacher 2000, 5-6). Further on, Casanova finally qualifies that Pedro, who was a *muchacho*, was only a *niño*, a term which Schumacher again explains rightly as used to refer to a young boy up to about 16 years of age (Schumacher 2000, 6). If Casanova's last memory of Pedro was that he was only a *niño* (at most 16 years old) when they parted in 1671, it is very likely that Pedro would have been only about 17 or 18 years old the following year, 1672, when he was martyred. It would not have been very hard for Casanova to remember Pedro, not only because they were together for three years, but also because—as Schumacher stresses—there were only a few, “no more than 20,” Filipino lay mis-

sionary companions of the Jesuits in the Marianas whom Casanova had to get acquainted with (Schumacher 2000, 30). Moreover, it is very probable that Casanova's memory could not yet be faulty at that time since he was only 29 years old when he last saw Pedro, and 35 years old when he made his testimony, which he based on the narrative and the letters of the other missionaries who were in Guam at the time of the martyrdom.

The annual letter of the Philippine Jesuit Province in 1672, the year when Pedro died, uses the terms *mocito* and *mancebito*, i.e., younger than a *moxo* or a *mancebo* (youth), to describe Pedro at the time of his martyrdom (*Positio*, 68). This may prove that even during that time, it was not absolutely impossible for young boys in the Philippines to move out of their villages and join the missions, or that the Jesuits in the Philippines themselves found it possible, perhaps even an ordinary case, that a young boy from the Visayas would be serving the Mariana Mission at that time. In the end, Schumacher considers that Pedro may have been "certainly fourteen years old at the very least" when he joined the Mariana Mission in 1668 (Schumacher 2000, 55), and that would mean that Pedro may have been about 18 when he was martyred.

Pedro's Work in the Mission

Both Leyson and Arévalo describe Pedro as an all-round assistant in the Mariana Mission, a work which included assisting the Jesuits in catechizing the Mariana natives, i.e., helping catechumens in memorizing the prayers and the Christian doctrine or leading the communal recitation of the *Doctrina* for post-baptismal deepening (Leyson 1999, 19ff; Arévalo 1998, 7). Just like de la Costa who, in his authoritative work *The Jesuits in the Philippines*, refers to the boys who helped the Jesuit missions in this way as catechists (see de la Costa 1961, 144, 170, 288, 468), Leyson also refers to Pedro as a catechist.

Schumacher is more cautious by saying that Pedro should not be called a catechist since what a lay mission assistant could do in those

days was only to help catechumens in memorizing the prayers and the Christian doctrine, or lead the communal recitation of the *Doctrina* for post-baptismal deepening. Only the missionaries (priests and brothers) explained the Faith to the people. The lay assistants “were not full-time trained catechists in the sense in which the word would be understood today” (Schumacher 2000, 10-11).

Although Schumacher has a reason for saying so, he nevertheless commits the mistake of absolutizing the idea that only the priests and religious brothers could catechize at that time. Diego Bazan from Mexico, who joined the Mariana Mission when he was only 14 and died when he was only 18, was a mission assistant like Pedro; yet, he was known to have entered into discussions with a Chamorro chief who led an adulterous life (Leyson 1999, 103), which means that he was somehow able to explain and defend the Faith, too. Testimonies from 1700 and 1723 never hesitated to refer to Pedro as a catechist or that he knew how to preach (Leyson 1999, 42, 73) which goes to prove that these things were not totally impossible for a boy mission assistant to do during those days. Besides, even if Pedro helped only in the recitation or memorization of the prayers and the Christian Doctrine, he can still be rightly considered a catechist today in the sense that “catechesis begins with a more simple presentation of the whole structure of the Christian message (using also summary or general formulations)” (General Catechetical Directory 38).

The *National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines: Maturing in Christian Faith* (Saint Paul Publications, 1990) says that

there is a great need to distinguish various levels of catechists, corresponding to the work they are called upon to perform....

A *professional catechist* is one who has undergone adequate professional training and is certified as such, with an apostolic mandate from the Bishop, whether full time or part time, paid or not. To such belongs the systematic catechesis of formal instruction of children and youth, both preparing them for first communion and confession, as well as the continuing catechesis in school afterwards....

A *volunteer catechist* refers to those, who in one form or another,

help in the catechetical ministry. Two general groups of volunteer catechists are:

- a) *student volunteer catechists* who generally help in public schools and Sunday schools in practicing prayers, songs, preparing chapel/classroom for liturgies, aiding in memorization, organizing youth activities, etc.;
- b) *lay men and women*—fathers, mothers, professionals, retired teachers, senior citizens, members of CWL, Legion of Mary, Curcillo, Focolare, and similar parish mandated organizations, who are often called to run parish pre-sacramental (Baptism, Eucharist, Penance, Marriage) catechesis, adult catechesis, Bible study seminars, Family Life catechesis, etc. and who assist in funding, in organizing follow-ups and support projects, and the like.

A third general category includes *seminarians* in formation, *novices* and *scholastics* of religious congregations who are assigned to assist professional catechists in the catechetical ministry, or “help out” during their vacation periods, at fiestas in *Alay kay Maria, Flores de Mayo*, youth choir groups, outdoor activities and sports, prayer groups and days of recollection, as mentors of core groups, public school students, and so forth. Also covered here are *priests, deacons, brothers* and *formed religious* who are involved in coordinating catechetical programs, staffing catechist formation centers, as well as actually teaching, giving retreats, vocation seminars, and the like (NCDP 1990, no. 469).

This being clarified, there can be no problem in considering Pedro Calungsod as a catechist even today.

Corrections

One very important point which Schumacher hoped his article could serve was to correct some distorted accounts regarding Pedro Calungsod (Schumacher 2000, 3). Following this lead, we now point out some errors in Schumacher’s article itself to check and prevent more distorted information.

THE *POSITIO* FOR PEDRO CALUNGSOD

Schumacher mentions that “Arévalo has based himself for the facts of the martyrdom principally on the deposition presented to the Congregation of Saints by the Archdiocese of Cebu ([Leyson] 1993). This in turn depended almost completely on the *Positio* prepared for the beatification of Blessed Diego de San Vitores ([Ledesma] 1981)” (Schumacher 2000, 1; see also 4 & 71). It must be said that the work which Schumacher refers to here as the “deposition” is not the deposition presented to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in the Vatican for the beatification of Pedro Calungsod; nor was this supposed “deposition” written by Leyson. This work, entitled *Deposition on the Martyrdom of the Servant of God Lay Catechist in Guam Visayan Cebuano Pedro Calungsod + 2 April 1672*, was written by Fr. Juan Ledesma, S.J., in 1993. It is Ledesma’s English version of his own original Spanish work which he hoped could serve as the *Positio* for Calungsod. However, Ledesma’s work was not accepted by the Vatican not only because it was almost entirely copied from the *Positio* for Blessed Diego Luís de San Vitores, but also because it is *pieno di errori* (full of errors) and was prepared without prior canonical process. Schumacher was right in seeing the similarity between the *Positio* for San Vitores and what he rashly presumed as the official “deposition” for Calungsod. What he did not see is that the similarity was not because an author copied from or depended on another, but that both works were written by one and the same author, Fr. Ledesma.

Schumacher’s hasty presumption led him not only to wrongly ascribe the errors of Ledesma to Leyson, but also to say that Leyson was inconsistent when he notes that Leyson’s work in 1999, i.e., the real work of Leyson, entitled *Pedro Calonsor Bissaya: Prospects of a Teenage Filipino*, contained the right information as compared to what he supposed to be Leyson’s earlier work in 1993, i.e., actually Ledesma’s work, which was erroneous (see Schumacher 2000, 4).

The real and official *Positio* for Pedro Calungsod was prepared by Leyson and is entitled *Beatificationis seu Declarationis Martyrii Servi Dei Petri Calungsod, Catechistae Laici in Insulis Marianis (+ 1672), Positio*

Super Martyrio, Roma 1998 (Positio 1998). It passed the scrutiny of the Vatican historians and theologians on 5 October 1999 and 4 January 2000, respectively.

THE MISSIONARIES IN THE VISAYAS

In his endnote 5, Schumacher says that “Leyson (1999, 18-19) is not accurate in saying that the Jesuits were the only missionaries of the Visayas and Mindanao” (Schumacher 2000, 71). But what Leyson actually wrote was that “the Jesuits were the *solos y únicos ministros de los indios bisayas, o de lo más principal de ellos*” (Leyson 1999, 19). Leyson intentionally quoted the original Spanish from Ignacio F. Alcina’s *Historia de las islas e indios de Bisayas* (1668) to show that it was not his but another person’s observation. A Jesuit missionary in the Visayas, Alcina was a firsthand witness to the Visayan mission during the time of Pedro Calungsod and according to him the Jesuits were the only ministers of the Visayan indios, or of the chief of the indios. While quoting Alcina, Leyson also presented the fact that at that time there were also religious missionaries in the Visayas other than the Jesuits (Leyson 1999, 18, n. 73). However, it can be said that the Jesuits were evangelizing the greater part of the Visayas in those days since the entire Visayan islands of Samar, Leyte and Bohol were under their care while they were also present in Cebu, Panay and Negros, where other missionaries, like the Augustinians, were present.

PEDRO’S COMPANION, AMBROSIO HAGMAN

In trying to determine the age of Pedro Calungsod, Leyson and Arévalo considered among others the age of Ambrosio Hagman, a native of Guam who was only between 14 and 15 years old when he gave a testimony in 1673 on the death of Padre Diego Luís de San Vitores and Pedro Calungsod (Leyson 1999, 17; Arévalo 1998, 7). Schumacher says in his endnote 13 that “[t]hough Arévalo is careful to say of Hagman ‘who (*it appears*) stayed with the Filipino helpers,’ Leyson without any such reserve simply asserts that he [Ambrosio] was one of the ‘boys who assisted Padre Diego’ ” (Schumacher 2000, 75). For Schumacher, “Hagman, of course, being a native inhabitant

of Guam, cannot be taken as a norm for young Filipinos who had come with the Jesuit missionaries” and that he was not part of the Mission since “he lived among its enemies” (Schumacher 2000, 5, 75). However, Fr. Francisco Solano, S.J., a priest of the Mariana Mission who personally knew Ambrosio, was the one who sent the young Chamorro on 1 April 1672, along with two other mission assistants who were Filipinos, from the missionaries’ residence in Agaña where Padre Diego and Pedro were, to inform them of the imminent danger due to the new assaults of the enemies. Solano says of him: “*Ambrosio... que nos assiste como cualquiera otro de los Filipinos...*” (Positio 1998, 59). Ambrosio Hagman assisted the Mariana Mission just like Pedro and the other Filipinos.

A Difficult but Beneficial Task

Recovering the pre-martyrdom Pedro Calungsod is not an easy task. And one has to consider all available facts fairly if only to get nearer to the truth about the young Visayan martyr’s background.

The martyrdom of Blessed Pedro Calungsod may be sufficient to challenge his devotees to live the Christian faith even up to the shedding of their blood. As the grace of martyrdom is granted only to a few, an idea of his heroic pre-martyrdom life, even though limited to serious conjectures, can also be a source of inspiration to the many who are called to die each day by denying themselves to follow Christ along the way of the Cross.