

**‘The Battle of Fray Juan Ramírez’: Excerpt from Antonio de la Calancha,
Coronica moralizada del Orden de San Agustín (Barcelona: por Pedro
Lacavallería, 1638), book 2, chapter 14, section 6, pp.391-2.¹**

[391] Let us now leave aside the two fathers, and turn our attention to the particular excellence of our blessed friar Juan [Ramírez]’s service to God. He went out into the countryside (as we have already said), sometimes in search of Indians to catechise them, sometimes to gather them up, and on many occasions, in order to divert them away from their shrines and *pacarinas*.² And he already knew that when the Indians did not come on the day that they were supposed to, they were not busy with work, rather with idolatry. On one occasion, like a good shepherd, he went out into the countryside in search of his sheep, as the one which was missing and wandering in the fields hurt more than leaving the ninety-nine in the sheepfold. Whether warned by word-of-mouth or by heavenly impulse, he climbed up to a shrine and found there a common idol which was as venerated by the Indians as it was hidden away; they had refused to listen to the exhortations of their priest and held it to be God in their blind sacrifices. He found it and, as if it were a treasure for the greedy or a holy image for the devout, he was filled with joy; for one who is protective of God’s honour, the destruction of vice is as glorious as discovering the most precious jewel in heaven. Saint James experienced more joy when he showed the magus Hermogenes the error of his ways than when he saw heaven on [Mount] Tabor; [even] if [in the latter case] [St. James] was on the best mountain and the object [of the vision] was divine, his joy was hasty and without merit, experienced with shock and reprehension, while with Hermogenes he won merits for himself, a soul for heaven and glory for God. I know that if we were to ask our padre (priest), fray Juan, if he could exchange having found the Idol he was searching for in order to destroy, for having witnessed a small amount of glory in which he could delight, he would renounce the latter in which zeal might prosper, and would esteem the former which would be intended for the glory of God. He lifted up the idol and carried it in his arms, so that in the sight of its worshippers it might perish by being burned to ashes, and so that they might publicly

¹ Working translation by Andrew Redden.

² A *pacarina* (also spelled *paqarina*) is a holy place, usually close to the summit of a mountain, from where an ancestor deity emerges. These are often caves or springs.

bear witness to the crime that had been so hidden. As he was returning to the town, a gang of idolaters were on their way to visit their *huaca*.³ They discovered their love in the arms of their fear, and their God in the power of their punishment: "Here," [the friar] said, "I'm taking your false God so that the idol might perish in fire, just as its creator suffers in the devil's fire." They were not afraid; they neither denied it nor gave excuses. Rather, they obstinately asked him for the idol and, filled with rage, they managed to wrest it from him. He defended it with God's zeal and they seized it from him with bestial rage. He abhorred their diabolical fury and they the law of Christ, and they soon took it from his arms. And, as if the idol could hear them, they spoke soothingly to it and asked it to punish the blessed priest. The zeal of Elijah was kindled within him, and with vile curses he insulted the idol and anathemised the idolaters, attacking their liberty and contending their brazenness—effects [in them] of [their] ultimate perdition, and, in him, of courageous charity. The devil, who wanted to bet infernal zeal against divine zeal, entered them and with some picking up sticks and others stones, they thrashed and broke him. Those who did not have sticks or stones to hand punched and kicked him, and they were well on their way to killing him—they nearly managed it, because he was nearly dead. They wanted to finish him off there on the ground where he was lying unable to speak, but either heaven or fortune did not wish him to die. They saw two Spaniards approaching, who from a height had seen this martyrdom take place, and fearing them more than they feared God or their own pastor, they took their idol and left him for dead. And the Spaniards took the fortunate friar to his cell, where he was more upset for not having died for God, than [the Indians] were for not having killed him for taking what was theirs. He offered his martyrdom for the conversion of those who offended him; even if he were not to win over all of them, (just like Christ) he had to save some of those robbers. I see Saint John the Evangelist martyr in the cauldron where he died⁴ and this Augustinian Juan amongst sticks and stones, where, if he did not die, at least he obtained the merit of martyrdom, and the honour of Apostolic Pastor.

³ A *huaca* is an Andean patron deity. These could take various forms and sizes, from natural objects, even parts of the landscape, to sculpted images.

⁴ According to Christian tradition, on the orders of the Roman emperor Domitian, St John the Evangelist was thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil at the gates of Rome (the Porta Latina) but while Calancha, following a particular medieval Christian tradition, writes that St John was killed there, more common Christian tradition holds that he miraculously survived and returned to Asia Minor. St John the Evangelist was the only apostle not to have been killed through martyrdom. A church now stands on the site of St John's martyrdom and miraculous survival.

If, as Christ says⁵, the father of the household sent three servants to collect his dues and one was beaten with sticks, the other wounded and the other stoned, in this priest we see the merits of all three [392] because some beat him with sticks, others throw stones at him and all wound him. From these injuries flow his greatest honour, and after he had healed they continued to plot other types of death: "Until when, will you who are hardened, furiously and stubbornly attack the just man, the Christ of God?" said David⁶ "so that he surrenders and falls like a wall made of stone without mortar." "My treasure and my jewel they wanted to take from me," said David in the name of the one who suffered, "I ran thirsting whilst they cursed me": all of this applies to our good fray Juan who, if they could topple with ease like a stone wall without mortar, stones could not take away the jewel and treasure of his patience. His thirst we shall see shortly. This occurrence is mentioned also by fray Alonso Ramos in his *History*⁷, and all those who talk of this holy courage and heroic action, acclaim that sanctity, and confess their holy envy. This event was greatly valued then, and will be abundantly rewarded now.

⁵ Margin note: Matt. 21[:35]. The full verse would read in English: '[The vine-yard workers seized his servants]. One they beat, the other they killed, the other they stoned'.

⁶ Margin note: Psalm 61 [Psalm 62:4-5]. 'How long will you rush against a man? You all kill as if you were pulling down a leaning wall without mortar. Truly, they intended to reject my price. I ran thirsting: they [...] cursed with their hearts.

⁷ Margin note: *Historia de Copacabana*, book 1, chapter 32.

demás sus imitadores. La mayor parte de los Indios estaban durísimos a recibir nuestra ley, i adversos a creer nuestros Sacramentos, que aunque los mas por tímidos aplaudían la Fè, por rebeldes no dejaban su falsa adoracion, siendo lo publico engaño aparente, i lo que obraban abito envejecido, aunque otros a cara descubierta continuaban su idolatria, de que presto veremos exenplar.

6 Dejemos aora a los dos padres, i solo atendamos a las particulares finezas, que en servicio de Dios izo nuestro bendito fray Iuan. Salia (como ya digimos) por los campos, unas vezes en busca de los Indios para dotrinarlos, otras para recogerlos, i muchas para divertirlos de los lugares de sus adoratorios i pacarinas, i ya sabia, que el no venir los Indios el dia q̄ les señalava, de buelta no los ocupava su labrança, sino su idolatria. Salto una vez en busca de sus ovejas por los campos, que como buen pastor, mas le dolia una que se le ausentava, que noventa i nueve que dexava en los apriscos, vagueando por los campos: o llevado de noticia, o de celestial impulso, subio a un adoratorio, i allò un Idolo comun, que los Indios tenían tan venerado como escondido, negándole a las amonestaciones de su Cura, i confesándole por Dios en los sacrificios de su ceguera, allòle, i como si fuese tesoro para el cūdiciofo, o imagen santa para el devoto, así se llenò de regozijo; que al zeloso de la onra de Dios, tanto le glorifica el vicio que destruye, como la presea mejor del Cielo que se álla. Mejor genero de gozo tuvo Santiago, quãdo quitò a Ermogenes Mago la causa de sus errores, que quando vido la gloria en el Tabor, porque si fue en el monte mejor, i divino el objecto, fue gozo apresurado sin merito, antes vista con sobrefaltos, i postre de repreension, i con Ermogenes ganò meritos para si, anima para el Cielo, i gloria para Dios. Ya se que si preguntáramos a nuestro Padre fray Iuan, si trocará el aver allado el Idolo que buscava para destruir, por aver encontrado un rato de gloria en que se pudiera deleytar, renunciára este en que el felo medrara, i estimára lo otro en que la gloria de Dios se pretendia. Cargò el Idolo, i traiale en los braços, para que a vista de sus adoradores pereciese en cenizas, i ellos viesen publico el delito tan

ocultado. Quando el bolvia al pueblo, ivã en gavilla algunos idolatras a su guaca, encontraron su amor en braços de su miedo, i su Dios en poder de su castigo: aqui llévó (les dijo) vuestro Dios de mentira a que perezca en fuego el Idolo, pues padece en fuego el Demonio su autor. No se atemorizaron, ni dieron escusas negando, antes obstinados le pidieron el Idolo, i llenos de ira le llegaron a quitar, el lo defendia con zelo de Dios, i ellos se lo quitavan con rabia bestial. Detestava su diabolico furor, i ellos la ley de Cristo, a breve rato se le sacaron de los braços, i como si el Idolo los oyera, le decian ternuras, i le pedian contra el bendito Sacerdote castigos. Encendióse el zelo de Elias, i con viles improperios baldonò al Idolo, i anatematizò a los idolatras, aperseando su libertad, i encareciendo su descompostura, efectos de última perdicion, i en el de valiente caridad. Revisteseles el Demonio, que quiso que apostasen el zelo Divino con el zelo infernal, i cogiendo palos los unos i piedras los otros, le molieron a palos, i le quebrátaron con piedras, dándole bofetadas i cozes los que no tenían a mano piedras o palos, i continuado a matarle, para lo qual faltava poco, porque estava casi muerto, o quiso el Cielo, o no quiso su suerte, que entonces muriese, para que alli, i a otros aprovechase su vida, queriendo ya acabarle en la tierra, donde le tenían sin abla. Vieron venir dos Españoles, que caminando avian visto de un alto el martirio, i temiendoles mas q̄ a Dios, ni a su proprio Pastor, llevando su Idolo lo dejaron por muerto, i los Españoles llevarò al dicho Religioso a su celda, donde mas triste de no aver muerto por Dios, que ellos de no averle muerto, porque les quitava el suyo, ofrecio su martirio por la conversion de sus ofensores, que sino los ganò todos, devio de rescatar (pareciendose a Cristo) alguno destos ladrones. Veo a san Iuan Evangelista martir en la tina donde murió, i a este Iuan Augustino entre palos, i piedras, dõde sino murió, ganò el merito del martirio, i la onra de Apostolico Pastor. Si a los tres siervos, que el Padre de familias embió a cobrar su deuda, dice Cristo, que al uno apalearon, al otro irieron i al otro apedrearon, en este Padre vemos el merito de los tres,

a Matth. 24.
Alium cor-
derunt, ali-
occiderunt, a-
lium vero la-
pidaverunt.

• pues

a Psalm. 61.
*Quousq; ir-
 ruitis in ho-
 mines? interfi-
 citis univer-
 sū vos: tāquā
 parietē inoli-
 tato, & ma-
 ceria depul-
 sa? Verum a-
 men pretium
 meum cogi-
 taverunt re-
 pellere, eucur-
 ri in siti: cor-
 de suo male-
 dicebant.*

b Istoria de
 Copacava-
 na lib. 1.
 cap. 32.

pues unos le apalean, otros le arrojan piedras, i todos le hieren, siendo aquellas afrentas el caudal de sus mayores onras, i despues de fano le maquinavan otros generos de muertes. Asta quando, ò vosotros endurecidos acometeys furiosos, i heris pertinazes al onbre justo, al Cristo de Dios (decia David *) que se rinde i cae como pared echa de piedras sueltas sin mezcla. Mi precio i joya me querian quitar, (dice David en nonbre del que padecia) corrí sediento mientras me maldecian: todo le ajusta a nuestro buen fray Iuan, que si con facilidad le pudieron derribar como a pared de piedras sin mezcla, la joya i precio de su paciencia no se la pudieron quitar las piedras: su sed veremos presto. Deste suceso aze tambien mencion el Padre Predicador fray Alonso Ramos i en su Istoria, i todos los que ablan desta valentia santa i accion eroica, aclaman aquella fantidad, i confiesan su envidia santa. Fue muy encarecido este echo entonces, i sera colmadamente premiado aora.