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THE HOLY MAN OF ZIA

FRAY ANGELICO CHAVEZ

ONE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY Franciscan of New Mexico to leave a memory of outstanding saintliness was Fray Bernardo de Marta, for some years the minister of Zia Pueblo. Two other notable friars, Fray Asencio de Zárate and Fray Gerónimo de la Llana, had left their crumbling bones at Picuris and Cuarac to be reverently gathered up and enshrined in a stone casket a century later by Governor Marín del Valle.¹ Evidently there was no trace left of Father Bernardo's grave at Zia; otherwise, we can be sure, Marín del Valle would have enshrined his remains also in 1759, for his life was no less prominent in the writings of Vetancurt, which had prompted the Governor to trace down the relics of the other two.

We owe to Vetancurt practically all that we know about good Padre Marta, with small but important addenda by the eighteenth-century archivist of the Franciscan Province of the Holy Gospel of Mexico, Fray Francisco Antonio de la Rosa Figueroa.² Fray Bernardo is of further interest because his brother, Fray Juan de Marta, encountered martyrdom in faraway Japan and was eventually beatified by the Church. The two brothers were accomplished musicians and organists, and Fray Bernardo was a pioneer professional musician in New Mexico.

Fray Bernardo de Marta was a Catalan by birth. He and his brother Juan together joined the Franciscan Province of Santiago in 1597, in the friary of Zamora. After their ordination they decided to go to the Indies in search of martyrdom, having first consulted a holy nun in La Villa de Carrión³ and a local Carthusian

monk likewise noted for his sanctity. They set sail for the New World in 1605, and in the following year, as both brothers were about to embark for the Philippines, a painful separation took place in Mexico City. Fray Juan was allowed to proceed to the Far East, but Fray Bernardo was ordered to remain in America. He accepted this disappointment with exemplary resignation and equanimity. Although Vetancurt states that this specific order assigned him to the Custody of New Mexico, he has him next residing in the city of Puebla. Figueroa indicates more clearly that he was assigned to the friary at Puebla at this time. There he edified his brethren by his unfeigned piety and no less by his musical abilities, so much so that they called him "the organist of Heaven." Some friars claimed to have seen him lost in ecstasy in the great choir of the Puebla friary, or else enjoying sweet colloquies with a Christ-Child carved on the ornate lectern in the middle of the choir. Since he was such a gifted and ardent musician, we can understand how such conduct was not too much out of the ordinary for a sensitive artist. What is extraordinary about Fray Bernardo, over and above his submissive separation from his brother and their mutual goal in the Orient, was his leaving the great organ at Puebla for the raw frontier missions of New Mexico which lacked such a musical luxury. We may presume that he did so willingly.

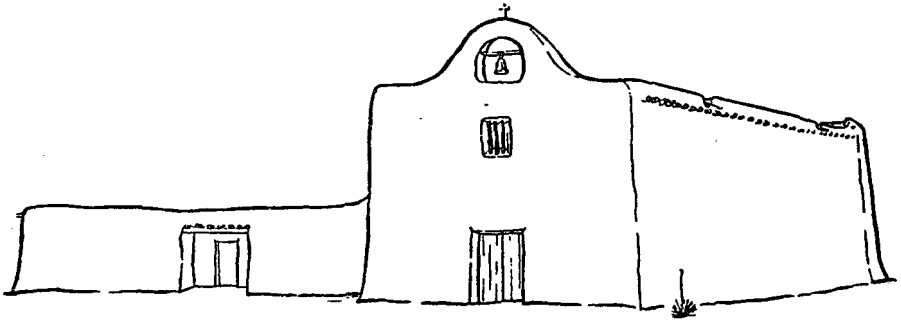
We do not know for sure when he reached New Mexico. Neither Vetancurt nor Figueroa say that it was in 1605, as some have quoted them as saying. Most probably he went there in the years 1609-1610, with a group of missionaries conducted by Fray Alonso Peinado. The first specific mention of him in early New Mexico documents is in the year 1613.⁴ Little is known of his activities from such records, save that he was in charge of Santo Domingo (possibly with Cochiti and San Felipe as *visitas*) in 1613-1614, then of Galisteo in 1615, and finally of Zia from 1616-1617 until his death.⁵ Except for these first years just mentioned, he seems to have avoided completely the acrid quarrels then raging between the Franciscans and the current Spanish governor. The early manuscript that mentions him does have him involved, but

what is said of him is altogether to his credit as a prudent but courageous Franciscan.

A certain Fray Francisco Pérez Guerta wrote to his superiors in Mexico City complaining about the arbitrary conduct of the Father Commissary in New Mexico, Fray Isidro Ordóñez, who not only fulminated savagely against Governor Peralta, but had most of his good friars in a state of shock. There was even strong suspicion that he had forged his papers of appointment as Commissary.⁶ On July 6, 1613, says Pérez Guerta, when the Father Commissary was at his headquarters in Santo Domingo, where Fray Bernardo de Marta was minister, he asked Father Marta how he should proceed with the governor in Santa Fe. Father Marta quietly advised him not to go to Santa Fe, lest he make matters worse and even provoke the governor to shoot him dead. Promptly the Commissary told Father Marta that a "prudent man like himself should not say such things, and with this the friar became silent, and the Father Commissary went to the Villa."⁷ As the result of many scandalous incidents that ensued, perpetrated by the Commissary who persecuted all those who did not go along with his views, much mental and physical suffering was brought upon Pérez Guerta himself and several other exemplary friars, among whom was Fray Bernardo de Marta.⁸

One day Commissary Ordóñez convened several friars at Santo Domingo, when he proposed to go back to Santa Fe and actually put the governor under arrest. Then he asked his subjects for their opinion. Fray Alonso Peinado, an old and greatly venerated missionary, and the principal butt of the Commissary's tyranny, stood up and counseled the utmost caution. He suggested that all the missionaries should leave New Mexico together and repair to Santa Barbara in New Spain. There they would write a formal complaint to the civil and religious authorities in Mexico City, and await a solution to their problem. The Commissary immediately silenced Father Peinado. The other friars said nothing, except Fray Bernardo de Marta. He stood up and, remarked that since he had been summoned to give his opinion he would give it. He seconded Father Peinado's reasoning as being "of utmost

importance." However, writes Pérez Guerta, the Father Commissary had already made up his mind. More scandals in Santa Fe followed. Later, when Father Marta was stationed at Galisteo, a certain Fray Juan Suárez approached him for help. Driven to desperation by the Commissary's mistreatment, Father Suárez had decided to return to New Spain and went to Galisteo to beg for some provisions for the journey. Father Bernardo helped him as best he could, "although first he counseled him most religiously (*santísimamente*) not to do it." Perhaps he suspected that the Commissary, although he had given permission for Father Suárez to leave, was planning to intercept him on the way and arrest him as a religious fugitive.⁹



All in all, Fray Bernardo de Marta emerges from these brief references as a man of prudence, as Ordóñez himself unconsciously testified, as well as a man of quiet courage. Then comes Zia, and no further mention of him in the manuscripts.

As to his musical activities, Fray Bernardo could not have done too much music teaching during his brief stays at Santo Domingo and Galisteo, except for drilling his Indians in a few hymns and psalm chants. He spent some eighteen years in Zia, however, if our computations from Vetancurt and Scholes and Bloom are correct.¹⁰ Did he have at least a rudimentary hand organ on which his tender soul could recall ecstatic hours of long ago in Spain and in Puebla? Perhaps there was one at Zia since Santo Domingo did

have one at this early date. When Peralta's successor, Governor Bernardino de Ceballos, arrived there on his way to Santa Fe, he was received by the Father Commissary with the ringing of the bell, the Eucharist exposed in the open tabernacle, organ music and polyphony—"a repique de campana, el Santmo. Sacramto. abierto, organo y canto de organo."¹¹ Anyway, Fray Bernardo could have taught his flock to play on several kinds of wind instruments which did exist in the missions in those times.¹² But even if he lacked his favorite instrument, Father Marta was the first really professional organist in New Mexico, or at least shares this honor with another friar, Fray Cristóbal de Quirós, who apparently came with him under Father Peinado in 1609-1610.¹³

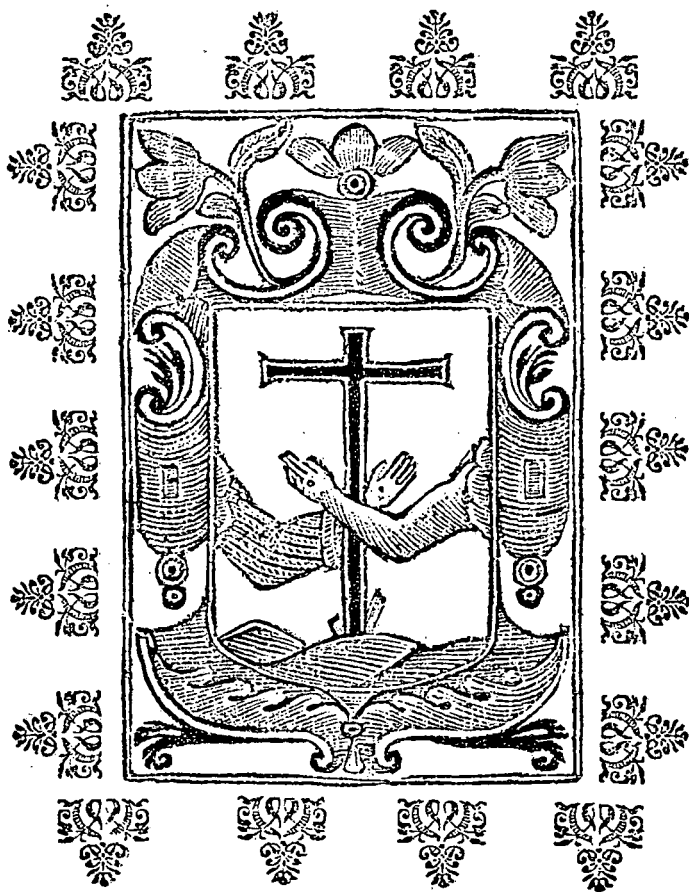
Some further light is thrown on Fray Bernardo's origin and his musicianship by what was written in the Orient concerning his brother Juan. Vetancurt merely states that Fray Juan de Marta was crucified at Meaco (present Kyoto) on August 16, 1618, after four most painful years in prison, adding that his martyrdom is treated by a Padre Llave (*trien.* 12, *cap.* 20), and in the (Franciscan) Martyrology for August 14, and that his beatification was being considered in Rome. Figueroa says that Fray Juan, inspired by the Holy Martyrs of Japan,¹⁴ requested passage to the Philippines, and some years later went on to Japan. After nearly five years of torments in prison, he was crucified at Meaco on August 16, 1618. Fray Diego de San Francisco, the Franciscan Superior of Japan from 1618 to 1632, wrote a more detailed biography of Fray Juan, in which, surprisingly, there is no mention whatsoever of his brother Bernardo.¹⁵ Fray Diego calls him Fray Juan de *Santa Martha*, a variant and probably the original form of the name "Marta." He was born in 1578 at Prades near Tarragona in Cataluña, and from early childhood learned Gregorian chant at the cathedral of Zaragoza, later becoming vice-chantre of the cathedral of Zamora. In 1605 he left for Manila, where he taught chant for a year. Then in 1607 he went to Japan, where he became Superior of the friary at Fushimi near Kyoto, then the capital of Japan. Father Juan did not devote all his time to music. He made a thorough study of the native language and traditions, which un-

doubtedly accounts for his great success in making converts to Christianity. At the instigation of the jealous bonzes he was apprehended on June 12, 1615, and sent to the public prison in Kyoto. There he languished and suffered torture for more than three years, until he was beheaded on August 16, 1618.¹⁶

Even though his name does not appear in this biography, Fray Bernardo must have been the martyr's brother as Vetancurt and Figueroa relate, whatever the slight difference in surname. The error these two writers of New Spain made about Fray Juan's "crucifixion" can be attributed to the fact that their very own Fray Felipe de Jesús had been crucified at Nagasaki not too many years before Fray Juan. The separate accounts written in New Spain and Japan agree and dovetail too well in many details to allow any doubt. Both friars were Catalans, they were similarly trained in music, they entered the Franciscan Order in the same place and year, and they sailed from Spain in the very same year. Perhaps they were very young orphans adopted by cathedral canons for choir service, that they should have wandered at so early an age from the Catalonian east coast to Zaragoza in Aragon, and thence all the way across Spain to Zamora in Leon near the border of Portugal. Or else their family was a migratory one.

Whether Father Bernardo spent eighteen full years of lonely dedication in Zia, teaching his Indians the good life as well as good music, or whether he died there by 1620 as contemporary documents (or rather their silence about him) seem to indicate, we have no way of knowing thus far. It is indeed surprising that Fray Alonso de Benavides does not mention Fray Bernardo de Marta at all in his famous *Memorials*, attracted as he was to recording personalities of this type. Perhaps Fray Bernardo had indeed been dead for more than a decade when Benavides wrote. If he died before the permanent seventeenth-century church was built, this might also explain why there was no trace of his grave in Zia by the end of the century. He might have even passed away, by blessed coincidence, around the same time that his dear brother was beheaded in Japan—the one a martyr of blood to be eventually inscribed in the Church's list of the Blessed, the other an

obscure witness for goodness and beauty who lived on for many decades in the hearts of humble New Mexicans, both Indian and Spanish.



NOTES

1. Fray Angelico Chavez, "The Unique Tomb of Fathers Zárate and de la Llana in Santa Fe," NMHR, vol. 40 (1965), pp. 101-15.

2. Fray Agustín de Vetancurt, *Theatro Mexicano*, vol. 2 (México, 1698), *Menologio Franciscano*, Sept. 18; Fray Francisco Antonio de la Rosa Figueroa, *Bezerro general, menologico y chronologico de todos los religiosos que ha avido en esta Sta. Prova. del Sto. Evango. desde su fundacion hasta el presente año de 1764* (MS in Ayer Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago), p. 126.

3. Sor Luisa de Carrión (1565-1636), a contemporary of Sor María de Ágreda and of the same Order of blue-mantled Conceptionist nuns, resided at the convent of Carrión de los Condes north of Valladolid. During her life she enjoyed a great reputation for sanctity, so much so that, as Father Benavides attests in his *Memorial* of 1630, Fray Francisco de Porrás fearlessly entered the unfriendly Hopi pueblos carrying a cross that had belonged to her, while another missionary treasured her portrait. When the Jumana Indians came to Benavides asking for missionaries, claiming that a woman dressed in blue had appeared to them and taught them the Christian faith, this portrait was shown to them, and the Indians allowed that the vesture was identical although their catechist was a younger and more comely woman. Back in Spain, Benavides convinced himself that this young nun was none other than Sor María de Ágreda (1602-1665) residing in the convent of Ágreda northwest of Zaragoza. In his *Revised Memorial* of 1634 Benavides, strange to say, further declared that Sor Luisa de Carrión had appeared to the Navajo Apaches in the west just as Sor María de Ágreda had done among the Jumanas of the east. For further treatment of these two nuns, see text and notes in P. P. Forrestal and C. J. Lynch, *Benavides' Memorial of 1630* (Washington, D.C., 1954) and F. W. Hodge, G. P. Hammond and A. Rey, *Fray Alonso de Benavides' Revised Memorial of 1634* (Albuquerque, 1945).

4. F. V. Scholes and L. B. Bloom, "Friar Personnel and Mission Chronology," NMHR, vol. 19 (1944), pp. 325-31.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 333-34.

6. *Relacion Verdadera q. el pe. predicador fr. Franco. Perez guerta . . . hizo al Rmo. Comisso. Genl. . . . de las cosas sucedidas en el nuevo Mexco. por los encuentros que tubieron don Pedro de Peralta gor. de la dha prouya. y fr ysidro ordoñez Commo., etc.*, Archivo General de la Nación, México, Inquisición, tomo 316, fols. 149-74. For the hectic Ordóñez episodes see Scholes, *Church and State in New Mexico, 1610-1650* (Albuquerque, 1937), pp. 19-68, based on the above *Relacion*.

7. Pérez Guerta, fol. 159.
8. *Ibid.*, fol. 161v.
9. *Ibid.*, fol. 167.
10. Scholes and Bloom, NMHR, vol. 20 (1945), p. 61.
11. Pérez Guerta, fol. 168.
12. Lincoln Bunce Spiess, "Church Music in Seventeenth-Century New Mexico," NMHR, vol. 40 (1965), pp. 5-21.
13. Lota M. Spell, "Music Teaching in New Mexico," NMHR, vol. 2 (1927), pp. 29-30; gives the first place to Fray Cristóbal de Quiñones who, on the sole testimony of Vetancurt, built the church at San Felipe and installed an organ in it prior to his death in 1609. Figueroa (*Bezerro*, p. 313) carries him over from Vetancurt, as if loath to lose an extra friar. "*Parece profeso en España, murio en Nuevo Mexico, 1609.*" (*Promptuario general y especifico y colectivo de nomenclaturas de todos los religiosos . . . en esta Sta Prova. del Sto. Evangelio . . .* (MS Ex Libris Genaro García, The University of Texas Library, Austin, p. 7). In all probability, Vetancurt meant Fray Cristóbal de Quirós, who, like "Quiñones," was proficient in languages, served as Custos, and was an accomplished musician. See Hodge, Hammond, and Rey, p. 65. A native of Barrameda, Quirós made his profession at Puebla, May 28, 1600 (Figueroa, *Bezerro*, p. 354), and most probably arrived in New Mexico together with Father Marta. Scholes and Bloom, NMHR, vol. 19, p. 331. Incidentally, Pérez Guerta says that Father Quirós sided for a time with Commissary Ordóñez. See note 6, *supra*.
14. A group of twenty-five Franciscans was crucified in rows at Nagasaki, Feb. 5, 1597, the same year that the Marta brothers were inspired to enter the Order! Among them was Fray Felipe de Jesús, a native of Mexico City. They were beatified on Sept. 14, 1627, and canonized on June 8, 1862. See "Peter Baptist (Saint), and Twenty-five Companions," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*.
15. It is contained in Platero's *Catalogo Biographico . . . de la Provincia de S. Gregorio Magno de Philipinas*. This incomplete reference, and items therefrom, were furnished me, June 25, 1957, by Fr. Thomas Uyttenbroeck, O. F. M., missionary in Japan, who was then working on the lives of the martyrs.
16. On July 7, 1867, Pius IX beatified Fray Juan, along with seventeen other Franciscans martyred in Japan between 1617 and 1632. The names are listed in *Acta Ordinis Minorum* (1883), pp. 141-42; beatification, *Acta Sanctae Sedis* (1867), vol. 2, pp. 478-81. The whole group is commemorated in the Franciscan calendar, Sept. 10, under the title: "Bl. Apollinaris and Companions, Martyrs of the First and Third Orders."

Audite filij disciplinam Patris tui. PROV. I.

Timorem Domini docebo vos. PSALM. 33.



Venite filij audite me.