

## Miscellanea

### **Pedro de Alcantara Jiménez: a representative case of the election of bishops in Latin America during the XIXth century**

Summary of: *Un representativo caso de la elección de la Jerarquía episcopal hispano-americana en el siglo XIX*, by Alfonso ESPONERA, O.P., Published in *Studium* (Revista cuatrimestral de filosofía y teología), 29 (1989), 299-328.

This article would have given «immense pleasure» to the author of the biographic and bibliographic dictionary concerning the *writers, artists and scientists of the order of Prémontré*, since the «representative case of the election of the episcopal hierarchy in hispanic America during the XIXth century» is Pedro de Alcantara Jiménez, born in Cantalapiedra in 1782. In 1806, after his studies in the abbey of Valladolid, he was ordained premonstratensian priest. The only thing Goovaerts knew to write about him was that he was the last bishop of Ciudad-Rodrigo, after 1835<sup>1</sup>).

The biography of Jiménez is used by the author of the article to illustrate the relations between Spain and the Holy See concerning the appointment of bishops in Spain and in hispanic America.

Pedro de Alcantara Jiménez left Spain for Latin America in 1810 as a companion of Antonio de Orellana, the appointed bishop of Córdoba in Argentina, who never reached the see he was appointed for and died as a bishop of Avila in 1822. Jiménez worked first secretly as a missionary among the Argentine Indians. Later he went to Rio where he served as a chaplain to the ambassador of Spain in Brazil. The latter probably urged Jiménez to leave for Uruguay.

In 1817, the eastern part of Uruguay was occupied by Brazil. A congress was held in Montevideo in 1821 during which the incorporation of the occupied part of Uruguay was accepted by the local authorities. One of the conditions however was that the above-men-

<sup>1</sup>) Jimenez (Pedro-Alcantara), Prémontré, dernier évêque de Ciudad-Rodrigo, après 1835. Cet évêché fut supprimé par le concordat. Des renseignements sur ce fils de St. Norbert feraient un plaisir immense. (Léon GOOVAERTS, *Écrivains, artistes et savants de l'ordre de Prémontré*, Bruxelles 1899, 421).

tioned territory should be separated from the diocese of Buenos-Aires and should be erected as a new diocese.

In 1828, Jiménez was sent to Europe. In June he arrived in Rome, where he pleaded with the ecclesial authorities for the erection of a new diocese. It was a hard case because of the resistance of the spanish king Ferdinand VII who considered the annexation of east-Uruguay as illegal. The author quotes from the letter written by Jiménez to pope Leo XII in which he argued in favor of the erection of the diocese of Montevideo. The Apostolic See however tried in its politics concerning the new Latin-American Republics not to offend against the spanish crown. The problem was clear, but difficult to solve. It was impossible to appoint diocesan bisshops without offending against Spain, since the crown claimed still its «*ius patronatus*». The appointment of titular bisshops as «apostolic vicars» or «apostolic delegates», could harm the relations with the local authorities. Meanwile the governments of the new Latin-American republics also claimed the «*ius patronatus*», which the Apostolic See refused to grant them.

In general the effect of these troubles was a paralysis of the ecclesiastical government of Spanish Latin-America. The solution preferred by the roman Curia in 1827 was the nomination «*motu proprio*» of diocesan bisshops, through which it denied the claims of both parties. From the end of 1828 onwards they preferred to appoint titular bisshops as «apostolic vicars».

The nounce at the imperial court of Brazil, Pietro Orsini, pleaded for the division of the diocese of Buenos-Aires, and suggested Jiménez as the candidate for the newly proposed see. Also Mariano Medrano, the bisshop of Buenos-Aires was in favor of the division of the territory, but did not consider Jiménez to be the most suitable candidate because of his spanish nationality. In 1830, Jiménez was nominated by pope Pius VIII as «apostolic vicar» for Uruguay, and was ordained titular bisshop of Cinna.

The Uruguayan government disagreed about the nomination of Jiménez, because of his spanish citizanship and because of his previous relations with the brazilian court. They recognized the right of the pope to appoint freely «apostolic vicars», but they argued that the Holy See should not appoint persons who were not wanted by the government. Since the resistance of the civil authorities of Uruguay could not be overcome, Jiménez stayed in Rome, waiting untill there would be a vacant diocese or an office in the roman curia, for which he could be appointed.

The author largely quotes from the correspondence between the Vatican secretary of state, Mons. Tommaso Bernetti and the nounce in Madrid during the year 1831, in which the former recommended Jiménez at the court for a diocese in the spanish empire. In the answer of the nounce Tiberi, Jiménez is described as a member of the Oratorians of St. Phillip Neri! After a long period of negotiations, he was presented in 1832 as a candidate for the diocese of Osma in Spain. Again he was rejected by the spanish government, probably because he was a religious. From 1828 till 1834, Jiménez stayed in Rome as a responsable of the portugese church and its hospital.

In 1834 the archisshop of Valencia asked pope Gregory XVI to give him an auxiliary bisshop. This request furnished the roman authorities with a motive to send Jiménez back to Spain to exercise a worthy office. In the same year, however, the queen-widow Maria Christina, who ruled as regent after the death of Ferdinand VII, nominated Jiménez as bisshop of Puerto Rico. The reasons given for this unexpected nomination were the personal qualities of Jiménez, and the desire to foster the friendly relations between the spanish court and the Apostolic See, by appointing Jiménez to a higher office than the one he was recommended for by the pope. Because of political problems with Don Carlos, who pretended to be the heir of the spanish throne, and opposed against the nominations of bisshops by the court of Madrid, Jiménez was once more restrained of taking possession of his new office.

From 1835 till 1847 the relations between Spain and the Apostolic See were interrupted. After the death of the bisshop of Ciudad Rodrigo the chapter of canons of this diocese received a communication from Jiménez announcing his appointment by the queen-regent to the diocesan see. The canons did not react because of the lack of a pontifical communication. Under pressure of the court, the canons elected Jiménez as «ecclesiastical governor» in november 1836. In march of the following year, Jiménez took possession of his office under the protection of the civil authorities. Chronists described the period of his government, which covered six years, as confused and full of disorder, especially because he illicitly conferred holy orders and because of his intransigency as a defender of the cause of Isabel II. Jiménez deceased february 21 in 1843 and he was, in accordance with the wish of the canons, buried with the honor due to a bisshop who had died while passing through the city.

Esponera concludes his well-documented study stating that the case of Jiménez is exemplary as an illustration of ecclesiastical politics of the spanish court and the Apostolic See. The delay in the nomination of bisshops for vacant sees was an instrument of power, used by the spanish king to save what could be saved in the colonies, since he hoped that the catholics would revolt against their new governments, because of the lack of bisshops. The case also clearly shows the struggle between the roman Curia and the court for the primacy in matters concerning ecclesiastical politics. The whole conflict was slightly concealed by the theories of the «*Ius Publicum Christianum*». The actors in this diplomatical play however, frequently demonstrate their intrests for concrete and immediate results.

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