

Fray Martin de la Ascención and his Theological Explanation of “Papal Military Exercise Rights”

Hirofumi Takahashi

Vice-professor, Faculty of Intercultural Studies, Tomakomai Komazawa University

It is very important and interesting to resolve why and how the Pope could acquire “papal military exercise rights”, or the right to exercise military powers. The aim of this article, therefore, is to consider the paradigm of this right with a close analysis of *Relación de las cosas de Japón para Nuestro Padre Fray Francisco Arezubiaga, Comisario General de todas las Indias en corte*, written by Fray Martin de la Ascención in Japan in 1596.

Medieval Popes engaged in military activities not only independently but also proactively because at that time they played a role of secular and political importance in their exercise of temporal powers. Papal military activities, therefore, were very important issues to catholic missionaries who preached the word of God in Japan in late 1590s. According to Ascención, Jesus Christ devolved all authorities and powers upon the pope with the inevitable result that the pope, as Vicar of Christ, could use every means possible to achieve Pax Dei. Ascención’s theological theory united the political and religious powers of the pope and authorized him to use the papal military powers.

However, as the pope recognized as the holy presence, the Pope Clemens VIII had to avoid using military force as much as possible and therefore needed to find a secular monarch who would undertake pontifical duties, particularly temporal ones, including military activities. Pope Clemens VIII selected the Spanish king, Felipe II, to do so. Thus it was that the pope could exercise papal military rights without getting his own hands dirty.

The pope is the Bishop of Rome, Vicar of Jesus Christ and Successor of the Prime of the Apostles. Despite of these sacred titles, popes of early modern times was, against Christ’s will, involved in military affairs such as organizing papal soldiers, lending war funds to secular monarchs in Western Europe, etc., which required much of their annual income. We have had considerably “militant” popes such as Gregorius IX, Paulus III and Clemens VIII. With the pope as military ruler of the sacred world, wars were justifiable, and as a consequence, Christian ethics and morals were prevented from putting an end to wars.