

**JOSE G. BURGOS**  
(1837-1872)

Advocate of the Secularization Movement

Jose Apolonio Burgos was born in Vigan, Ilocos Sur on February 9, 1837. He was the youngest of the three children of Jose Burgos, a Spanish officer of the *Batallon Milicias* in Ilocos and Florencia Garcia, an Ilocana.

Burgos' full name was Jose Apolonio but he seldom used the name Apolonio so he became known as Jose. Orphaned at the age of ten, he was sent to the Colegio de San Juan de Letran, where he excelled in academics and extra curricular activities like boxing and fencing. On February 11, 1855, he obtained his *Bachiller en Filosofia* with high honors. At the University of Santo Tomas, Burgos pursued *Bachiller en Teologia*, which he finished on January 21, 1851 at the top of his class. After graduation, he was taken as parish priest at the Sagrario de Intramuros, where he had his first scolding by his superiors because of his liberal ideas.

While serving his term in Intramuros, Burgos continued his pursuit of knowledge. On August 11, 1860, the young cleric returned to his alma mater for further studies. He finished his master's degree, *Licenciado en Teologia*, on February 21, 1862. His performance, like his bachelor days in the UST, once again proved that Filipinos were as good as the Spaniards. In the same university, he finished the following: *Bachiller en Canones* (February 8, 1866); *Doctor en Teologia* (April 14, 1868); *Licenciado en Canones* (October 29, 1868); and *Doctor en Canones* (April 1871).

Highly qualified, Burgos was given professorial position at the San Juan de Letran and at the University of Santo Tomas where he was designated as master of claustral ceremonies. He also became a member of the examining boards for priests. Despite knowing the possible consequence of criticizing the government and the church, Burgos did not play deaf and dumb to the abuses and discriminations of the Spanish authorities to the Filipinos, including to the native priests. During those days, the native priests were already losing their parishes to the Spanish priests under the decrees of 1861. He was also a known advocate of putting more Filipinos in the clergy, and a close associate of Father Pedro Pelaez, who was spearheading the secularization movement. Burgos continued what Pelaez had started in the movement when the latter died in the earthquake in 1863.

To the Spanish priests, Burgos and other known critics of the Church were marked men. They had their chance to get rid of them when a mutiny at the arsenal in Cavite took place on January 20, 1872. Although the mutiny was easily quelled, the authorities took it as a wide scale rebellion against them so they effected arrests to suspected Filipinos. The priests, who have strong influence in the government, were able to implicate Burgos, together with Fathers Mariano Gomes and Jacinto Zamora, as instigators of the mutiny. The three priests were arrested and were placed under trial on February 15, 1872 by the military court under Col. Francisco Moscoso. Burgos was given a defense attorney, Jose Arrieta, who instead incriminated his client by stating that his client had confessed his guilt about the mutiny. Burgos defended himself to no avail.

On February 16, 1872, the military court reached a verdict. Major Boscoso read the decision on the three priests: death by garrote. At sunrise the next day, spectators flocked at Bagumbayan and watched the three priests garbed in their priestly habits marched to their execution. Before this, Governor-General Rafael de Izquierdo had requested Manila Archbishop Gregorio Meliton Martinez to forbid the priests from wearing their habits at the execution as they ceased to be ministers of God but the Archbishop who believed of their innocence declined.

Burgos was the last to be executed. Before he took his place at the execution bench, he uttered forgiveness to Major Boscosa, saying: "I forgive you, and may God forgive you as I have forgiven you." Father Burgos continued, "But what wrong have I done? Shall I die without reason? My God is there no justice at all on earth?" He turned to the people and gave his blessings. Death

cut short his prayer of entrusting his soul to the Almighty. Soon after, Church bells tolled in the city.

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