

UST Professors and Martyrs: A Destiny of Christian Witnessing*

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A major event bound to be in focus throughout most of the world this year is the expected beatification of sixteen martyrs who died for the Christian faith in Nagasaki, Japan, in the fourth decade of the 17th century. Even as the Beatification Cause was still under study, the Holy Father gave to understand that, the solemn declaration of blessedhood would be made during his planned visit to the Philippines.

The choice of Manila as the site of the beatification rites is a total novelty. This will be the first time in the history of the Church that such a formal declaration is done outside of the Papal place of residence. Manila has more than one reason to be selected for the honors, for instance, the fact that for the first time a Filipino is proposed for the honors of the altars: Lorenzo Ruiz. A rather unknown but interesting feature of the Cause is the additional fact that five of the candidates for the altars belonged to the academic world of Manila, precisely to the University of Santo Tomas.

The combination of “doctor and martyr,” of professor and martyr, of professionally intellectual and martyr, seems to be quite rare in the catalogue of the saints of the Church. A glimpse at the sanctoral will show in the primitive Church a St. Justin, philosopher and martyr, a St. Ignatius, St. Ireneus or St. Cyprian, profound theologians and martyrs, and, in the

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Renaissance period, a St. Thomas More, humanist and martyr, but the most “popular” martyrs do not belong to the rank of professional thinkers, and the greatest Doctors of the Church, including the early Fathers, died without the pain of martyrdom.

The coincidence of both titles in some of the 17 martyrs of Nagasaki may, therefore, come as a pleasant surprise. It is true that their teaching profession and their martyrdom are not concomitant neither in time nor in motivation; these martyrs were not put to death in the act of teaching nor for the specific reason of being university professors, but they were professors – and one student – who exchanged the classroom for the mission field at the risk of giving their lives in testimony of what they had taught.

The four professors under our consideration belonged to the *claustr*o of the *Colegio* (now University) of Santo Tomas of Manila. They were Fr. Domingo Ibáñez de Erquicia, Fr. Lucas del Espíritu Santo, Fr. Antonio González and Fr. Guillermo Courtet. The student was Fr. Tomás de San Jacinto. They all lived in the last decade of the sixteenth century and the first four of the seventeenth, a period of Christian renewal in Europe and of missionary adventure in America and Asia, including the Philippines and Japan.

Saints, besides being so in imitation of Christ and for their own good, are symbols and models for the edification of the people of God. Our five martyrs symbolize the academician committed to the discovery, interpretation and dissemination of truth with a commitment so total and so sincere that they were ready to lay down their lives for the love of God’s truth. Actually such commitment is implied in the very nature of a Catholic university, and therefore, it weighs heavily on the vocation and conduct of every Catholic professor. As His Holiness Pope John Paul II said in a gathering of Catholic professors and students at Mexico, “the Catholic University must be an environment in which Christianity is alive and operating... That presupposes a revision of the figure of the professor who cannot be considered a mere transmitter of knowledge, but also and above all, a witness and educator to true Christian life.”¹ Witness, above all.

¹ *L’Osservatore Romano*, English Ed., 19 February 1979.

The Infant University

Before drawing a brief sketch of the academic life and of the martyrdom of our professors and martyrs, we might well begin by presenting a picture of the institution which formed them and which, in some measure, they helped to build, the University of Santo Tomas.

From the point of view of its historical development, this university was at that time a mere miniature of what it is today. Strictly speaking, it was not granted University status and title until 1645, when Pope Innocent X declared it so by the Pontifical Bull *In supereminenti*.² Before that date, it had lived thirty four years as a modest College with university prerogatives; a local missionary enterprise of intellectual character, much in conformity with the objectives and ideals of the Dominican Order. The Foundation Act goes back to the year 1611 (April 28), but the construction of the building was not finished until 1619, in which year classes were formally opened for twelve *becarios* (scholars) or interns and an undetermined number of external students.³

The first fifteen years of the life of this College are of special interest to us because our martyrs lived and taught in it during that period. Unfortunately, the academic records of those initial years are very scanty. A few pertinent facts, however, can be ascertained. First, the faculties created were three, namely, Grammar (Humanities), Arts (Philosophy) and Theology. Second, the Statutes adopted from the very beginning were those of the University of Mexico, which were in also copied substantially from the statutes of the University of Salamanca. Those Statutes were adapted to Philippine conditions by Fr. Domingo González, a man who knew personally and intimately all our martyrs. Third, right from the start, the College enjoyed certain university privileges and prerogatives in virtue of

² Original Ms. in the Archives of the University of Santo Tomas (hereunder quoted as AUST), Sec. "Documentos Especiales"; published in ALBERTO SANTAMARIA, *Documentos históricos de la Universidad de Santo Tomás*, Manila 1937, pp. 31-35.

³ Original Ms. in AUST, *Libros* 48, fols. 10-19; the text of the foundation Act can be seen in *Unitas*, September 1934, pp. 137-144. On the first years of the College see A. SANTAMARIA, *Estudios históricos de la Universidad de Santo Tomás*, Manila 1938, pp. 53-55, 70-71.

the Apostolic Brief *Carissimi in Christo*⁴ of Pope Paul V (1619), which granted, to all institutions of high learning entrusted to the Dominican Order in the Indies, the faculty to confer degrees in Philosophy and Theology under certain conditions. This grant was valid for ten years, and, as for the Colegio de Santo Tomas was concerned, was renewed in 1629 and 1639.

The people of the seventeenth century were as punctilious about technicalities, due process and legal requirements as we are in the twentieth century. Such was the case with the public recognition of university studies. A “technical” problem that arose just after the foundation of this College of Santo Tomas will help us to evaluate the institution our martyrs knew and the kind of education they were expected to impart. The Papal Bull *Charissimi in Christo* of 1619 could not be enforced anywhere until the King of Spain gave his *pase regio* or Royal approval of the Bull for the Indies, a right granted to the Spanish monarchs by the Holy See under the system of the *Patronato Real*.

When the Royal *Cedula*⁵ authorizing the publication of the Papal Bull and the granting of academic decrees arrived in Manila in 1625, six years had elapsed in which the curricula had been offered at the College with all the seriousness and thoroughness of a university proper. Fr. Domingo Ibáñez de Erquicia and Fr. Lucas del Espíritu Santo had been among the professors. However, scruples of conscience began to bother the College authorities as to whether the studies so far made with so much labour would entitle the students to graduation. Playing safe, in order to dispell any doubts about the legality of the degrees to be granted the administration decided to impose upon professors and students a very hard burden: to repeat all the courses so far given.

Actually the Papal Bull was then enforced “with such rigor that even those students who had completed their philosophical and theological courses had to enroll again in Arts (Philosophy) and had to repeat the courses as many years as required for graduation, undergoing with all

⁴ A Ms. Authenticated copy is in AUST, *Becerrolos* 41, fol. 4; published in A. SANTAMARIA, *Documentos históricos*, pp. 4-5.

⁵ *Recopilación de las Leyes de los Reynos de las Indias*, Libro I tit. 22, Ley 53 (Ed. Madrid 1841, I, p. 137); printed in A. SANTAMARIA, *Documentos históricos*, pp. 6-7.

seriousness and formality the *quodlibeta*⁶ and the other literary acts, in the same manner as in the University of Mexico; for which reason, those who have graduated from this College are very few and very selected." In case future generations would find hard to believe it, this repetition courses was placed on record in 1631, attested to under oath by several prominent citizens of Manila, at a public hearing held during the rectorship of Fr. Domingo González.⁷

From the foregoing data, it is clear that the Colegio de Santo Tomas strived, from the initial years, to offer to the youth of the Islands an education in the humanities and in the sacred sciences at levels comparable to those of Europe and the Hispanic America. We do not have the complete rolls of professors and students in those years, but degrees recognized by the State and by the Church were certainly granted before 1631. Between the years 1631 and 1636 (period of teaching of Fr. Antonio González and Fr. Guillermo Courtet), at least 13 students graduated as Bachelors, Masters and Doctors, to mention only those whose graduations can be supported by surviving University records.⁸

The fragmentary records preserved are not much of a help to reconstruct the manifold aspects of the life of that little college. The full text of the Statutes, the routine life, methods of teaching, ideas of the professors, particular subjects taught, textbooks or notes used, academic and extracurricular exercises, religious life, etc., are missing. Yet various contemporary narratives on other related matters, events or institutions and some details in the biographies of our martyrs permit us to know some interesting insights into their life in the College, in preparation for their missionary and heroic adventure in Japan.

⁶ The *Quodlibeta*, much in vogue in medieval scholasticism, were free discussions on all sorts of philosophical and theological subjects. The scholastic system of lecturing theology remained substantially unaltered for centuries and it was done in three stages: *lectio*, in which the text was read; *quaestio*, a commentary thereupon; and *disputatio*, when the students and masters together criticized the thesis. The *quodlibetum* was an extension of the *disputatio*.

⁷ The original text of this document is in AUST, *Libros* 37, fols. 36-42; cf. my article "The first graduates (1629-1663)", foreword to *UST Graduate Listing*, Manila 1972, pp. VIII.

⁸ For more particulars on the first graduates of the University, see my article cited in the previous note.

The Professors

Fr. Domingo Ibáñez de Erquicia

Fr. Domingo Ibáñez de Erquicia,⁹ a Spaniard from the Basque of Guipúzcoa, who was almost 22 years of age, arrived in the Philippines in 1611, in the same year that Colegio de Santo Tomas was founded. A year later he was ordained priest, after completing his theological studies at the Convento de Santo Domingo, a formal House of Studies; then he was sent to the missions of Pangasinan. In 1619 – the year when classes were started at the Colegio – Fr. Erquicia was recalled to Manila and for two years he worked in the church of Binondo among the Chinese and Filipinos of that young *pueblo* (founded in 1594). It is not far-fetched to suppose that Fr. Erquicia knew a Filipino born in that *pueblo* at the beginning of the century, Lorenzo Ruiz, future martyr of Japan and now also candidate for beatification. Lorenzo was a houseboy in the *convento* and sacristan in the church of Binondo



REV. FR. DOMINGO IBÁÑEZ DE ERQUICIA, O.P., Spanish
Professor of Theology at the Colegio de Santo Tomas
Martyred in Japan on August 14, 1633

⁹ Born in Régil (Guipúzcoa, Spain) in 1589, Domingo Ibáñez de Erquicia entered the Dominican Order in 1605. After arriving in the Philippines in 1611, he worked as missionary in Pangasinan until 1619 when he was called to Manila. He taught theology at the Colegio de Santo Tomas. In 1623 he left for Japan and displayed a marvelous zeal and spirit of sacrifice amidst the anti-Christian persecution, until he was arrested in July 1633. Brought to Nagasaki and refusing to renounce his faith in spite of many inducements and offers made by the judges, he was executed on August 14, 1633 in the torment of the *gallows on the pit*, the first European on record to have undergone this kind of mortal torture. – For a complete biography of Erquicia, cf. *Nagasakien. seu Macaon. seu Manilen. Beatificationis seu declarationis martyrii Servorum Dei Dominici Ibáñez de Erquicia, O.P. et XVI Sociorum in odium fidei, uti fertur, annis 1633-1637 interfectorum, Positio super introductione Causae et Martyrio ex officio concinnata*, Sacra Congregatio pro Causis Sanctorum, Romae 1979, pp. 26-88. This work, which collects and examines all documents bearing on the life and martyrdom of the 17 martyrs of Nagasaki and serves as the basis for the examination of the 'Beatification' Cause, will be quoted hereunder as *Positio*.

and even presuming that in 1619 Lorenzo did not hold those jobs anymore, he was still a *cofrade* of the Holy Rosary, that is, an active and devout parishioner.

In 1621, Fr. Erquicia received a new assignment at Santo Domingo Convent, that of Examiner of candidates for the office of confessor for Spaniards and for natives.¹⁰ During the next three years, he was known throughout the city of Manila as a preacher of “great talents, virtue and science,” and besides, “he taught Theology at the Colegio of Manila,” that is, the Dominican College of Santo Tomas. This simple, laconic information about his professorship is totally reliable, because it comes to us from no other source than the Rector of the same college, Fr. Domingo González.¹¹

Fr. Lucas del Espíritu Santo

The second martyr associated with the University of Santo Tomas is Fr. Lucas del Espíritu Santo, another Spaniard from the province of Zamora and the Diocese of Astorga.¹² He was twenty four years of age when he arrived in the Philippines in 1618, in a *barcada*¹³ which

¹⁰ Cf. *Acta Capitulum Generalium Provinciae Sanctissimi Rosarii Philippinarum Ordinis Praedicatorum*, Manila 1874, I, pp. 119,121.

¹¹ DOMINGO GONZALEZ, O.P., *Relación del ilustrísimo martirio de los Padres Fray Antonio González... y compañeros... el año pasado de 1637*, Manila 1638; reprinted in *Positio*, p. 439.

¹² Fr. Lucas del Espíritu Santo was born in Carracedo (Zamora, Spain) in 1594. After professing in the Dominican Order in the Convent of Santo Domingo, in Benavente, 1611, he left for the Philippines, where he arrived in 1618. He was first assigned to the missions of Abuatan and Pilitan, in the Cagayan Valley (near Ilagan, Isabela). He taught philosophy in the College of Santo Tomas, Manila, around the year 1622. In 1623 he left for Japan in the company of Fr. Domingo I. de Erquicia. His apostolate in Japan lasted for ten years, zealously working among the persecuted Christians. He travelled far and wide, always disguised in many forms. In his last apostolic journey he reached the northernmost end of the island of Honshu, and turning back to the south he was arrested in Osaka on September 8, 1633 with a group of Dominican and Jesuit companions. They were taken to Nagasaki together. On October 18 he was hanged from the *gallows on the pit*, dying the following day. His executioners, enraged at having failed to make him apostatize, dismembered his body with *katana* blows before burning it. For a fuller biography of Fr. Lucas del Espíritu Santo, see *Positio*, pp. 197-212 and documents cited therein.

¹³ *Barcada*, a group of missionaries who, volunteering to go to the missions of America or the Far East, travelled together in the same galleon. Almost every year the Aca-pulco Galleon brought to the Philippines a *barcada* of one or other religious Institute.



REV. FR. LUCAS DEL ESPÍRITU SANTO, O.P., Spanish
Professor of Philosophy at the Colegio de Santo Tomás
Martyred in Japan on October 19, 1633

included his future companion of apostolate and martyrdom in Japan, Blessed Luis Beltrán Exarch.

Fr. Lucas' first mission field from 1618 was the Cagayan Valley where he worked in two posts, Pilitan and Abuatan, at that time belonging to the Diocese of Nueva Segovia and now to that of Ilagan, in the province of Isabela. From those northern missions he was sent back to Manila about 1620 where he stayed until 1623, the year of his departure for Japan. From 1621 to 1623, he held the post of Lector of Arts or Professor of Philosophy at the Colegio de Santo

Tomás. Again this fact is totally certain,¹⁴ though no details can be found about his professorial life.

Fr. Antonio González

Fr. Antonio González,¹⁵ a native of the city of León in Spain, arrived in the Philippines in 1632 at the age of thirty nine. The

¹⁴ His professorship is attested by fellow professors in the College in an *Información Jurídica* or public hearing held in 1649 in Manila at the request of the Rector of the University of Santo Tomás (Ms. AUST, *Libros* 37, fols. 1-14). It is also affirmed by the contemporary historian DIEGO ADUARTE, O.P. *Historia de la Provincia del Santo Rosario de Filipinas*, Ed. Madrid 1962, II, p. 217.

¹⁵ Fr. Antonio González was born in the historic city of León, Spain, in 1593. After studying in the Diocesan Seminary he entered the Dominican Order in the same city. At the conclusion of his ecclesiastical career he obtained the degree of Lector of Theology, and taught this sacred science. Moved by the ideal of being a missionary in Japan, he left Spain and arrived in the Philippines in 1632. He taught theology at the College of Santo Tomás until 1636. He held the posts of Acting Rector of the same college and of Vicar Provincial of the Dominicans in the islands. In 1636 he left for Japan, was arrested in Okinawa and taken to Nagasaki after one year in prison. Subjected to inhuman tortures to make him apostatize, he died in prison as a consequence of the torments on September 24, 1637. For a short but scholarly biography of Fr. Antonio, see A. SANTAMARIA, "Un Rector y un Professor Mártires" in *Estudios históricos*, pp. 121-131; for a fuller biography, see Positio, pp. 345-353, 374-379, and documents cited therein.

missionary *barcada* of the Acapulco galleon of that year also brought the future protomartyr of China, the Dominican Blessed Francisco de Capillas. Fr. Antonio's life in Spain had been quite remarkable, for he had earned the degree of Lector of Theology and taught this science at the convent of Piedrahita (Avila); he had been Student Master and had preached God's word through many provinces of Spain. From his young years as a religious he had conceived the idea of going to the foreign missions and be a martyr for Christ in Japan.

To Japan he would certainly go, but not immediately after his arrival in the Philippines. Voyages to Japan were the most risky venture a Christian could undertake from the Philippines; they had to be carefully prepared long beforehand through costly and difficult dealings with Chinese merchants, as no Spanish ship would be allowed to enter Japan. The Superior Provincial of the Dominicans Fr. Francisco de Herrera had managed to send in 1629 a Japanese Dominican, Fr. Tomas de San Jacinto and in 1632 (about the time of the arrival in Manila of Fr. Antonio's *barcada*) two more priests, namely, Fr. Jacobo de Santa María and Fr. Jordán de San Esteban. These three priests would soon be martyrs, and now they are also included in the same Beatification Cause.



REV. FR. ANTONIO GONZALEZ, O.P., Spanish
Rector and Professor of Theology at the Colegio de Santo Tomas
Martyred in Japan on September 24, 1637

Father Antonio had to wait for another occasion. During the waiting period he could adapt himself to the oriental conditions and could learn the fundamentals of the Japanese language. Meanwhile, "he was assigned to teach theology and to preach, and he fulfilled both tasks as was expected from him."¹⁶ In fact, he taught theology

¹⁶ DOMINGO GONZALEZ, *Relación del ilustrísimo martirio*, as reprinted in *Philippiniana Sacra*, XII (Jan.- April, 1977), 34, p. 200; *Positio*, p. 348.

during three years at the university-college of Santo Tomas. His assignment as professor appears in the official proceedings of the Dominican Provincial Chapters held in 1633 and 1635, in which he is called “Lector of Theology”.¹⁷

He took up residence in the same college, and probably, for some time, also in the convent of Santo Domingo. The mention of his residence is important because he lived closely associated with a person who has bequeathed us precious details of information about him. This person is Fr. Domingo González, ex-Rector of the Colegio de Santo Tomas and now Superior Provincial.

We do not need to search much among academic records in order to know the personality of Father Antonio. It is possible to penetrate deeply in the sanctuary of his soul through the biographical sketch written by his confidant Fr. Domingo González. This sketch is so detailed and intimate that we can reasonably suppose that the author was Fr. Antonio’s spiritual director or, at least, that he possessed some spiritual diary written by the martyr himself. What kind of man, priest and religious was he? What feelings and aspirations characterized his soul? How did he organize his time? From the biographer’s notes we will draw here a summary of his daily occupations:

- Morning 5:00 – Rising. Acts of thanksgiving, his whole body prostrated on the floor.
- Community prayer in choir, for one hour. He flogged himself with the discipline.
 - Retiring to his room, he prayed one chaplet of the Rosary on his knees, for the souls in Purgatory.
 - Morning prayers of the Divine Office.
 - Study.
 - Interior preparation for the Holy Mass. Examination of conscience and, some days, sacramental confession.
 - Holy Mass and thanksgiving, praying for the ecclesiastical and civil authorities.

¹⁷ *Acta Capitulorum Provincialium*, I, pp. 166,167.

Noon 12:00– Community meal.

- Recreation with the community in spirit of obedience and fraternal charity.
- Retire to his cell. Second chaplet of the Rosary for those in mortal sin.
- Brief siesta.

1:00 – Rise and prayer of thanksgiving prostrated in *venia*.

- Meditation for one hour with the community.
- Vespers.
- Spiritual reading.
- Study.
- Class and academic acts.

Evening

- Supper with the community.
- Matins in choir with the community.
- Third chaplet of the Rosary on his knees and with prostrations, praying for the conversion of Japan and other pagan countries.
- Study until 11:00.

Night 11:00 – Prayer for one hour, flogging himself with the discipline.

- Fulfill again the sacramental penance, adding other penitential acts for the defects of the day; with arms outstretched he prayed for the Church and for the conversion of the pagans.

12:00 – Prostrated in *venia*, he prayed for a good repose.

- Rest on a wooden board.

“In this way – Domingo González concludes – he rested until dawn to rise up and resume the same prayers and exercises the following day.”¹⁸

The above-summarized biographical sketch was written a few months after Father Antonio’s death and the biographer was perhaps more interested in the ascetic and devotional life of the martyr than in his academic achievements. The time-table reveals a soul in constant communion with God and a theologian drawing from the living waters of faith and contemplation the needed nourishment for his study and his teaching just as the most authentic of theologians like St. Thomas Aquinas have done.

Father Antonio was not totally enclosed in a mystical world without regard for the affairs of men. For some time he was in charge of the government of the Dominican Order in the Philippines, as Vicar Provincial, in the absence of the Superior Provincial. He was involved – both personally and in representation of his confreres – in the clamorous conflict between the Governor of the Philippines, Don Sebastian Hurtado de Corcuera on one hand and the Archbishop of Manila, Don Hernando Guerrero, and the religious Orders on the other. Both authorities clashed in 1636 over matters of jurisdiction, and the conflict ended with the banishment of the Archbishop and the excommunication of the governor. Fr. Antonio González did not hesitate to denounce the Governor from the pulpit of the cathedral – in the presence of Corcuera – for the latter’s encroachment in the spiritual affairs of the Church.¹⁹

In April 1636 the Rector of the Colegio de Santo Tomas, Fr. Francisco de Herrera, was elected Prior of Santo Domingo Convent, leaving the rectorship vacant. Fr. Antonio, as Lector Primarius of Theology, became *ex officio* Rector until the appointment of Fr. Herrera’s successor. His tenure of office, attested by at least two contemporary

¹⁸ The full text of Fr. Antonio González’s daily schedule is in D. GONZALEZ, *Relación*, pp. 198-206; *Positio*, pp. 349-351.

¹⁹ On Fr. Antonio’s denunciation of Governor Corcuera, see ANTONIO DE LA LLAVE O.F.M., *Crónica de la Santa Provincia de San Gregorio de Filipinas... desde el año 1625*, Ms. of the Franciscan Archives of the Province of St. Gregory, Madrid, Sign. R 10/12, fols. 430v-432v; *Positio*, p. 473.

documents, lasted for two months only, until his departure for Japan on June 10, 1636.²⁰ On that day, upon the recommendation of the Provincial Council and in fulfillment of a life-long dream, our Rector and Professor left the Philippines on a journey that would end in martyrdom.

Fr. Guillermo Courtet

Fr. Guillermo (Guillaume) Courtet, in the Philippines called by the adopted religious name of Fr. Tomas de Santo Domingo, is the fourth professor and martyr to be beatified. He is one of the very few French Dominicans ever to have come to the Philippines and certainly, the only one to have preached the Gospel in Japan with the crown of martyr. He was 45 years old when he set foot on these shores and his previous biographical data are rather scanty and somewhat obscure.²¹



REV. FR. GUILLERMO COURTET, O.P., French
Professor of Theology at the Colegio of Santo Tomas
Martyred in Japan on September 29, 1637

A native of Sérignan, near Béziers, in southern France, he joined the Dominican Order at the

²⁰ Cf. A. SANTAMARIA, "Un Rector y Un Profesor Mártires", in *Estudios Históricos*, p. 124.

²¹ Fr. Guillermo Courtet was born in Sérignan (Hérault, France). The main highlights of his biography are given in the text above. Fr. Courtet is the only French Dominican ever to have taught at the University of Santo Tomas of Manila. From Manila in 1636 he travelled to Japan with some companions including Fr. Antonio Gonzalez and the Filipino layman Lorenzo Ruiz. With them he was arrested in Okinawa and, after one year in prison, he was taken to Nagasaki on September 13, 1637. For fourteen days he underwent many tortures, and on September 27 he was put in the mortal torment of the *gallows on the pit*. On September 29, he was extracted from the pit and was beheaded. – For a short but scholarly biography, see A. SANTAMARIA, "Un Rector y un Profesor Mártires", in *Estudios históricos*, pp. 124-131. For a more documented biography, see *Positio*, pp. 353-362, 374-379 and documents cited therein and bibliography on Courtet.

age of 16, and, having finished his ecclesiastical studies, he received the degree of Lector of Theology. For some years he taught theology at the convent of St. Maximin and then he became Prior of the historic convent of Avignon. The dramatic martyrdom of the 26 Protomartyrs of Japan in 1597, which was widely published in Europe, enkindled his missionary zeal. He begged to go to the Far East, took the road to Spain and embarked in Seville in 1634.

The *barcada* that brought him to the Philippines is known in the Dominican chronicles as the *barcada de los barbones* (*barcada* of the bearded ones), because the 23 religious aboard let their beards grow during the voyage as a sign of their intention and determination to go to Japan and China as missionaries. For most of them it was not to be so, because the Superiors here in the Philippines disagreed with the plans of the organizer of the *barcada*, Fr. Diego Collado, whose momentary success in dividing the Dominican Province with the help of Governor Corcuera ended in failure.²²

Humbly submitting to the dispositions of his Superiors, Fr. Courtet accepted to be assigned to the Colegio de Santo Tomas as Lector of Theology, sharing the professorial chair with two other theologians, Fr. Antonio González, and a much younger professor, Fr. Sebastián de Oquendo, the latter to be known as one of the most remarkable theologians in the Islands in that century.

As in the case of Fr. Antonio González, we are quite lucky to possess some precious details of information about the personal life of Fr. Courtet through the narrative of his companion and Superior Fr. Domingo González. "While waiting for his departure for Japan – Domingo González writes – he taught Theology at the College of Manila with much advancement of his pupils and of the others who lived in the same college, because, aside from being very learned, he appeared very holy to all, both friars and laymen ... Deeply absorbed in contemplation, he was rather taciturn, as one whose conversation was not on earth but in heaven."²³

²² On the *barcada* of Fr. Courtet and companions and on the problems raised by their leader Fr. Diego Collado, see D. ADUARTE, *Historia*, II, pp. 510-516.

²³ D. GONZALEZ, *Relación*, p. 211.

If he was taciturn, he was certainly not a dumb man when discussing theological topics during the public sessions of the Faculty of Theology. This can be gathered from an edifying anecdote narrated by Domingo González to underline his profound sense of humility. "One day he had a (public) discussion with a co-professor of Theology, much younger than he, about academic matters, without exchanging hot or intemperate words, which were always far from his mind. He thought that his persistence in the argumentation had been excessive and so, right there, before the session was over and in front of many friars and laymen, he prostrated himself in *venia* and asked pardon to his colleague, leaving everybody edified and his colleague confused by such an act of humility."²⁴ The session in question seems to have been an *Acto Mayor* or Theological Disputation to which all professors and students, and even guests, attended and participated in.

Fr. Courtet's professorship of only one year (1635-1636) did not distract him from his ideal of being a missionary in Japan, possibly a martyr; rather it served as a preparation to strengthen his soul for the battles ahead. A biographical outline of his, drawn with evident admiration by his confidant Fr. Domingo González, unfolds before us an ardent apostolic soul matured by a life of high contemplation and astonishingly rigorous asceticism. There is no substitute for the words of the biographer:

"In addition to the two hours of prayer which in this (Dominican) Province are performed in common every day, Father Guillermo customarily added many more. In order to have more time for this holy exercise, during the last twenty years of his life he did not remove his habit during sleep and he rested not on a bed but on a chair, so that his sleep was always light and always easy to interrupt for prayer. There are many and painfully biting mosquitoes in this land, but he never applied against them the remedy used by everybody, which is the mosquito net;

²⁴ D. GONZALEZ, *Ibid.*; *Positio*, p. 361.

and he offered to the Lord their bites, and this was no little mortification and act of penance. However, wonders at his despising the mosquito bites when he often used, tight by the flesh, a girdle with fifteen rosettes (in honor of the Holy Virgin of the Rosary and of the fifteen mysteries of the rosary) with such pointed barbs that they drew blood from the fingertips upon slight contact? He also often used a steel chain which, by constant use, was burnished and shiny. Moreover, on occasions he wore a skin-tight hair shirt provided with iron barbs so big and sharp that made shudder and shiver anyone who would see it.

“He was very frugal at meals. It was his custom to eat for three days of every week only a little bread and water with some fruits. This was also his practice during Lent and Advent, except on Sundays when he took some viand. Many people were awestruck how with so little food could he work so hard and pray almost the whole night long in the chapel, where he went to give himself some ardent floggings with a discipline of six strands of iron chains and thus he was constantly bruised. With such continued and devout prayer, it would be needless to say how reverently and piously he celebrated his Mass, instilling devotion in all those who attended it. Those who were acquainted with him held him in the highest regard as a holy man and all had praises for him...

“He was rigorous with himself, yet he was meek and gentle with others especially as he had a soft spot in his heart for repentant sinners. Thus he was of special aid and comfort to his penitents because with his spirit of meekness, he had words of life which indeed made those confessing to him spiritually alive and blithe. They rose up from his feet full of confidence and reliance to persevere in the practice of virtue. Kind and soft to repentant sinners, he was firm with the obstinate, however powerful they might be. His martyrdom showed this most convincingly. Less than a year had passed since coming to join this Province before he

was sent to Japan, and nevertheless in such short period of time he gave many proofs of holiness".²⁵

On June 10, 1636, thoroughly equipped to give witness to Christ under any adversity, Fr. Courtet, in the company of his colleague and Rector Fr. Antonio González, two other Dominicans and two laymen (one of these Lorenzo Ruiz), set sail for the final meeting with eternal destiny.

The Alumnus: Fr. Tomás de San Jacinto

Two things set Fr. Tomás apart from the four above-mentioned martyrs. First, he was not a professor but a *student* who finished his ecclesiastical courses at the Colegio de Santo Tomas; and second, he was not a European but a Japanese, the first Thomasian alumnus from Japan.

His full name is Tomás Hioji Rokuzayemon Nishi de San Jacinto, Tomás being his baptismal name and De San Jacinto the surname adopted in his religious profession.²⁶ He was born in 1590 in Hirado, Kyushu, Japan and at the age of eleven, he entered the Jesuit College of Nagasaki, where he was



REV. FR. TOMÁS HIOJI DE SAN JACINTO, O.P., Japanese
Student of Theology at the Colegio de Santo Tomas
Martyred in Japan on November 17, 1634

²⁵ D. GONZALEZ, *Relación*, pp. 211-212; *Positio*, pp. 361-362.

²⁶ TOMÁS was his baptismal name; HIOJI, his Japanese personal name; ROKU-ZAYEMON, his adopted name in his adult years; NISHI, his father's family name; DE SAN JACINTO, the name of religious profession in the Dominican Order. He was born in Hirado in 1590. After the events of his life in Japan and Manila, narrated in the text above, he left the Philippines in 1626, accompanying a Spanish military expedition to Formosa (Taiwan). In Taiwan, he and some fellow Dominicans founded a mission. In 1629, he embarked secretly for Japan via Okinawa. Back in his native land, he worked zealously for five years until his arrest on August 4, 1634. After three months in prison, he was hanged from the gallows on the pit on November 11, dying a few days later. For a full biography of Fr. Tomas, see *Positio*, pp. 282-297 and documents and sources cited therein.

trained in “virtue, the letters and the things needed for the pastoral ministry,”²⁷ meaning that he was educated as a catechist. Catechetical work was his occupation in his youth until 1614 when the Edict of general persecution issued by Tokugawa Yeyasu brought to a dramatic end all public Christian activity in Japan. At an unspecified date Tomas left Japan and came to the Philippines, at the approximate age of thirty. His avowed intention in coming to this country was to become a religious, moved by the edifying life of the Dominican missionaries in Japan. Determined to join their Order, he asked for admission into the novitiate, but his petition met contradicting opinions among the friars of Santo Domingo Convent in Manila, because there was no precedent about admission of Japanese candidates.²⁸ In the end, the Dominican Superiors decided to test his vocation by having him study philosophy at the Colegio de Santo Tomás. They never regretted that decision.

Tomás was enrolled in the Colegio about the year 1621 as a *manteísta* (from the *manteo* or cope of the uniform), that is, a student with a scholarship, to whom the College paid for the lodging, study fees and maintenance. In 1623 twenty scholars lived with him in the college as intern students and from 1621 to 1626 Tomás pursued all the courses of philosophy and theology required for the ordination to the priesthood.

Very probably, Fr. Lucas del Espíritu Santo was his teacher in some subjects at the Faculty of Arts; and two other outstanding men

²⁷ As his classmates testified at the time of his entrance in the Dominican Order (Cf. *Positio*, pp. 299-302).

²⁸ FRANCISCO DE PAULA, O.P., *Breve relación de los triunfos y trofeos de la perseguida iglesia de Japón*, Ms. Archives of the Dominican Province of the Rosary, San Juan, Metro Manila, Secc. Japón, t. 3, doc. 6, fol. 121; *Positio*, p. 284. – From 1624 to 1630, the Philippine Dominicans admitted to the novitiate five Japanese candidates, with a view to continue the apostolate in Japan so difficult under the anti-Christian penal laws. We have knowledge of five novices who arrived at the priestly ordination. By order of their admission to the novitiate they were: In 1624, Jacobo de Santa María and Tomás de San Jacinto, both candidates now for beatification; in 1625, Diego de Santa Catalina and Luis de Santo Tomás; and in 1629, Felipe del Espíritu Santo. We adopt here their Christian and religious names (cf. HILARIO OCIO, *Compendio de la Reseña biográfica de los Religiosos de la Provincia del Santuimo Rosario de Filipinas*, Manila 1895, Apéndice, pp. 13, 19, 36, 58, 79).

were certainly his mentors in philosophy and/or theology, namely, Fr. Domingo González (Lector of Theology during 1619-1623 and Regent of Studies in 1623-1629) and Fr. Francisco de Paula (Lector of Philosophy during the period 1623-1627). For Tomás to become a Dominican the opinion of these professors was decisive. They keenly observed him as they had to submit a report on his moral and intellectual sufficiency for the religious life. The actual text of their report has not been preserved, but we have something equivalent. Two years after the alumnus had suffered martyrdom in Japan, his professor Fr. Francisco de Paula recalled the student life, conduct and qualifications of his student Tomas. Here is what Fr. Paula wrote in 1636.

He (Tomás) was accepted in the College or University that this (Dominican) Province has, in which he began to study the Arts (Philosophy) and he was so proficient in them that he bested the other students in the *Acto General de Filosofia* (Public Philosophical Disputation) which he conducted with such mastery and brilliance that he was judged competent to teach, as assistant to the professor, the theses he had defended. His Latin was elegant, he was very well versed in books, of a sharp and clear mind, highly profiting not only from what the professors lectured him but also from what he read in the various authors.²⁹

After two years of intensive courses and with the professors favourably reporting about him, Tomas was accepted to the novitiate “with general applause and joy of the whole Community” of Santo Domingo Convent. The novitiate year brought him closer to God by the continuous exercise of contemplation, prayer, self-examination and rigorous ascetic practices. Fr. Paula continues writing admirably:

Most Japanese are known for their natural toughness accompanied by pride, self-esteem and scorn for other peoples. What was extraordinary about Fray Tomás was his great meekness and such deep humility that during his novitiate year and later as professed, he was never heard by his brethren to utter an improper word, a feat that in a

²⁹ F. PAULA, *Breve relación*, fol. 121; *Positio*, p. 285.

Japanese was proof enough of uncommon virtue, for having conquered his strong natural bent. Nothing reproachable was seen in him. Unlike most Japanese, he was neither slow nor shy in performing the practices of the Order and the duties of a novice. Rather, with cheerful *mien* and with lips ever ready to break into a smile, he was the first novice to prepare the choir books for the Divine Office and to volunteer as reader or server in the dining room. Unlike most religious of his nationality, he became familiar with our ways and manners, attended all the community acts with visible joy and learnt the Spanish language better than the others. He was assiduous at prayer and although he was a beginner, he prolonged the prayers in private long beyond the two hours prescribed by this Province. He was frequently seen fingering the rosary with devotion. In these exercises and with the practice of fasting and the discipline, he finished the novitiate year.³⁰

When the novitiate year was completed, he made the religious profession, adopting then the name of San Jacinto in memory of the Dominican martyr St. Hyacinth of Poland (†1257) and then “he resumed the interrupted studies of Theology. In a short time, he became very proficient due to his talents and his diligence, never neglecting the exercises of prayer amidst intense scholastic occupations.”³¹

Ordained priest at the beginning of 1626 and “prepared to hear confessions and to preach”,³² Fr. Tomas de San Jacinto was mature and ready for the return to his country and for helping his persecuted brethren. In 1629, after three years of apostolic work in a newly founded mission in Formosa (Taiwan), he disembarked in his beloved land.³³

³⁰ F. PAULA, *op. cit.*, p. 121; *Positio*, pp. 286-287.

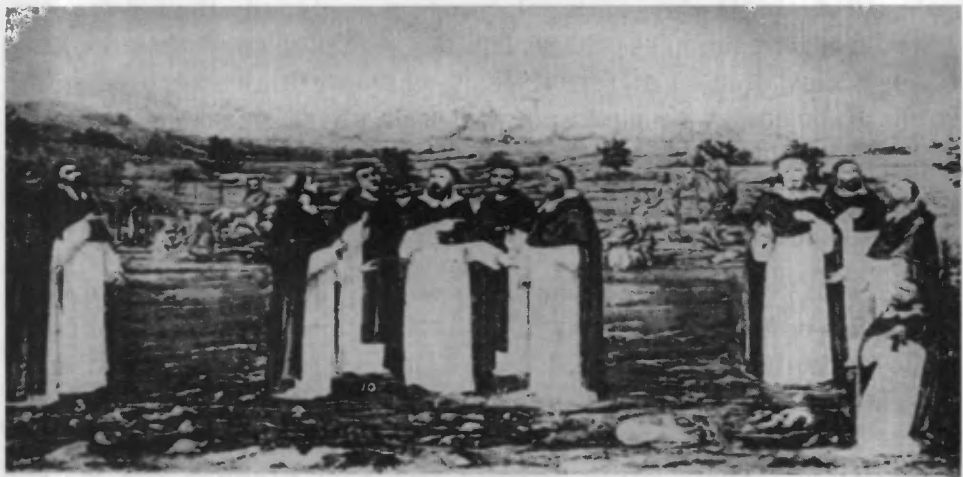
³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Fr. Tomás was not recipient of an academic degree because no degrees were granted by the Colegio at that stage. He missed the opportunity by two or three years. The first degrees were granted in 1628 or 1629 (cf. A. SANTAMARIA, *Los grados en la Universidad de Santo Tomás antes de 1631*, in *Unitas*, Febr.1935, pp. 557 ff.; F. VILLARROEL, *The first graduates (1629-1663)*, in UST Alumni Listing, *Manila* 1972, pp. 1-X). – Besides, a diploma would not be much of a help in Japan under those circumstances.

The Martyrs

The story of the martyrdom of our four professors and one student is far better documented and more enlightening than their academic life. Martyrdom meant for them more than anything else in this world. It was the supreme ideal and the final goal of their innermost desires. They wanted to be evangelizers in Japan and they knew that being an apostle in Japan and a witness to the truth they had studied, taught, meditated upon and experienced in religious life was no task for cowards or weak-hearted. They were in advance aware, that they would go through the "great tribulation" (Rev. 7,14) and would have to "drink the cup Christ had to drink" (Mk. 10,38), for if "the Master was persecuted, they would be persecuted too" (Jn. 15,29); they realized that they would be "handed over to the sanhedrins, beaten in synagogues and they would stand before governors and kings for God's sake to bear witness before them, since the Good News must first be proclaimed to all nations" (Mk. 13, 9-10).



Los once religiosos dominicos martirizados en Nagasaki en 1633, 1634, 1637
Cuadro del antiguo Convento de Santo Domingo, Manila, reproducido en *El Santísimo Rosario*, Vergara, España, VIII (mayo 1893).

Izquierda: PP. Jordán de San Esteban y Tomás de San Jacinto († 1634); *centro:* P. Lucas del E. Santo, Fray Mateo K. del Rosario, P. Domingo I. de Erquicia, P. Jacobo de Santa María († 1633); *derecha:* PP. Guillermo Courtet, Miguel de Aozaraza, Antonio González, Vicente de la Cruz († 1637).

It would be outside of the scope of this study to write the story of the persecution waged by the Japanese *shoguns* of the Tokugawa family against Christianity in the 17th century.

The literature on the so-called “Christian century of Japan” is very abundant, and much of it is accessible in English.³⁴ The persecution started in 1614 with the Edict issued by Shogun Tokugawa Yeyasu ordering the expulsion of all missionaries, the destruction of all Christian buildings and religious objects and the prohibition of the Christian cult in any form under penalty of death. This Edict was enforced by his son Tokugawa Hidetada and his grandson Tokugawa Yemitsu in the following decades with systematic methods and appalling cruelty. Thousands of Christians suffered martyrdom, of whom 26 have been canonized and 205 beatified. The persecution was particularly ruthless in the 1620’s and 1630’s during the apostolate of our professors.

It is not our intention to write the full story of the troubled and difficult years of activity of our martyrs in Japan, but only to underline the most remarkable angles of their apostolate and of their death. A few things are common to all of them. First, none of them enjoyed a single day of legal freedom in Japan; they were outlawed from the moment of their landing in that country. Second, even though they died in different years, they were all executed in the same place and in the same spot, Nagasaki, the Nishizaka Hill. Third, they were all subjected to the same final torture of the *horca y hoyá*, or hanging on the pit, except Fr. Antonio González who died in prison.

Fr. Domingo Ibáñez de Erquicia arrived in Satsuma, Kyushu, on June 19, 1623, at a moment when Japan was breaking all commercial relations with the Philippines and when the situation of Christianity began to assume tragic proportions. Eight Dominicans had been put to death the previous year in the so-called “Great Martyrdom” of 1622. In ten years, from 1623 to 1633, Fr. Erquicia was marked for death. One reads his letters from Japan – fifteen have been pre-

³⁴ For readings on the persecution, we will limit our suggestions to the scholarly works of: CHARLES BOXER, *The Christian Century in Japan (1549-1650)*, Berkeley and London, 1951; JOHANNES LAURES, S.J., *The Catholic Church in Japan*, Tokyo, 1954; JAMES MURDOCH, *A history of Japan*, New York, 1946. A brief historical sketch can be seen in *Positio*, pp. 6-46, with some bibliography; and for a more rapid overview accessible to the general reading public of the Philippines, see my book *Lorenzo Ruiz, the Protomartyr of the Philippines and his Companions*, St. Paul Publications, Pasay City, 1979, pp. 25-40.

served – with the same emotion one experiences when reading the *acta* of the martyrs of the primitive Church. Two or three hundred thousand Christians, reduced to clandestinity, sorely needed the help and consolation of priests. Erquicia was there as a priest in God's service, but constantly, somewhere near him, lay but the danger of the police and of their informers.

Night was the only time available for the discharge of his priestly ministry for catechetical instruction, for assemblies of the faithful in utmost secrecy, for the care of the sick, for sacramental confessions and for the celebration of the Mass. In order to turn the persecutors away from the trail, he moved from house to house every night and from village to village every week. Often he ventured traveling by day, but only when it was snowing, raining or hailing, patiently enduring the inclemency of the winter cold along muddy and stony roads. For sure – Erquicia comments in one of his letters – the persecutors would not dare go out in such intemperate weather conditions. Arriving at a house, battered and soaked, he only took some bread and wine for supper because it happened to be a fasting day by the constitutions of the Dominican Order.³⁵

News of fresh and terrifying martyrdoms, which occurred almost daily, deeply saddened the sensitive soul of Fr. Erquicia. Hundreds of executions are reported in his letters, including those of his intimate helpers and catechists. He was several times betrayed and denounced to the authorities, hardly managing to escape before the arrival of the soldiers to his hiding place. His little boat was once searched and providentially, he was not noticed behind the boat-sails. Rewards were offered to informers and a drawing was made of his face for wide circulation throughout the country and in the midst of all these privations, sufferings and fears, he lived “very contented, waiting for martyrdom, like those who are already in prison.” Much as he wanted to “dissolve and be with Christ,” his flock needed him.³⁶

³⁵ Cf. letter of Erquicia to the Superior Provincial F. Miguel Ruiz, Isahay, Japan, January 20, 1624, published in *Positio*, pp. 99-100.

³⁶ Cf. letter of Erquicia to Captain D. Juan de Oláez, Nagasaki, April 1624, in *Positio*, p. 102.

To his father in Spain, from whom he had no news for ten years, – not knowing whether he was dead or alive, – he wrote a moving letter in 1630, telling a few stories about the persecution, softened by some phrases of Christian humor and ending with these beautiful words: “And so, my most beloved father, let us live in such a way as to ensure our living together in heaven for ever, without fear to separate. Let us not mind this world which is our exile and separates us from God and our good. Good bye, until heaven.”³⁷

On July 1633 he was captured and imprisoned in the jail of Nagasaki. All attempts at making him surrender, by offerings of money, lucrative employment and the favor of the Shogun, totally failed. On the eve of the feast of the Assumption of Mary, August 14, 1633, Fr. Erquicia, Superior of the few Dominican missionaries left alive in Japan, was executed in the torment of the *horca y hoyo*. Hanged by the feet from a gallows, his head and half of the body falling into a pit, the mouth of which was closed with two boards adjusted to the waist, he expired of bleeding or suffocation. He was the first European missionary to experience that horrible torture invented for the martyrdom of Christians two weeks earlier.³⁸

Fr. Lucas del Espíritu Santo, colleague of Fr. Erquicia in the teaching profession, was also his companion in their voyage to Japan in 1634 and sharer of the same apostolate for the same period of time. Most of what we know about his life in Japan derives from his own letters, of which three have been preserved in his own handwriting.

The story of the persecution, so dramatically told in Erquicia's letters, is retold in Fr. Lucas' correspondence. More often than not, Fr. Lucas lived in the mountains, hidden in grottoes and caverns, bringing the consolation of God's words and the spiritual aid of the sacraments to the Christians fleeing from the cities and towns. The

³⁷ Letter of Erquicia to his father, Japan, October 18, 1630, in *Positio*, pp. 118-118.

³⁸ Two weeks earlier the torment of the *gallows on the pit* had been tested for the first time on the Japanese Jesuit laybrother Nicholas Keian Nagawara Fukunaga, who was put to death on July 31 (cf. J. F. SCHUTTE, S.J., *Monumenta Historica Japoniae*, Rome 1975, p. 984.

frightful distress of the fugitives did not pain him so much as the apostasy of so many renegades (forced to recant by countless threats and torments) and the daily news of terrible executions of so many who – in his own words – died “beheaded, crucified, roasted alive, thrown into boiling water, burned alive, immersed into icy waters, sawed with bamboo saws in an agony prolonged for days and weeks and by many other forms of death which the devil has invented.”³⁹

In the last five years of his life, not unlike the untiring Apostle St. Paul, Fr. Lucas travelled more than most missionaries of Japan, from Kyushu in the southwest to the “land confines” of Honshu in the north, by land and by sea, disguised in all manners and forms. At the end of his last journey – nearly a thousand kilometers – on September 8, 1633, feast of the Nativity of Mary Our Lady, he was captured in Osaka, aboard a boat in the middle of the Yodogawa river. What was the need for further disguise? He put on his Dominican habit and knelt down on the muddy soil on the river bank as he was manacled. On the way to prison he marched singing the *Te Deum*, and on entering the jail in the company of several other religious and Christians, he washed and kissed the feet of his fellow prisoner the Jesuit Father Antonio de Sousa and let his feet be washed and kissed by the Jesuit “in imitation of Christ” and the persecutors were edified. Days later, chained to a heavy beam on his shoulders, he and his companions were transported to Nagasaki, 200 miles away, suffering diverse inconveniences during the journey by land and sea. Prisoner for Christ, he preached enthusiastically to the curious crowds that gathered at every port or stopover to see the missionaries.

From the Nagasaki prison, on October 16, 1633, he wrote a letter to his Superior Provincial in Manila, expressing marvellous sentiments of joy, love and hope. The concluding paragraph begins: “If I were to die on the feast of St. Luke ...” The feast of his patron saint was only two days away and on that day, he was placed in the mortal torment of the gallows on the pit. The executioners, enraged by their failure to have him renounce his faith, tore his body

³⁹ Letter of Fr. Lucas to Fr. Miguel Ruiz, Japan, September 28, 1630, in *Positio*, pp. 216-219.

to pieces with *katana* blows before burning it. It was October 19, 1633 when he gave his blessed soul to his creator after twenty four hours of agony.⁴⁰

Fr. Antonio González was appointed Superior of the group of four missionaries who left the Philippines in a dramatic escape on June 10, 1636. Two laymen accompanied them, a Japanese leper, Lazaro of Kyoto and the Filipino Lorenzo Ruiz. Lorenzo never left Fr. Antonio's side; he was always seen beside him in the most crucial moments of his trial.

Several Portuguese traders contemplated from the windows of their residences in Deshima (on the waterfront of Nagasaki) the disembarkment of Fr. Antonio and the laymen on September 21, 1637. He came ashore with a calm and dignified demeanour and, lifting his eyes to heaven as one expecting aid therefrom, he raised his right in an elegant gesture and crossed himself in the name of the most holy Trinity "as the martyrs of the primitive Church used to do." Fr. Antonio, elegant and tall, towering over the crowd of Japanese onlookers who gathered around him, marched towards the government courthouse very slowly on account of his infirm legs but with a dignified countenance, wearing an improvised Dominican scapular which did not reach below his knees.

Dignified, solemn, confident, determined: This was to be his permanent attitude throughout his trial before the judges of Nagasaki. Interrogated by the judges, he declared that he "had no other purpose in coming to Japan than to preach the Good News and the way of salvation and to show the errors in which you and your people live." Although the professor was ready to preach, he was sternly ordered to limit himself to answer the questions asked by the court. His judges endeavoured to make him apostatize, but he was ready to die instead. He was commanded to trample on an image of the Virgin Mary, but he, seeing that some ministers did it rushed himself over the floor to kiss the image uttering words of reverence and love, for which he earned a slapping in the face by the ministers.

⁴⁰ The story of his arrest and imprisonment is in Fr. Lucas' last letter from the Jail of Nagasaki, October 16, 1633; published in D. ADUARTE, *Historia*, II, pp. 408-411, and in *Positio*, pp. 245-249.

He had high fever when he landed in the harbour of Nagasaki, and the fever continued to devour him as he was submitted to the inhuman torment of the water repeatedly forced in and out of his stomach most violently. A greater fever consumed him, that of his love for Christ, his Master, for whom he was suffering all those torments. That love was contagious and no one experienced its benefits more than Lorenzo Ruiz during the darkest moments of his trial.

In the early hours of the morning of September 24, feverish and languishing in jail, he asked the prison guards to give him a little wine, because he wanted to continue witnessing to his faith. The guards complied and the wine reinvigorated him for a few hours until dawn “when Our Lord called him to Himself to reward him for his sufferings ... until the end conversing with his companions.” Thus the University Rector and mission Superior preceded his subjects in the attainment of an immortal “crown.”⁴¹

Fr. Guillermo Courtet witnessed in prison the death of Father Antonio September 24. This French Dominican had left Manila with Fr. Antonio but had arrived in Nagasaki eight days ahead, that is, on September 13, 1636. During those eight days he faced the tribunal several times. He had blond hair and a fair complexion and was taken for a Dutchman. Was his intention to join the Dutch and to spread Christianity from their trading places at Hirado?, the judges wondered. “My only concern – Fr. Courtet answered – is with the Japanese and I came to live in the mountains and to teach the little and innocent ones and the other people and lead them all to their salvation.” Was he a theologian? “Yes – he answered – I am a theologian and a Lector, and (my companion) Fr. Miguel (de Aozaraza) is a very good theologian too, although he is not a Lector.”

The theologian and professor was only once given the chance to clarify an issue and give a lesson. He had undergone the torment of

⁴¹ For a full narrative of Fr. Antonio’s martyrdom, see D. GONZALEZ, *Relación*, in *Positio*, pp. 451-455, and the eyewitness account of PEDRO RODRIGUES and ANTONIO CARVALHO, *Martírio dos Padres frei Miguel, frei Tomas, frei Vicente, frei Antonio...* Ms. Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Rome, *Jap. Sin.* 64, fols. 208-214; a Spanish version in *Positio*, pp. 410-418.

the water repeatedly and the more sensitive torture of the needles thrust into his fingertips between the nails and the flesh. He looked devastatingly ruined and half-dead. Even his tormentors began to have pity on him. Why did he have to come to Japan, suffer all this and die? Would not his death be a non-sense? Gathering strength, Fr. Courtet replied forcefully: "Listen to me very carefully. We did not come to Japan to die, but to preach God to the Japanese and to teach them the way of salvation. Not to die, I repeat, but to preach and if necessary to give our lives for God. Let this be understood."

If necessary, as things were, it had become necessary to die, because he was placed in the option of apostatizing or being executed. To die for the faith was no nonsense but the supreme witnessing to the truth he had always believed in and taught all his life as a Lector of Theology.

When, on September 27, he marched towards the place of martyrdom across the streets of Nagasaki, on horseback, he was "so weak and feeble that he could hardly stay on the horse, but strong enough to ride with his eyes raised to heaven." At Nishizaka Hill, outside of the city, he was hanged by the feet from a gallows into a pit, and after three days of painful agony he was extracted from the pit. Then he and his companion Fr. Miguel de Aozaraza "still with strong courage and faith and constancy managed to kneel down, said farewell to each other, and their heads were chopped off" at the blow of the *katana*.⁴²

Fr. Tomás de San Jacinto had one considerable advantage over his fellow Dominican missionaries in the task of helping the persecuted Church: He was Japanese. Neither his physical appearance nor the language would betray him easily. When he returned to Japan in 1629 to work as a priest, the situation was totally different from the days when he had been a young catechist. After fifteen years of unrelenting persecution, the impressive edifice of Christianity looked like crumbling into pieces. Everywhere Fr. Tomás went he could only see crypto-Christians, fugitives, martyrs or apostles.

⁴² For the story of Fr. Courtet's martyrdom, see sources mentioned in previous note 42.

“All the Christians of Nagasaki have apostatized”, he reported alarmingly in the first letter he wrote to the Superior Provincial in Manila in 1630. “There are many Judases who are always on the look to betray the religious for the money they receive as a reward.”⁴³ Except for the too sweeping statement about the apostasies in the city of Nagasaki, he was right. His five years of apostolate coincided with the beginning of a more systematic enforcement of the anti-Christian penal laws under the terror tactics of the two *bugyo* (governors) of Nagasaki, Mizuno Kawachi (1626- 1629) and Takanaka Uneme (1629-1632). *Rokuzayemon* (Fr. Tomas’ pseudonym) was one of the most wanted men in Japan, an invisible priest whose hiding place was totally unknown, for the revelation of which many Christians were questioned and tortured everywhere. Where is *Rokuzayemon*? He so cleverly had the police out of track that sometimes he was looked for in one place when he was actually two hundred kilometers away.

“I am awaiting my arrest every day and every hour,” he wrote again to the Superior Provincial.⁴⁴ He felt that he was unworthy of the ministry of the Gospel and he asked the prayers of the Community of Santo Domingo Convent of Manila for his many needs. The missionaries – he added in the same letter – are being eliminated little by little, the Christians are afraid to receive us in their houses because if one is found in a house the whole family and the families of five neighbours would be put to death.

His arrest finally came on August 4, 1634, feast of St. Dominic. His companion (and Superior, after the martyrdom of Fr. Erquicia) Fr. Jordan de San Esteban was captured with him and both priests languished in the Nagasaki prison for the three months undergoing tedious interrogations and painful tortures (water torture, the torment of the needles and all sorts of human privations) until the day of their execution. On November 11, Fr. Tomás de San Jacinto, his fellow Dominican Jordan and sixty nine Christians were

⁴³ Cf. letter of Fr. Tomás to the Superior Provincial, Japan, January 3, 1630, in *Positio*, p. 304; also *Relación* written by the same Fr. Tomás on September 28, 1633, published by D. ADUARTE, *Historia*, II, pp. 406-407, and reprinted in *Positio*, p. 309-310.

⁴⁴ Cf. Fr. Tomás’ *relacion* cited in previous note.

paraded along the streets of Nagasaki towards the Nishizaka Hill. Public criers informed the spectators that the victims were led to execution “for having preached and taught the law of Christ in Japan.” Fr. Tomás proclaimed the same thing at the top of his voice before he was hanged from the gallows after six or seven days of agony, he bled to his death and to his glorious triumph.⁴⁵

“Prius Vita Quam Doctrina”

In the foregoing pages I have attempted to unfold before the reader, too partially and too rapidly, some moving scenes about five ignored or forgotten men who combined in their lives the two essential elements of a Catholic academician: the serious quest for truth and the authentic witnessing to that truth. In a Catholic university nothing is “purely academic,” as the phrase goes, nothing abstract or unrelated to life. Everything springs from the Supreme Truth and everything is meant to serve an evangelical, moral and transcendental purpose. The University – said Pope John Paul II to a gathering of university representatives in Mexico – promotes and realizes in professors and students a more harmonious synthesis between faith and reason, between faith and culture, between faith and life.”⁴⁶ Faith, in order to be living and operating, cannot be divorced from Christian life and action, it must be married to life, always for better and until death.

Speaking to the same kind of audience at the Gregorian University in Rome last December 15, 1979, the Pope again stressed the role of theological studies in the pastoral life and evangelizing mission of the Church. “Theology – he said – is a service of the Church and therefore ought to feel itself dynamically involved in the mission of the Church, particularly in its prophetic mission. Theological thought and pastoral action are not at loggerheads with each other; rather they foster one another; one bears and sustains the other.”⁴⁷ Christian mission and evangelization, the proclamation of the truth and

⁴⁵ A detailed narrative of Fr. Tomás’ martyrdom, based on direct testimonies, is in FRANCISCO DE PAULA, *Breve relación*, fols. 120-128; published in *Positio*, pp. 323-329.

⁴⁶ *L’ Osservatore Romano*, English ed., 19 February 1979.

⁴⁷ *Id.*, December 21, 1979.

personal witnessing, are like the full flowering of one's dedication to the academic teaching of theology.

A professor witnessing to the truth by means of martyrdom carries his academic commitment to the last consequences, in a heroic and sublime manner. He exchanges his very *life* for the sake of the truth in which he totally believes. Three words of Thomas Aquinas, theologian, professor and saint, may be borrowed here in a slightly different context in which they were written: "*Prius vita quam doctrina.*"⁴⁸ Life before doctrine; teaching and preaching must be confirmed by action, in practical life; just as Christ, when launching his public life, "begun to do and to teach" in that order, in the words of the Gospel, but if life is more important than doctrine, it is doctrine that gives meaning to life and thus when the martyr surrenders his corporal life to the executioner he witnesses to God by changing the words of St. Thomas into "*prius doctrina quam vita,*" and so he immolates his life at the altar of truth, which is God himself.

That our four Dominican professors and one student of the University of Santo Tomas gave their lives for the truth they had devotedly cultivated and loved was not mere accident or coincidence. They actually looked forward to and desired that kind of death and what is really curious is that, the Dominican Superiors and the Japanese of the 17th century were in agreement about the convenience of sending men of theological learning to preach the Gospel in Japan. The first encounter ever made by Japanese people and Dominican friars is worth recalling here.

It happened in the year 1587. Some Japanese merchants had arrived in Manila and, while doing their trade and looking for missionaries for their country, the Acapulco galleon brought to the Philippines the first group of Dominicans to be established here. The Japanese "were very happy to see them and very pleased to see their habit, humility and manner of conversing and, having seen with their own eyes their good living and realizing that they were very learned and that they abstained from meat, and having heard other excellent things about them it seemed to them that no other religious Order would be better fitted to go to Japan than that of St. Dominic, because

⁴⁸ "Sed prius accipit homo vitam quam doctrinam" (*Sum. Th.*, III, q. 71, art. 1). From the context it is obvious that St. Thomas speaks here of ontological precedence only.

the priests of the gentiles are also very learned men and the (Japanese) people are of sharp minds and judgment; and these religious being learned as people say, they will be able to answer and to satisfy those who inquire and they will confound the bonzes, who are their priests; and as for abstaining from meat, this is something that will please the people of Japan, because their bonzes do not eat meat and in general, the Japanese people are fonder of fish than of meat.”⁴⁹

The Superiors of the Dominicans in the Philippines shared similar views when in 1636 they decided to send to Japan Fr. Antonio González and Fr. Guillermo Courtet, professors of theology, as previously they had sent, Fr. Domingo Ibáñez de Erquicia and Fr. Lucas del Espíritu Santo. These men were badly needed in Manila to run the professorial chairs of the university – college of Santo Tomas, “but – as Fr. Domingo González wrote in 1638 – the Superiors picked up the choicest men of the (Dominican) Province, unmindful of the great need of them. For such mission the best men must be sent. The Superiors deemed less important whatever services such men could give to the Province in comparison with the task of converting the pagans ... Hence Our Lord has honored our Province with holy martyrs and confessors.”⁵⁰

Martyrs, confessors and doctors; we can call them so in concluding this study. Before closing, however, let me make clear that their martyrdom has yet to be acknowledged by the Church in a formal act of Beatification. In the foregoing pages I have used the word “Martyr” only in the conventional popular sense, without intending to anticipate the judgment of the Holy See, but certainly these men of learning lived and taught with the supreme ideal of witnessing to the truth in total commitment, anxious to prove at any cost the sincerity of their faith in God and their unreserved love for him. This was their most precious legacy to those who, in a Catholic University, endeavor to dedicate themselves to the quest, teaching and propagation of truth. □

⁴⁹ *Información que recibió el obispo (de Manila, Domingo Salazar) del estado que tienen las cosas en Japón, Manila, 4 de Julio 1587, published by JOSE LUIS ALVARES TALADRIZ. Notas para la historia de la entrada en Japón de los Franciscanos, in España en Extremo Oriente, Madrid 1979, p. 21.*

⁵⁰ D. GONZALEZ, *Relación*, p. 145; *Positio*, p. 439.