

Resistencia al Poder: Zeferino González on Aquinas's View on Insurgence

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Abstract: This paper discusses Zeferino González's commentary on whether Thomistic teachings support insurgence. In particular, the study revisits one chapter of the *Estudios sobre la filosofía de Santo Tomás* (1864). Here, González critiques a court official of Castille, Francisco Gutiérrez de la Huerta, who, in his *Dictamen del Fiscal* (1845), attributes the doctrine of regicide and tyrannicide to St. Thomas Aquinas. Suspecting this ascription to Aquinas and the Dominicans as "bad faith," González goes back to Huerta's cited passages from Aquinas's "De regno" in the work *De Regimine Principum*, the *Summa Theologiae*, and the *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*. Furthermore, the discussion is given context by citing relevant discourses in the University of Santo Tomas and the Philippines during the time the *Estudios* was published, such as the discussion in the 1864 article "A la Nacion," which has since been attributed to González's student, Fr. Jose Burgos.

Keywords: Zeferino González, Thomas Aquinas, Insurgence, Resistance to power, Tyranny, Jose Burgos

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Introduction

In 1864, the UST Press published the book collection titled *Estudios sobre la filosofía de Sto. Tomas*.¹ It was written by a Spanish Dominican, Fr. Zeferino González, OP, and was released at a time when the first Filipinos, who were regarded as heralds of nationalism, were still studying at the University of Santo Tomas. The three-volume collection discusses various topics, mainly philosophy and theology. He taught these subjects in UST from 1853 to 1868 before he was sent back to Spain.

One notable discourse in the *Estudios* is the chapter titled “*Resistencia al Poder*” (Resistance to Power). Here, Fray Zeferino talks about resisting the authority of a state, rebellion, and ideas like killing a tyrant and putting all this in the context of Thomistic philosophy.

This is interesting because of two aspects: Firstly, discourses on Aquinas’s views on politics and governance have usually been limited to his idea that monarchy is the best kind of regime. The book *De Regno* (On Kingship) is the usual source on this topic.² This is a letter of the Angelic Doctor to the King of Cyprus in 1265, where he discusses that the governing body of a state, even if it is a group of people, must be unified into one to attain the goal of society or the common good. Meanwhile, according to Aquinas’s commentary on Aristotle’s *Politics*, as long as the objective of a king is peace, unity, and order, the state is better governed by one person rather than by many.³ It will be more efficient to be led by one wise authority, who is not burdened by the qualms of the less wise and those who may hinder effective governance. Also, in this commentary, St. Thomas explains his preference for a virtuous monarchy over oligarchy and democracy. To review, every kind of regime has its own corruption: A corrupt monarchy is a tyranny where the rules of the state only benefit the ruler. Meanwhile, oligarchy is corrupted when laws lean toward the advantage of the rich. Democracy, when led by those constantly in need, will not be able to attain the common good for society. They will be too preoccupied with addressing their needs.⁴

The second reason that makes Fray Zeferino’s essay interesting is that he published his book in 1864, twelve years after he started teaching Philosophy at the University of Santo Tomas. In those years, Fray Zeferino taught some of

¹ See Zeferino González, *Estudios sobre la Filosofía de Santo Tomás* Vol. I, II, III (Manila: Establecimiento tipográfico del Colegio de Santo Tomás, 1864).

² See Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno (On Kingship: To the King of Cyprus)*, Book I, translated by Gerald B. Phelan and revised by Ignatius Eschmann, OP (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1949), accessed 30 September 2024. <https://isidore.co/aquinas/english/DeRegno.htm#0>.

³ Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri Politicorum (Commentary on Aristotle’s Politics)*, translated by Ernest L. Fortin and Peter D. O’Neill, Spiazzi 1951 edition, Book III, Lecture 6, Isidore Forum, accessed 30 September 2024. <https://isidore.co/aquinas/Politics.htm>.

⁴ Aquinas, *Sententia libri Politicorum*, Bk. III, Lec. 6.

the personalities that we consider today as forefathers of our nation, such as Fr. Jose Burgos and Fr. Jacinto Zamora, who together with Fr. Mariano Gomez, are collectively known today as the GOMBURZA, and to whom our national hero Jose Rizal dedicated his landmark novel *El Filibusterismo* (1891).⁵

In Fr. Fidel Villarroel's research, Burgos and Zamora had Fray Zeferino as one of their professors in Physics. But, perhaps more notably, he was Burgos's professor in Metaphysics.⁶ Initially, the subject names "Physics" and "Metaphysics" may give the impression that the scope of the curriculum for the philosophy program was too narrow, that Fray Zeferino could not have tackled St. Thomas's views on governance, all the more his critique of tyranny, in any classroom discussion on these subjects. But Fr. Villarroel further enlightens us on this matter. He notes that at that time, the traditional curriculum divisions were one year for Logic, another year for Physics, and another year for Metaphysics:

...Under Physics [were] 'notions of General Physics, elements of Mechanics, Hydrostatics and Hydraulics, notions of Physics in particular, elements of Cosmogony, Astronomy, Cosmology, [Scientific] Psychology, Geography and Optics'; under Metaphysics [were] 'Ontology, [Philosophical] Psychology, Natural Theology, Ethics and Religion.'⁷

Fray Zeferino teaching Burgos is something significant that known history today has overlooked. Suppose that Burgos exhibited "proficiency and faithfulness" in studying Metaphysics, as Fray Zeferino notes in the records of the University.⁸ In that case, the similarities between the concepts in the *Burgos Manifesto* and Fray Zeferino's *Estudios* cannot be coincidental. It could mean that Fray Zeferino's discussions can give insights into the thoughts of Burgos as a reformist and Filipino nationalist. Moreover, it could show how Thomism is not too foreign to Filipino thought after all.

Let me return to this point in the latter part of this study.

The Chapter: 'Resistencia al Poder'⁹

The main question, which Fray Zeferino attempts to answer in this chapter of the *Estudios*, is whether there is anything in the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas that, even remotely, resembles any justification of regicide (killing of a king) and tyrannicide (killing a tyrant).

⁵ See Jose Rizal, *El Filibusterismo*, translated by Harold Augenbraum, originally published in 1891 (New York: Penguin Random House, 2011).

⁶ Fidel Villarroel, *Father Jose Burgos: University Student* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas, 1972), 13–14.

⁷ Villarroel, *Father Jose Burgos*, 13.

⁸ Villarroel, *Father Jose Burgos*, 13.

⁹ Gonzalez, *Estudios*, Tomo III, 452–475.

There is a reason for Fray Zeferino to write this chapter. His *Estudios*, after all, is not meant to simply repeat the thirteenth-century philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas. For him, if one were to study the wisdom of the Angelic Doctor, one would still have to go through the primary sources. However, what he intends with his *Estudios* is to present commentaries and inquiries on how Thomistic thought had been “perennial” across centuries. He would even claim that during the most pressing times for the Church, the wisdom communicated by St. Thomas would guide and lead the Church to become more robust and founded. Such was the case during the Council of Trent when the Church addressed the Protestant Reformation that Martin Luther started in the sixteenth century.

But this paper concerns Fray Zeferino’s critique against one attribution to St. Thomas Aquinas and the Dominican Order, which was presented and recorded in the Courts of Castille and officially published and mass-produced as a book in 1845.¹⁰ The attribution is that of tyrannicide and regicide, which was made by Don Francisco Guitierrez de la Huerta, a prestigious lawyer and senior minister of the Royal Council of Castille.¹¹ Imagine that in the jurisprudence or the study of Law and legal documents in Spain, the Dominican Order, in particular St. Thomas, is said to be the proponent of justifying the killing of a king and a tyrant. In addition, this thought was repeatedly disseminated in official publications in Spain and its colonies, having one book edition in Chile in 1849 and two more in Mexico in 1849 and 1873.¹²

Fray Zeferino’s reason for his critique was palpable. In his mind, this attribution was not only disrespectful and misleading, but it was also dreadful and dangerous. He was even sent to the Philippines precisely because of the repercussions of such a thought.

Fray Zeferino was born in 1831 to a humble family of farmers in the Asturian village of Villoria, Spain.¹³ At the age of thirteen, he entered the Dominican House

¹⁰ See Francisco Gutiérrez de la Huerta, *Dictamen del Fiscal Francisco Gutiérrez de la Huerta presentado y leído en Consejo de Castilla sobre el Restablecimiento de los Jesuitas*, originally published 1945 (Santiago de Chile: Imprenta de la Sociedad, 1849).

¹¹ See Real Academia de la Historia, “Francisco Guitierrez de la Huerta,” accessed 30 September 2024, <https://dbe.rah.es/biografias/37022/francisco-gutierrez-de-la-huerta>.

¹² Huerta’s dictamen was an extensive analysis that justified his decision to advocate for the reinstatement of the Society of Jesus, following a thorough re-examination of King Charles III’s decree to expel the Jesuits from Spanish territories. His treatise not only dissected the original rationale behind the expulsion but also argued for the Jesuits’ return, positioning them as essential contributors to the educational well-being of Spain. Given the significant implications of this re-evaluation, it is not unreasonable to speculate that the Society of Jesus itself may have been responsible for disseminating the dictamen across Spanish territories, including Chile, Colombia, and Mexico. Manuel Salas-Fernández and Raquel Soaje-de-Elias, “Historiography of the Post-Restoration Society of Jesus in Spanish America,” in *Jesuit Historiography Online*, accessed 30 September 2024. https://doi.org/10.1163/2468-7723_jho_COM_227557.

¹³ Paulino Alvarez, OP, *Santos, Bienaventurados, Venerables de la Orden de los Predicadores*, Vol. 3 (Vergara: Tip. del Santisimo Rosario, 1922), 810.

of Studies in Ocaña. It is important to understand that choosing a religious vocation at that time was far from convenient. Spain was already rife with hostility toward the Church, especially the Dominicans. Friars had been massacred in Madrid (1834) and Barcelona (1835). The anti-Church policies of Spanish Prime Minister José María Queipo de Llano, the “Conde de Toreno,” had led to the closure of convents and religious institutions, except those dedicated to caring for the sick, educating poor children, and training missionaries, particularly for the Philippines. After Queipo de Llano, his successor, Juan Álvarez Mendizábal, ordered the confiscation of Church properties and resources throughout Spain.¹⁴ In response to these growing threats, Fray Zeferino and some of his fellow friars were sent to the Philippines to complete their studies at the University of Santo Tomas in Manila.¹⁵ Clearly, Fray Zeferino understood the dangers that association with teachings on regicide and tyrannicide posed for the Catholic Church during this tumultuous period.

Content of Huerta's *Dictamen*

As observed, Fray Zeferino was protesting Huerta's attribution of tyrannicide and regicide to St. Thomas and the Dominican Order. But why did the honorable fiscal, who was also known to have supported the Catholic Church, write such a judgment that he knew would end up in the jurisprudence of the Courts of Castille?

Huerta seemed to be a friend of the Catholic Church, specifically the Society of Jesus or the Jesuits. In the summer of 1767, around half a century before Huerta's fiscal opinion was read at the Courts of Castille, the banishment of all the Jesuit missionaries in Spanish colonies occurred. Around six thousand members of the Society were “condemned and exiled without trial or defense.”¹⁶ It was due to the command of the King of Spain, Carlos III, who dissolved the Society and banished its members because “the Jesuits were implicated in the insurrection and in the plots against his life.”¹⁷ All the charges were contained in a *Consulta*, dated 29 January 1767, and a *Memoria Ministerial*, dated November 30, 1768. These documents

¹⁴ After the death of Fernando VII, anti-clerical violence erupted in Spain, targeting the clergy in a wave of unrest. One of the most notorious incidents occurred on July 17, 1834, when a brutal massacre took place in Madrid, where numerous friars were killed by enraged mobs. Just a year later, on July 25, 1835, a similar tragedy unfolded in Barcelona, where more clergymen were violently murdered. These events were fueled by growing tensions between liberal factions and the Church, which was seen as an ally of conservative forces and the monarchy. The violence reflected the deep divisions within Spanish society during the early nineteenth century, where the clergy often became scapegoats for political frustrations and broader struggles for power. These massacres underscored the volatile relationship between church and state during this period of transition and reform in Spain. See Gustavo Bueno Sánchez, “La obra filosófica de Fray Zeferino González.” PhD diss., Universidad de Oviedo, 1989.

¹⁵ Alvarez, *Santos, Bienaventurados, Venerables de la Orden de los Predicadores*, 811.

¹⁶ Martin P. Harney, *The Jesuits in History: The Society of Jesus Through Four Centuries* (New York: The America Press, 1941), 317.

¹⁷ Harney, *The Jesuits in History*, 318.

reached Huerta's desk, although it was unclear when these were sent. But Huerta's fiscal opinion was formally presented and read to the Council of Castile in 1815, and his *dictamen* was published in 1845 as the book referred to earlier. Note that Fray Zeferino had nothing against the Jesuits. As he himself wrote, Huerta's fiscal opinion vindicates the "Jesuits of the accusation that the enemies of the Society and the Church had unjustly launched against them."¹⁸ However, Fray Zeferino did not understand why Huerta could find no better way to reject the accusations against the Jesuits than to state that St. Thomas and the Dominicans had taught the doctrine of regicide and tyrannicide. For Fray Zeferino, even if St. Thomas or the Dominican Order had indeed justified the killing of a king and a tyrant, treason remained a crime punishable by law in Spain.

Fray Zeferino finds irony in Huerta's *dictamen* because when he revisited the texts cited by the fiscal, he "feared that St. Thomas would be accused of favoring tyranny, rather than being a supporter of regicide and tyrannicide."¹⁹ Yet, Huerta read the same texts differently and declared that the Angelic Doctor maintained and defended the legality of the sanguinary doctrine "of the death of the tyrant, both of acquisition and administration!"²⁰

It will prove helpful to define tyranny here, especially in terms of acquisition and administration: A tyrant of acquisition is one who unjustly invades a nation, trying to subdue it by violence and force. Meanwhile, a tyrant of administration is a legitimate king who abuses his power to tyrannize the people.²¹

Fray Zeferino's Rebuttal

Now, let us visit the actual text in Huerta's *Dictamen*. The crucial question to our study here was, *Was the sanguinary doctrine of tyrannicide and regicide born in the Society of Jesus?* To this, the Fiscal says "no." He adds that it was known and taught three centuries before the foundation of the Society. The doctrine can be found in the magisterial works of the Thomistic school, from the Angelic Doctor himself, St. Thomas Aquinas. He even declares, "There is not just one, there are several places in his works in which he maintains and defends the bloodthirsty doctrine of the legality of the death of the tyrant, of both acquisition and administration..."²²

¹⁸ Gonzalez, *Estudios*, Tomo III, 457.

¹⁹ Harney, *The Jesuits in History*, 469.

²⁰ Harney, *The Jesuits in History*, 458.

²¹ Z. Gonzalez, *Estudios*, Tomo III, 470. This is important, especially to identify the semblances between the discourse on abuse by Burgos and "Los Filipinos" and the discussions of Fray Zeferino on resistance and insurgency.

²² F. Gutiérrez de la Huerta, *Dictámen del Fiscal Don Francisco Gutiérrez de la Huerta, presentado y leído en el Consejo de Castilla sobre el restablecimiento de los Jesuitas* (Madrid: Imprenta de Don Agustín Espinosa y Compañía, 1845), 139–140.

Huerta proceeds to cite three sources: *De Regimine Principum*, the *Summa Theologiae*—in particular, *secunda secundae*, Question 69, Article 4 and *secunda secundae*, Question 42, Article 2—and Book 2 of the *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, Book 2, Distinction 104, Question 2 [*sic*].²³ Fray Zeferino comments on Huerta's citations as follows.

Firstly, Huerta only mentions *De Regimine Principum* in his *Dictamen*. He does not explicitly cite the text. Neither does Fray Zeferino specify it in his response. A reader then is left with the note that St. Thomas allegedly justifies the killing of the king and the tyrant in the text and that Fray Zeferino categorically objects to this thought. The approach of this study then is to go back to *De Regimine Principum*, a popular and influential text during the Middle Ages because it was frequently attributed to St. Thomas.

However, “in reality, St. Thomas wrote at most only the first part, also known as *On Kingship*, which was addressed to the King of Cyprus.”²⁴ As further noted by twentieth-century scholars, Ptolemy of Lucca completed most parts of the *De Regimine Principum* around thirty years after the passing of the Angelic Doctor. This is important to the research at hand because it delimits the scope of the text to be reviewed. In the first part, titled “*De Regno*” (On Kingship), only one passage stands out as potentially being the seat of the issue. It reads:

It also seems that proceeding against the cruelty of tyrants should pertain to public authority rather than to the private presumption of some. First, if it pertains to the right of some multitude to provide a king for itself, the same multitude can, not unjustly, depose a king that they instituted or bridle his power, if he should abuse the royal power tyrannically. Nor should such a multitude be thought to be acting unfaithfully when it abandons the tyrant, even if it had previously subjected itself to him in perpetuity, because he deserved to have his subjects not preserve their pact with him by not behaving faithfully in the government of the multitude, as the office of king demands.²⁵

If this is Huerta's reference, Fray Zeferino is correct in challenging the court officer. As the Dominican friar explains, deposing is only a removal from office, and nowhere in the text can a justification be found for killing someone, especially a king or a tyrant.

²³ Huerta, *Dictamen*, 140.

²⁴ Ptolemy of Lucca with portions attributed to St. Thomas Aquinas, *On the Government of Rulers: De Regimine Principum*, translated by James M. Blythe. The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 1, accessed 30 September 2024. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fhkt9>.

²⁵ Aquinas, *De Regno*, Book 1, Chapter 7, No. 7. See translation from Ptolemy of Lucca, *On the Government of Rulers*, 75–76.

Huerta also cites the *Summa Theologiae*. But this time, he specifies *Secunda secundae*, Question 69, Article 4 (Whether a man who is condemned to death may lawfully defend himself if he can?). Here is the text he refers to:

A man may be condemned to death in two ways. First justly, and then it is not lawful for the condemned to defend himself, because it is lawful for the judge to combat his resistance by force, so that on his part the fight is unjust, and consequently without any doubt he sins.

Secondly a man is condemned unjustly: and such a sentence is like the violence of robbers, according to Ezech. 22:21, “Her princes in the midst of her are like wolves ravening the prey to shed blood.” Wherefore even as it is lawful to resist robbers, so is it lawful, in a like case, to resist wicked princes; except perhaps in order to avoid scandal, whence some grave disturbance might be feared to arise.²⁶

Fray Zeferino presents a compelling critique of Huerta’s interpretation of the *Summa Theologiae*, accusing him of misrepresenting the original teachings of St. Thomas. He counters Huerta’s claims by focusing on three crucial points: Firstly, Fray Zeferino contends that it is clear that if a person is unjustly sentenced to death by a judge, that person may lawfully resist or defend himself, but only under strict conditions. This resistance is permissible only when it does not incite public disorder or scandal. Moreover, such resistance is allowed when dealing with lower authorities or judges, and when the injustice of the sentence is well-known and publicly recognized. However, if these conditions are not met—if the resistance risks causing disruption or scandal among the people—then it becomes unlawful, regardless of how unjust the condemnation may be. This nuanced view emphasizes that resistance must be exercised with caution and responsibility.

Secondly, Fray Zeferino highlights that St. Thomas’s discussion is strictly limited to self-defense and resistance. At no point does Aquinas suggest that it is permissible to kill the judge or, more drastically, advocate for regicide. The Dominican missionary further underscores that St. Thomas’s writings concern moral resistance to unjust authority, not taking life or overthrowing rulers.

Thirdly, and most importantly, Fray Zeferino points out that this text in the *Summa Theologiae* limits the right to defense and resistance to individuals who have been unjustly condemned to death. This right is personal and specific, applying only to the one facing an unjust sentence. As Huerta implies, it does not extend to the general populace or suggest a broad justification for regicide or tyrannicide. The theories of regicide and tyrannicide, which advocate for the killing of a ruler under

²⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, Q69, A4. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benziger Bros. edition, 1947), accessed 30 September 2024, <https://isidore.co/aquinas/summa/SS/SS069.html#SSQ69OUTP1>.

certain circumstances, misconstrue Aquinas's careful and limited allowance for individual self-defense.

It can be confidently asserted that Fray Zeferino's critique underscores that Aquinas's arguments focus on justice and order, not rebellion or overthrowing an authority. This interpretation reinforces the understanding that Aquinas sought to promote lawful resistance within the boundaries of moral and ethical principles without endorsing violent insurrection or destabilizing legitimate rule. Such a thought also resonates in the other text in the *Summa Theologiae* cited by Huerta which addresses the question, "Whether sedition is always a mortal sin?" It reads:

A tyrannical government is not just, because it is directed, not to the common good, but to the private good of the ruler, as the Philosopher states (Polit. iii, 5; Ethic. viii, 10). Consequently, there is no sedition in disturbing a government of this kind, unless indeed the tyrant's rule be disturbed so inordinately, that his subjects suffer greater harm from the consequent disturbance than from the tyrant's government. Indeed it is the tyrant rather that is guilty of sedition, since he encourages discord and sedition among his subjects, that he may lord over them more securely; for this is tyranny, being conducive to the private good of the ruler, and to the injury of the multitude.²⁷

Meanwhile, understanding Huerta's citation from St. Thomas's *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* and Fray Zeferino's rebuttal is a bit challenging. Huerta's reference appears to be incorrect. If one were to go back to the stated reference, he would find nothing, for it does not exist. Fortunately, Fray Zeferino perceptively identifies this error and directs the readers to the closest reference to Huerta's claims in his *Dictamen*. Fray Zeferino cites the passage in Book 2 of the *Commentary on the Sentences*, Question 2, Distinction 44.²⁸ This is St. Thomas's discussion: "On the source of the power to sin: Obedience and Authority." Cited below is the only text in this part which refers to tyrannicide:

If it is a legitimate and even a praiseworthy deed to kill a person, then no obligation of obedience exists toward that person. Now in the Book on Duties (De Officiis I, 8, 26) Cicero justifies Julius Caesar's assassins. Although Caesar was a close friend of his, yet by usurping the empire he proved himself to be a tyrant. Therefore toward such powers there is no obligation of obedience.²⁹

Upon closer examination of the text, it becomes evident that this passage appears before St. Thomas's *Sed Contra*, indicating that it serves merely as a premise

²⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, Q42, A2.

²⁸ Gonzalez, *Estudios*, Tomo III, 462.

²⁹ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences*, Lib. 2, d. 44, q. 2, a. 2, arg. 5. See T. Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences*, compiled by Joseph Kenny, OP, accessed 30 September 2024, <https://isidore.co/aquinas/Sent2d44q2a2.htm>.

rather than his original thought. The cited idea originates from Cicero (also known as Tullius). The quotation that follows is St. Thomas's nuanced interpretation of Cicero's argument:

To the fifth argument the answer is that Cicero speaks of domination obtained by violence and ruse, the subjects being unwilling or even forced to accept it and there being no recourse open to a superior who might pronounce judgment upon the usurper. In this case, he that kills the tyrant for the liberation of the country is praised and rewarded.³⁰

Here, St. Thomas only offers a possible explanation for the judgment of Cicero, who was a general. But to the question of Article 2 of Distinction 44, that is, "Whether Christians are bound to obey secular powers, and especially tyrants," St. Thomas answers that "Christians are bound to obey the authorities inasmuch as they are from God; and they are not bound to obey inasmuch as the authority is not from God."³¹ This resolution of St. Thomas exhibits how he builds upon the ideas of classical thinkers, such as Cicero. It offers his integration of these thoughts into his broader philosophical framework. With the said foundational doctrine, St. Thomas further answers the question: "An authority acquired by violence is not a true authority, and there is no obligation of obedience."³²

From the reviewed texts, what can be concluded is that the response allowed by St. Thomas to a tyrant or an abusive king is not regicide or tyrannicide. Instead, it is lawful resistance. As Fray Zeferino concludes, these texts from *Regimine Principum* (or *De Regno*, to be more precise), the *Summa Theologiae*, and the *Commentaries on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* can only indicate three assumptions: Firstly, St. Thomas admits, in principle and general thesis, the possibility of the legitimacy of resistance to tyrannical power. Secondly, there are indispensable conditions for resistance to be legitimate, and such conditions can only be achieved very rarely and with great difficulty. Lastly, in any case, regicide and tyrannicide remain illicit and contrary to Christian morality.

Furthermore, Fray Zeferino criticizes Huerta, saying that Huerta misses important discussions made by Jaime Balmes, an esteemed Thomistic scholar during that time in Spain.³³ While he does not explicitly cite any specific work by Balmes, further research for this study strongly suggests that Fray Zeferino is most likely referencing Balmes's *Escritos Políticos* (1944). The reference may be indirect, but the themes and ideas align closely with those found in Huerta's *Dictamen*, making it the probable source of inspiration in Fray Zeferino's critique.

³⁰ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences*, Lib. 2, d. 44, q. 2, a. 2, arg. 5.

³¹ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences*, Lib. 2, d. 44, q. 2, a. 2, arg. 5.

³² Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences*, Lib. 2, d. 44, q. 2, a. 2, ad. 4.

³³ Gonzalez, *Estudios*, Tomo III, 453.

In his *Escritos Políticos*, Balmes maintains that governments must uphold reason, justice, and good faith. He follows the members of the Salamanca school of classical liberalism on the foundations of the origin of civil authority, its attributes, boundaries, and the right to resist tyrants. Citing St. Thomas Aquinas, he underscores the need for a legitimate ruler to be subject to law and for law to accord with reason.³⁴ He warns that when legitimate authority is violated, it desensitizes citizens and rulers to the importance of respecting laws, paving the way for arbitrary governance and forced obedience, ultimately undermining the fabric of a just society.³⁵

In the eyes of Fray Zeferino, Fiscal Huerta neglects another relevant detail: John Wyclif (1328–1384), an English thinker and reformer from the University of Oxford.³⁶ Wyclif was known for lashing at clericalism, the abuse of the Church hierarchy, and luxuries enjoyed by priests. He also taught “that temporal lords may, at their own judgment, take away temporal goods from churchmen who are habitually delinquent; or that the people may, at their own judgment, correct delinquent lords.”³⁷ Among the forty-five Wycliffite propositions condemned as heretical or erroneous at the Council of Constance (1414–1418) were several concerning tyrannicide. Despite the widespread influence of Thomistic writings during this period, not a single work of St. Thomas Aquinas was cited in the council’s discussions on these propositions, particularly those related to the justification of tyrannicide. For Fray Zeferino, this omission makes it even more perplexing that Huerta suddenly invokes the names of St. Thomas and the Dominicans as apologists for the killing of a king or tyrant. Zeferino finds it curious, if not suspicious, that Huerta appeals to St. Thomas in defense of a stance that had never been associated with the Angelic Doctor’s teachings during such a critical moment in philosophical and theological debate in the Catholic Church.

Fray Zeferino expresses deep frustration, stating that the slanderous accusations have fallen into the hands of those who, unaware of the malice behind such claims, fail to grasp the depth of the injustice they perpetuate. He affirms that St. Thomas “makes the painfully true and exact enumeration of the injustices and iniquities that tyranny entails, [as well as] the horrible picture of the evils of tyrannical

³⁴ Ignacio Ibáñez, “Jaime Balmes: Seven Lessons and Three Pieces of Advice for Today’s Politicians,” *Journal of Markets & Morality*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2020): 209–213.

³⁵ An 1844 anthology, *Escritos Políticos* is a collection of eight of Jaime Balmes’s articles published in *El Pensamiento de la Nación*, nos. 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23. See also Jaime Balmes, *Política y Constitución*, edited by Joaquín Varela Suanzes (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Constitucionales, 1988), 215–16.

³⁶ Wyclif has been described as the “evening star” of scholasticism, marking the twilight of the medieval intellectual tradition, and as the “morning star” or *stella matutina* of the English Reformation, which heralded a new era of religious thought and reform. Emily Michael, “John Wyclif on body and mind,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 64, No. 3 (July 2003): 343.

³⁷ Guy Carleton Lee, *Source Book of English History: Leading Documents and a Bibliography of Sources* (New York: Henry Hold and Company, 1900), 210.

government.”³⁸ Yet, he likewise accentuates that St. Thomas is equally committed to upholding due process and maintaining civil order. That is why specific conditions must be met to judge resistance as justifiable. Fray Zeferino succinctly runs through these conditions as such:

1. *Tyranny is excessive and absolutely intolerable.* The rule has become insufferable, and resisting a perceived authority cannot bring much greater evils than those resulting from tyranny itself. If an abusive rule were not excessive, it is better to observe, assess, and rationally address it for a while than to violently and thoughtlessly act against such tyranny. Rashly acting based on impulse exposes oneself to dangers more serious than tyrannical rules, such as graver discord among the members of the state, especially in determining the next leaders and kind of government that must replace the tyrannical rule.³⁹
2. *The people possess the right to provide for themselves and the king.* Members of the state can legitimately stage resistance if they provide for the government, including the king. Thus, it is legitimate for the multitude to depose the king or restrict his power when he tyrannically abuses his public authority.⁴⁰
3. *The tyrant draws power from a higher authority.* If a higher authority has granted the tyrant’s power, the multitude must seek remedy from this superior to address the wickedness of the tyrant.⁴¹

Perhaps many people today would frown upon a critical reflection of Fray Zeferino in connection with the third condition. According to him, and as has been said earlier, the disorders and evils that result from resistance can be severe and much worse than those that result from the abuse of power. Fray Zeferino advises: “If there is no human resource left for the people against tyranny, the holy Doctor advises Christian suffering and prayer to God, King of all men and nations, always powerful to free a people from its tyrant.”⁴² He elaborates further, stating that some people believe that when tyranny becomes unbearable, brave individuals have to kill a tyrant. “But this is against apostolic doctrine,” Fray Zeferino underscores. By invoking apostolic teachings, he highlights the moral and theological contradiction in such views, stressing that even in the face of extreme tyranny, the Church does not condone violent rebellion or regicide. Instead, true courage lies not in taking life but in upholding the moral principles of peace, lawful resistance, and the sanctity of human life, even under oppressive rule. As Fray Zeferino eloquently observes:

³⁸ Gonzalez, *Estudios*, Tomo III, 469.

³⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 1, Chapter 6. See Thomas Aquinas, *Contra Gentiles*, translated by Anton Pegis, (New York: Hanover House, 1955), accessed 30 September 2024. <https://isidore.co/aquinas/ContraGentiles.htm>.

⁴⁰ Aquinas, *De Regno*, Book 1, Chapter 7, No. 49.

⁴¹ Aquinas, *De Regno*, Book 1, Chapter 7, No. 50.

⁴² Gonzalez, *Estudios*, Tomo III, 456.

There is no obligation to obey commands to sin, as the Christian martyrs did... St. Thomas, in all great philosophical, moral, and political questions, had been inspired by Christianity. He very well knew how to avoid extremes... He knew well that violence cannot establish the law or the legitimacy of power.⁴³

The Burgos Manifesto

Can this philosophical doctrine on resistance bear relevance within the broader context of Filipino history? Very closely, the principles of resistance, authority, and moral governance, as articulated by figures like St. Thomas Aquinas and interpreted by Fray Zeferino, can find meaningful echoes in the struggles faced by the Filipino people. Throughout the nation's history, from colonial resistance to the quest for self-determination, the Filipino people's fight against oppression has been shaped by similar questions of just resistance and moral legitimacy. The discourse surrounding tyranny, civil order, and the moral limits of rebellion is a philosophical foundation that resonates deeply with the nation's enduring pursuit of freedom, justice, and sovereignty.

The story of the GOMBURZA draws attention to a significant manifesto purportedly written by "Los Filipinos" and circulated at the University of Santo Tomas in 1864.⁴⁴ Notably, this was the same year that Fray Zeferino's *Estudios* was published. While this study does not suggest that Fray Zeferino was involved in the writing of the pamphlet that was later published in Spain as "*A la nación*," an interesting connection arises when considering that the manifesto has been attributed to Fr. Jose Burgos, one of the martyrs of GOMBURZA. Fray Zeferino had explicitly praised Burgos for his "proficiency and faithfulness" in the lessons the latter learned under his guidance.⁴⁵ This connection provides a valuable perspective when analyzing the contents of "*A la nación*," which forms part of what is now known as the *Burgos Manifesto*.

One may find in some historical studies that the *Burgos Manifesto* was among the first "anti-friar writings by Filipinos."⁴⁶ It has been part of the propaganda narrative

⁴³ Gonzalez, *Estudios*, Tomo III, 464.

⁴⁴ The pamphlet was signed by "Los Filipinos" on June 27, 1864, and was distributed inside the University of Santo Tomas. It was initially seen by historians as a manifesto protesting the injustices and aggressive land acquisitions carried out by the Spanish friars in the Philippines. However, to reduce it merely to a protest is an oversimplification. A closer examination may reveal more about it. For, it can be interpreted as far more than a mere cry against economic and social grievances. It presents itself as a deeply philosophical discourse, engaging with critical themes of human rights, freedom, and national sovereignty. Later on, it was published in Spain as an article titled "A la Nacion." See "A la nación," *La América*, September 12, 1864, 11–13.

⁴⁵ Villaruel, *Father Jose Burgos*, 17–18.

⁴⁶ John N. Schumacher, "*The Burgos Manifesto: The Authentic Text and Its Genuine Author*," 54, no. 2 (2006): 214.

that one has to be anti-friar to become a nationalist. In a study on the authenticity of the *Burgos Manifiesto*, a respected Church historian, Fr. John Schumacher, SJ notes that even the known *Burgos Manifiesto* itself could not have been entirely written by Burgos.⁴⁷ In a way, it appears that the manifesto was altered to serve a specific propaganda. In Schumacher's research, only the first twenty-four pages of the document could have possibly been written by Burgos.

This 1864 document criticized the prejudice in the Church, which supposedly favored the Spanish friars. But, in truth, the main agenda of the pamphlet was to provide rebuttals against false reports against the native clergy in the Philippines. The rabid criticisms were published in the newspaper *La Verdad* in Madrid. Meanwhile, the response to these allegations was published in another newspaper in Madrid called *La América*. Still, the latter's text, almost precisely similar to the 1864 pamphlet, was written in the Philippines.

This study cites four arguments attributed to Burgos, or “Los Filipinos,” in the 1864 document. In an initial reading, the document of Los Filipinos might appear to be outrightly anti-church. However, after further reflection informed by Fray Zeferino's discussions, these statements can be reinterpreted as philosophically grounded critiques rather than purely reactionary expressions of rebellion. By applying a more nuanced lens that is rooted in intellectual and moral considerations, it becomes clear that Burgos's arguments are not aimed at undermining the Church itself but rather at addressing specific injustices within the institution, particularly those related to the colonial clergy's abuses of power. The themes, referred to here, are the following: 1) prevention of discord, 2) allegation of an aborted rebellion, 3) right to resistance, and 4) ascent to greater authority.

Firstly, the introduction of the 1864 document lays out its purpose with striking clarity: it states that critics (as published in *La Verdad*) have portrayed the Filipino clergy in a demeaning and unjust manner, which does not reflect the clergy's true merits, virtue, or knowledge. This misrepresentation compelled the authors to break their customary silence. They felt it necessary to raise their voices, however humbly, to address the nation (Spain) in defense of the Filipino clergy. By doing so, they aimed to correct the distortions their detractors propagated and restore the dignity that rightfully belonged to their ecclesiastical community. Yet, it is true that this shift from passive silence to active response marks a pivotal moment in the history of the Philippines, as Filipinos started to seek to engage in a more public dialogue, driven by a desire for justice and truth. Its primary purpose was to prevent discord, which could emerge from the mutual antagonism between Spaniards and Filipinos—the Spaniards' disdain for Filipinos and the Filipinos' resentment toward Spaniards who judged them unfairly. By addressing these tensions, “*A la Nacion*” sought to foster a sense of fairness and mutual respect, curbing any potential for

⁴⁷ Schumacher, “*The Burgos Manifiesto*,” 292–293.

conflict from such deep-seated biases. The intention was to create a more harmonious relationship, mitigating the risk of friction stemming from prejudiced judgments and unequal treatment between Filipinos and Spaniards. The pamphlet reads: “We would not even take the trouble to refute them if we did not believe that perhaps certain unknowing readers, who do not have the duty of being well instructed in these matters, might have accepted in good faith such false ideas.”⁴⁸

When one goes back to the *La Verdad* article, one may understand why the Filipinos had to refute what it claimed, especially after learning that the Filipino clergy had continuously been maligned in Madrid. One criticism against the Filipinos reads:

The Filipino, by his nature, by his character, by the influence of the climate or of race, is not good for carrying out high offices. It is a common saying that the Tagalog is an excellent soldier, an ordinary corporal, a bad sergeant, cannot at all discharge the position of an officer, because he is unfit for it. Now, in the same way, the Filipino who consecrates himself to the service of the altar can carry out well the routine functions of a church, but he never succeeds in excelling when he is adorned with the dignity of the priesthood.⁴⁹

Secondly, the allegation of rebellion, supposedly led by the Filipino priest Fr. Pedro Pelaez, was an accusation lacking substantial evidence. When Burgos, in defense of his fellow Filipino, wrote that those responsible for fabricating this so-called rebellion “could be no other than the friars of certain determinate religious orders,” he was not issuing a broad, universal condemnation of the clergy.⁵⁰ Instead, his remarks were aimed at three specific friars who had been penalized by Pelaez for their actions deemed excessive and contrary to public morality and tranquility. However, “*A la Nacion*” refrains from detailing their offenses “out of respect for decorum.”⁵¹

Despite the baselessness of the *La Verdad* article, its claim was weaponized to malign Filipinos. The article used this unfounded charge to discredit both Pelaez and the broader Filipino clergy, portraying them as rebellious against the Spanish government. In response, the author of “*A la Nacion*” felt further compelled to defend Pelaez. The defense also sought to restore his integrity and counter the false narrative depicting him as a traitor. Thus, the pamphlet became a rebuttal to the insidious attempt to undermine the Filipino clergy and expose the slanderous intentions behind such accusations, ultimately revealing the manipulation of public sentiment against Filipinos. One paragraph in “*A la Nacion*” reads:

⁴⁸ The translations used here are also provided in Schumacher, “The Burgos Manifiesto,” 171.

⁴⁹ Schumacher, “The Burgos Manifiesto,” 177, 179.

⁵⁰ Schumacher, “The Burgos Manifiesto,” 207.

⁵¹ Schumacher, “The Burgos Manifiesto,” 207.

For a man of the stature of Father Pelaez to conceive [the rebellion], it would be necessary that that man either had complaints against the government for having been bypassed in his career and not having seen his services recompensed and his merits esteemed, or, on the other hand, that he be ambitious for power and cherish intentions of personal glorification. Fortunately, neither one nor the other could have been possible.⁵²

The suggestion that Pelaez was bypassed in any significant way cannot reasonably serve as motivation for rebellion. For one, he held a distinguished position in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, enjoying the prestigious title of treasurer of the cathedral. His status was further elevated by the government, which repeatedly entrusted him with honorable commissions, thereby demonstrating its high regard for his wisdom and virtue. Another reason why associating Pelaez with any form of rebellion is highly implausible lies in his widely recognized humility and virtuous character. He was known for his modest ambitions and content with his respected role within the ecclesiastical community. Far from being driven by personal gain or revolutionary zeal, he was fully satisfied with the honor and recognition he had received throughout his career. The virtues he embodied—humility, integrity, and devotion—stand in stark contrast to the traits one would associate with a rebellious figure. In the final year of his life, he focused solely on deepening his sanctity rather than seeking personal advancement or expressing dissatisfaction. His virtuous disposition made it clear that personal ambition was never a driving force for him but rather his devotion to a higher spiritual calling.

So, the defense of Pelaez is clear: It emphasized that he harbored no intention of creating a scandal. Even though he had legitimate reasons to feel slighted at one time or another, he chose to remain content and at peace with his situation. This attitude aligns with Fray Zeferino's interpretation of Thomistic teaching, which emphasizes the importance of avoiding scandals that might lead to public disturbance or discord. By refraining from acting on personal grievances, Pelaez embodied humility, prioritizing social harmony over personal advancement. In the eyes of Burgos, or "Los Filipinos," Pelaez's restraint could be seen as an act that could have prevented a revolution, demonstrating the power of personal sacrifice and silence in the face of potential conflict. This level of selflessness underscores the unlikelihood of his involvement in any rebellion.

Thirdly, resistance should not be conflated with rebellion or overthrowing a government, as resistance can still be lawful when certain conditions are met. This distinction is critical in understanding the accusations against Pelaez and the Filipino clergy. At worst, the clergy could be accused of resisting certain unjust practices, but even if that were true, it would constitute just resistance rather than outright

⁵² Schumacher, "The Burgos Manifiesto," 205.

insurrection or rebellion. The 1864 document provides a framework for justifying such resistance, underscoring that it was based on legitimate grievances rather than any desire to overthrow the governing authorities. The 1864 document “*A la Nacion*” reads:

We observe in passing that the Laws of the Indies, and all the dispositions of law... acknowledge, in conformity with canon law and the discipline of the Church, the preferential right that the secular clergy of the Philippines has to the parishes, without stopping to consider whether or not it is a native secular clergy.⁵³

This emphasis on lawful and measured resistance aligns with the teachings of St. Thomas, where resistance is permissible when it upholds justice and seeks the common good without descending into chaos or rebellion. Thus, any resistance attributed to Pelaez or his peers could have been morally grounded and justified rather than being an act of rebellion aimed at destabilizing the government. By referencing the Laws of the Indies and aligning with canon law, the 1864 document offers a solid legal and moral foundation to justify the resistance of Pelaez and other native clergy against their unjust removal from their parishes. This resistance was not arbitrary but grounded in principles that upheld civil and ecclesiastical law. This resistance aligns with what Fray Zeferino describes as resistance to the “tyranny of administration”—a form of governance that, while not outright despotic, imposed unjust measures that oppressed the Filipino clergy. By standing against such actions, Pelaez and his fellow clergymen were not instigating rebellion. They were only defending their rightful place within the Church, guided by legitimate laws and the principles of justice. This resistance sought to preserve the dignity and autonomy of the native clergy within a colonial system that often denied them these rights. The 1864 article further reads:

There was, it is true, there was a time when the friars here were placed on the heights of Olympus from which they scoffed, secure from the winds of contradiction, because it was believed that they were idolized by the natives and were the only ones capable of upholding the rights of the nation. However, that time has already passed. Now, seeing things as they are in reality, we know that, far from the nation being sustained by the friars, it is they who are sustained by the material force of the nation.⁵⁴

The final and perhaps most distinctly Thomistic argument in “*A la Nacion*” is the appeal to higher authority. This concept, deeply rooted in St. Thomas’s philosophy, is also mirrored in Fray Zeferino’s teachings. As how St. Thomas has been cited earlier, if the power of a ruler, who later becomes tyrannical, has been granted by a higher authority, then the people must seek recourse from that superior power. This appeal to greater authority is a legal and moral pathway for resisting tyranny without resorting to rebellion. If no such authority is available or willing

⁵³ Schumacher, “The Burgos Manifiesto,” 171.

⁵⁴ Schumacher, “The Burgos Manifiesto,” 199.

to intervene, Aquinas—and Fray Zeferino in agreement—advocates for a response rooted in Christian virtue: *Christian suffering and prayer*. In the absence of earthly remedies, the people are encouraged to bear their suffering with patience and to turn to God in prayer. This counsel underscores the Thomistic emphasis on order, justice, and the higher good, advocating that even in the face of unbearable tyranny, one should avoid the chaos of insurrection and instead trust in divine providence. This argument encapsulates the profound moral weight of St. Thomas’s doctrine, which favors lawful resistance and moral endurance over violent upheaval, ensuring that the people’s actions remain aligned with Christian doctrine and the common good. This thought is perfectly mirrored in the closing lines of the 1864 pamphlet. As it reads,

Now nothing remains for us to do but, first, to ask God that he give us a heart capable of bearing insults and enduring calumnies. Secondly, we ask the magnanimous and generous nation, to whom we address our words, to do justice to our loyal sentiments.⁵⁵

Conclusion

To conclude and answer the question, “Did St. Thomas Aquinas justify insurgence?” Zeferino González categorically said no. Organized rebellion, more so killing a king or a tyrant, cannot be supported by a Christian philosopher as intellectually gifted and divinely compassionate as St. Thomas. However, he did make allowances for specific forms of resistance, such as resisting a tyrant by acquisition (an invader who seizes power by force) or opposing a tyrant by administration (an abusive ruler), all though always within the bounds of moral law.

This discourse extends beyond abstract theory, as can be gleaned from a critical period in the history of the Philippines. The parallels between the arguments in Fr. Jose Burgos’s writings and those taught by Fray Zeferino are too comparable to be coincidental. While neither Fray Zeferino nor St. Thomas is explicitly mentioned in the 1864 document, the arguments’ structure and careful reasoning suggest an evident influence. After all, Burgos spent much of his life studying at the Colegio de San Juan de Letran and the University of Santo Tomas, where he would have been exposed to these very Thomistic teachings under the guidance of Fray Zeferino. The discussions around tyrants by acquisition and administration, which were not common in Manila at the time, almost certainly originated within Fray Zeferino’s classroom.

Now, at the closing of the study, one may think that the Thomistic doctrine of resistance, or even Fray Zeferino’s interpretation of it, lacks the potency to bring about real change. At first glance, it might appear passive or ineffective. However, one vital element alters this impression—that is, *prayer*.

⁵⁵ Schumacher, “The Burgos Manifesto,” 209.

Prayer is a gift deeply embedded in Filipinos. This power of prayer has been demonstrated in at least two pivotal moments in Philippine history: The first instance was in the battles of La Naval de Manila in 1646, when the prayers of the Filipino-Spanish forces were believed to have brought about a miraculous victory against the Dutch armada.⁵⁶ This was a success of a lawful resistance against a tyranny by acquisition. The other occasion was the 1986 EDSA Revolution, where the peaceful, prayerful mass gatherings of Filipinos overwhelmed a rather brutal dictatorship.⁵⁷ This example is a conspicuous illustration of resistance against the tyranny by administration.

Thus, while Thomistic resistance may seem restrained, it holds within it the transformative potential of lawful action and spiritual strength, two elements that have arguably shaped one important aspect in the development of the Filipino psyche.^{PS}

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⁵⁶ See Joselito B. Zulueta, ed., *Saga of La Naval: Triumph of a People’s Faith* (Quezon City: Dominican Province of the Philippines, 2007).

⁵⁷ Aurora Javate de Dios, Petronilo Bn Daroy, and Lorna Kalaw-Tirol, eds., *Dictatorship and Revolution: Roots of People’s Power* (Manila: Conspectus, 1988), 902 pages.

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