



Antonio Gonzalez, O.P. : Purveyor of Truth, Servant-Leader and Scholar

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In his three decades of active engagement in the university, Fr. Antonio Gonzalez, O.P. led a hyphenated career. He was teacher, administrator, regent. All his works in the university were crowned by his vocation as priest. As teacher, he epitomized two shining attributes – scholarship and dedication to truth. He wrote and taught passionately about truth while at the same time witnessing to it by his life of authenticity. As administrator, he epitomized servant leadership by performing his responsibilities with a genuine spirit of service while adhering to the highest ethical standards. This made him a lumnious examplar to his fellow-administrators and students. As regent he went beyond what a regent normally does – presiding over the Eucharist, hearing confessions and facilitating retreats- he was confidant, counselor and companion in their search for answers to their many questions.

Fr. Gonzalez has left a legacy of academic excellence and virtues, two essential attributes that all members of the Catholic University must possess.

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Introduction

Studying is a constitutive part of the life and vocation of Dominicans. It is study not simply for the sake of acquiring knowledge but study in the service of preaching. Proof of this is the fact that St. Dominic sent his brothers to the new universities of Europe, to Paris, to Bologna, and to Oxford, in order to acquire the needed academic training to become effective preachers of the Word.

The Book of Constitutions and Ordinations of the Friars of the Orders of Preachers (2011) categorically states:

By study the brethren consider in their heart the manifold wisdom of God and prepare themselves for the doctrinal service of the Church and of all mankind. It is all the more fitting that they should devote themselves to study, because from the tradition of the Order they are more specially called to cultivate mankind's inclination toward truth. (p. 20).

As a Dominican, study characterized the life of Fr. Antonio Gonzalez, O.P.

Fr. Antonio Gonzalez, O.P. was born on the 31st day of December in 1912 in Lugueros, Leon Spain to Roman Gonzalez and Maria Garcia. His early fascination with the Dominican way of life is evidenced by his thorough Dominican schooling having been educated in institutions run by the Order of Preachers. He finished his secondary education at the Dominican College in Valladolid, his tertiary education at the Sto. Domingo Convent in Avila where he earned his Bachelor's Degree in Philosophy. It was in St. Albert Priory in Hongkong where he obtained his Bachelor in Sacred Theology degree. It was also in this place where he was ordained as priest in 1936. His incessant quest for knowledge was not staved by the Philosophy and Theology degrees he earned. He continued his studies at the University of Santo Tomas where he earned his Licentiate degree in Philosophy. It was in the same university where he clinched his doctorate in Philosophy. Perhaps desiring to infuse vigor into his solid Dominican education, he enrolled for and earned a Masterate degree in Literature at the Catholic University of America. His search for knowledge did not end with the acquisition of his academic degrees. He was a voracious reader and prolific writer who produced articles that could withstand the scrutiny of academics. In his various stints in the University, he emphasized that the primary engagement of students is to hone their knowledge and acquire the skills and values that reflect their being Thomasians. The different facets of the life of this great Dominican unfolds in the succeeding pages.

Fr. Antonio Gonzalez, Purveyor of Truth

One of the distinguishing characteristics of a Catholic University articulated by John Paul II in his apostolic letter, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* is that it is both "a community of scholars representing various branches of human knowledge, and an academic institution in which Catholicism is vitally present and operative" (n.14). The Catholic University enjoys the best of both worlds because it includes among its ranks distinguished scholars who also make sure that every activity in the University is permeated by Catholic values. These are scholars who fastidiously engage in the

rigours of scholarly pursuits and who also epitomize the highest form of excellence – virtue.

Catholicism becomes truly “vitaly present and operative” in Catholic universities when it is impelled by the commitment to provide all its stakeholders, the most important of whom are the learners, complete formation. This formation if it will witness to the University’s role in the evangelizing mission of the Church must seek the formation of experts with conscience, of technocrats with firm moral grounding, of entrepreneurs steeped in social responsibility and of politicians committed to servant leadership. Indeed, this commitment of Catholic schools to holistic formation of its students speaks of its very identity. (CCE 11).

An obvious indicator of the commitment to the holistic formation of students in the Catholic university is its strict adherence to truth. John Paul II in *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* emphasizes this dialogue between truth and holistic formation when he states, “It is in the context of the impartial search for truth that the relationship between faith and reason is brought to light and meaning. The invitation of Saint Augustine, *Intellege ut credas; crede ut intellegas* is relevant to Catholic Universities that are called to explore courageously the riches of Revelation and of nature so that the united endeavour of intelligence and faith will enable people to come to the full measure of their humanity, created in the image and likeness of God, renewed even more marvellously, after sin, in Christ, and called to shine forth in the light of the Spirit” (n. 5). During his stint as Regent of the College of Education, Fr. Antonio Gonzalez’ efforts to provide the students of the college with holistic formation goes beyond the regular works of a regent: presiding over Eucharistic celebrations, administering the sacraments, organizing and facilitating in retreats and recollections and counseling. He devised a unique way of addressing the most pressing questions of students ranging from political and social issues, questions about dogma, Church history, biblical interpretations, Church history, Canon Law, moral theology and even about dancing and singing. This ingenious way of addressing students’ questions does not only provide them with insightful and well-researched answers but also encourage them to send their questions while maintaining their anonymity. This way, these students do not run the risk of exposing themselves to possible ridicule or grilling by their friends and peers. It also empowers the students to ask questions ranging from the most transcendental to the most prosaic while it allows the good regent to bring the light of truth within their level of appreciation.

In his regular columns in the Education Journal, the official student publication of the College of Education, Fr. Gonzalez answers students’ queries in a straightforward and no frills manner, believing that these young people entrusted to his care deserve to know the truth and be guided by this same truth.

He answers each of these one by one, taking pains to substantiate his answers with citations from the Bible, Church documents, and from respected Catholic writers. It can easily be gleaned from his answers to the questions that there was never any question that he considered impertinent or insignificant. Each question was given a thorough response. The following examples of questions from the students and the corresponding answers of Fr. Gonzalez reprinted in the tribute edition of the *Education Journal* (Vol. XXV, No. 2, February – March, 1981) showcase his strict adherence to truth and his familiarity with a wide array of topics.

One of the questions posed to Fr. Gonzalez was about boycotting elections. It was a timely question because the 1980s were turbulent years. The young were restless and the wind of activism was howling ferociously. The young Catholics among the Filipinos needed guidance in the realm of politics, thus one of the questions that a student posed to Fr. Gonzalez was this, “Does boycotting of elections mean a sin on the part of Catholic citizens?” To this question, he gave a 6-paragraph answer. He first gave the meaning and importance of patriotism and the active participation of citizens in the affairs of the country. He then explained what elections are and why they are an important political exercise. Then he defined what it means to boycott elections and from there proceeded to discuss its moral character. He said, “To boycott means to combine in abstaining from or preventing dealings with as a means of intimidation and coercion. Therefore, boycotting elections is always wrong, whether in normal times or in times of crisis and criminally punishable to since it is a type of conspiracy against the country. Furthermore, using intimidation or coercion is always an unlawful means since it is not a reasonable way to attain anything” (p. 12). It is important to note that in his answer, Fr. Gonzalez did not delve into the moral culpability of the person boycotting the elections even if the question hints at that, rather, he concentrates on the action, not on the actor. This is consistent with the posture of the Church to condemn the sin but not the sinner.

A question on dogma which Fr. Gonzalez meticulously answered concerns original sin. This is the inquiry, “Has the Church a definite answer as to what really is the first sin of our first parents?” To this query, he first categorically gave an affirmative response. Then he cited explanatory footnotes to Chapters 2 and 3 of Genesis in the Jerusalem Bible. After a lengthy citation, he then tackled the symbolism of some key figures in the Genesis event like the serpent, the tree and the forbidden fruit. He then concluded his discussion by stating that “although the literary form used in the first chapter of Genesis is figurative, still, the message is unmistakably the fact that the command of God was transgressed implies pride” (p.15).

A rigorous two-page answer was provided by Fr. Gonzalez to this question, “Can interpretation of the Bible, made by the Catholic Church, change as the

time changes? In answering this question, he first defined hermeneutics, before unlocking the meaning of interpretation. He explained that “Divine revelation is a manifestation of God to man in human language. He meant much more in what he said than what we could grasp at first. Thus, there arises the need for interpretation of a datum of revelation and consequently an evolution in its understanding” (p. 17). After establishing the meaning and need for interpretation he then set the parameters for interpreting passages from Scriptures by quoting from *Divino Afflante Spiritu*. He then went to the crux of the matter by stating that, “there can be no change in interpretation in the sense of substituting a previous interpretation by another that is opposed to it is its contradictory or contrary. The new interpretation is simply bringing out a clearer message or making explicit what is implied in a datum of revelation” (p.18). He wound up his answer by citing this famous passage from the Gospel of John, “Many things yet I have to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when he, the Spirit of truth has come, he will teach you all the truth. For he will not speak, and the things that are to come he will declare to you” (Jn. 16:13-15).

There was also a question on the separation of the Eastern and Western Churches and the differences between the two churches. For this question, Fr. Gonzalez expertly scaffolded his answers. He began with the general causes for separation, proceeded to the particular causes then graduated to the proximate causes. He, however was not satisfied with simply providing historical facts to show how the schism began and the events that precipitated them. He ended his answer in a positive note. He explained that some attempts to heal the wounds of division seemed to be working, evidenced by that even right after the closing of the Second Vatican Council when Pope Paul VI and the Byzantine Patriarch Athanagoras “had a most cordial meeting in Jerusalem and both lifted from each other the mutual excommunication of 1054” (p. 21). The answers he gave to this particular question reveal the logical approach he employed as a philosopher and his assiduous effort to give a comprehensive response to a question posed to him. He believed that every question, regardless of the one posing them, deserves well-researched and well-formulated answers. This unbiased disposition speaks eloquently of the respect that he had for the students. This respect for the dignity of the learners is an essential hallmark of a Catholic school and is basic requisite for the staff, teachers and administrators of Catholic schools (Miller, 2006).

In his answers to the question on whether the Blessed Virgin Mary was ever tempted, he revealed the crisp, orderly two-step neatness of the scholastic approach: what does reason say? what does revelation say? (Mcdermott, 1993). He first enumerated and explained the three sources of temptations: the flesh, the world and the devil. He described the flesh as “the inclination of the concupiscent and irascible appetites that tend towards anything that is easy and pleasurable and shrink

from anything that is difficult” (p. 21). Next, he described the world as implying “any object, person or anything else that may be an object of scandal or inducement to sin.” Finally, he based his description of the devil from revelation, saying that “the devil tempted our Lord Jesus Christ,” He then concluded his answer by saying that “with regard to the Blessed Mother, we do not know by revelation whether or not she was tempted by the devil.” Not wanting to leave the discussion on an uncertain plane, he concludes his response by stating that “God lets us be tempted in order to give us a chance to practice virtues and acquire merits. The Blessed Mother needed not this way of acquiring merits because in her divine motherhood were contained all the possible merits of a pure creature” (p. 21).

Fr. Gonzalez’ grasp of Catholic social teaching is evident in his response to the question asking if the Catholic Church hampers material progress by stressing the importance of the spiritual. He first demolished the misconceived dichotomy between the material and spiritual order by asserting that “it is through the temporal that one ascends to the eternal. He followed this up, however with a *caveat* by saying that “the Church, however, reminds us continuously to maintain a sane hierarchy of values.” He then proceeded to quote from two important Church documents that deal with the role of the Church in the social, political, economic and cultural spheres. First he provided evidence that the Church does not hamper progress by quoting from *Mater et Magistra*, “The Church has always taught and will continue to teach that scientific and technical progress, like the prosperity that derives from them, are all authentic goods and a sign of the advance of civilization” (n. 245). To further provide evidence of the Church’s stand on the positive contribution of progress to the development of human civilization, he then quoted from *Gaudium et Spes*, “Today more than ever before, progress in the production of agricultural and industrial goods and in the rendering of services is rightly aimed at making provisions for the growth of a people and at meeting the rising expectations of the human race. Therefore, technical progress must be fostered along with a spirit of initiative, an eagerness to create and expand enterprises, the adaptation of methods of production, and the strenuous efforts of all who engage in production – in a word, all the elements making for such development” (n. 64). He concluded his answers by his assertion on the need for prudence when dealing with the fruits of progress. He asserted that the fruits of progress must not solely be directed towards the satisfaction of the desire for profit but rather they must serve the human person and must response to all his needs – material, intellectual, moral and spiritual.

There are still several questions posed by the students through his column but there is one more which is worth mentioning because it illustrates Fr. Gonzalez, unbiased demeanor towards any type of question. This question may be considered by some intellectuals as mundane yet he entertains and accords it with the same

intensity as he does with the other questions. The three-part question has to do with dance and music. The first part of the question asks if there is any encyclical or official pronouncement published by the Church regarding modern dances as well as modern music. The second part asks if modern dances and modern music hinder one's desire to become saintly and finally, if the religious dance during their recreation hour and the reasons why they do or do not.

The amusing questions were responded to by Fr. Gonzalez not with sternness but with much gusto and his characteristic rigor. He began with an affirmative response, stating that in the Encyclical Letter of Benedict XV dated March 1921, the Pope exhorts the faithful to “bypass those dances, some worse than others which are from a barbarian origin have passed down into the customs of our high social people, we cannot think of anything more apt to divest and do away with all sense of shame in man” (p. 25). He then provided the question sender with a list of documents which can be consulted with it comes to modern music such as *The Constitution of Sacred Liturgy* and the pastoral letter of Msgr. Mariano Madrigal, D.D., the then Archbishop of Pangasinan. It is quite amusing that in listing down the documents, Fr. Gonzalez included one that was produced during the Summer Study Week conducted by the UST Pax Romana Secretariat held in Los Banos on April 8-13, 1957. The document was titled, “Moral Problems in Recreation.”

Fr. Gonzalez did not simply respond to the question, “Do modern dances and modern music hinder one's desire to become saintly?” but corrected it by saying that it should be re-stated as “do dance and music hinder saintliness?” The reason he stated for rephrasing the question is “the fact that a dance or a given music may be termed as ‘modern’ has no bearing whatsoever upon man's desire for saintliness” (p.25). His response to the question revealed his capacity to dissect seemingly simple questions in order to bring out their rich texture. Answering the question, according to him required some distinctions. He said, “Like music, dancing, according to a Catholic author is ‘in itself an innocent and natural form of recreation, may be dangerous, if by its very mode and form, it incites to sins of sensuality and this kind must therefore be avoided under pain of sin. Even in cases of harmless forms of dances, if the company is bad, there is the same obligation of avoiding them. If however, both the company and the dance in itself are quite becoming, but if an individual frequently experiences the personal danger of sinning, this is not to be imputed to the dancing but to the personal factor, and the temptation should be put away by common sense, by living a good Catholic life, and by resisting temptation at its inception” (p. 26). He synthesized his quote by emphatically stating that the morality of modern dancing and music rests on the effects they have on human persons. He said that “if they incite the animal in man or they cause scandal or if they become proximate occasions for sin against chastity” then dances and music

hinder personal holiness. On the contrary, he said, that there are occasions when dances and music can even contribute to saintliness. In supporting this contention, he presented the case of “David who danced before the Arch of the Covenant, of ‘Los Seises’ in Seville who performed sacred dances inside the church during the feast of Corpus Christi and of St. Paschal Baylon who danced before the Blessed Sacrament (p. 26).

The third part of the question on music and dance deals not with the morality of both actions but on whether the religious dance during their recreation hour. Fr. Gonzalez answered this question with characteristic candor. He explained that the religious as a rule do not dance in the same way that they do not gamble. He clarified though that the reason for them not engaging in this activity is because it is sinful to do so. On the contrary he cited the examples of St. Theresa of Avila who ‘personally played the tambourine while her nuns danced among themselves during Christmas celebrations in the Convent’ and some missionaries “who have been known to have put on dance for the benefit of the catechumens” (p. 26).

Fr. Gonzalez knew that being Regent of a college with a population of more than 2,000 students was demanding. This however, did not eliminate the need for the Regent to make time for each and every student, especially when it comes to attending to their most pressing concerns. By coming up with a regular column that sought to provide answers to the students questions, he not only showed “respect for individual dignity and uniqueness” of the students, he also veered away from “mass education and teaching” a pre-occupation which any Catholic school worth its salt must avoid at all means (Miller, 2006). He took pains in answering each question and did not scoff at any of them, no matter how, in the eyes of some, they may appear too shallow or mundane. Through his regular column, he also showed openness to dialog and ability to interact with the students. Though the dialog and interaction may not be frontal but mediated by his column, this does not in any way detract from his effort to reach out to the students, especially to those who may not have the temerity to ask questions face to face.

The column which Fr. Gonzalez maintained is just one of the ways he accompanied the students towards lofty and challenging goals, and one of the means he got involved and connected with them (CCE, 2007). There are other ways. In the testimony written by the then President of Pax Romana,, Lynette Barit titled, “Fr. Antonio Gonzalez: A Man for Others” published in the 1981 Special Edition of the Education Journal, she characterized him as “a man for others, a father who provides for the material and spiritual needs of the members of the Education Pax Romana; a father who, in many wonderful ways manifested his concern for them, especially to those who needed to be consoled: a pat on the shoulder, a tight squeeze of the hand, or just a kind look. He was also full of mirth and joking and playing around with

them was one of the ways he gets them to approach him when they needed someone who will give them sound advice or will simply listen to them” (p. 6).

Fr. Gonzalez was not only an inspiring Regent who supported the student organizations in the College of Education. He also provided staunch support to initiatives which he believed are worth pursuing. In the Eulogy she gave during the wake of Fr. Gonzalez, published in the 1981 Special Edition of the Education Journal, the former dean of the College of Education, Dr. Lourdes Custodio, expressed her gratitude to him for his support to the establishment of the Faculty of Philosophy Student’s Forum. It was he, according to Dean Custodio, who gave the first blessing to the idea (of a Student Forum). Without his support, the Student’s Forum would have only remained a dream. But more than the support to its establishment, Dr. Custodio also credited him for helping the organization clinch the prestigious Pope Leo XIII Award in 1981 (p. 9). This award, given annually, recognizes individual students and organizations who demonstrate outstanding involvement in community development programs or services duly recognized by the Office for Community Development and the Office for Student Affairs. It is named after Pope Leo XIII because he epitomized what service to the poor means. The testimony of Dean Custodio reinforces the truth that Fr. Gonzalez possessed the ability and commitment to accompany his students towards lofty and challenging goals and to cherish high expectations for them (CCE 2007).

The regular column of Fr. Gonzalez in the Education Journal did more than provide the students with the answers to their questions, they also revealed his being ahead of his time. Fr. Gonzales’ columns were written in the late 1970s to the early 1980s yet they reveal the mind of a 21st century educator. With ease and alacrity, he shifted from one discipline to another, a skill which serves well for 21st century learners who are projected to be assuming in the future, hyphenated careers or jobs at the intersection of two or more disciplines. This trajectory requires that teachers or those who take charge of their formation must be able to traverse creatively and almost seamlessly from one discipline to another (Mishra, Koehler and Henriksen, 2010). The fact that Fr. Gonzalez was able to adroitly answer questions that pertain to Catholic Social teachings, biblical theology, Church history and Ecclesiology, Canon Law, Dogmatic Theology, Philosophy and culture attests to his being a multi-specialist. And even if he presented answers to questions from different perspectives, they are never wanting in depth or substance.

In another article Fr. Gonzalez wrote, he revealed another facet of his being a multi-specialist. His topic was not within the radar of Philosophy nor Theology, it was an altogether different topic – it was about reading. This is not surprising because he earned his Masterate in Literature from the Catholic University of America. In his article, “The College Student and Reading” reprinted in the 1981 Special Edition

of the Education Journal, he followed the typical scholastic method of teaching. He first delved on the definition of “student.” In the definition he presented, he asserted, that to study is not to receive passively information gathered from textbooks and lectures doing so, according to him would result in mere accumulation of information but not learning. Having established the meaning of “student” and consequently of studying and learning, he proceeded to define what “college” is before proceeding full throttle into the discussion of the importance of reading in the life of students. Two insightful ideas about reading that he discusses in his article are the following:

Reading is not to be equated with the mechanical ability of identifying printed signs and pronouncing words. Reading is not even identical with literacy. Reading is mental communication, the ability to commune, to communicate, to converse with books or to interpret anything which conveys or implies a mental or rational image. Reading, like attending a class, is not the passive reception of what things or books, or professors tell us. Reading is a live, personal, perceptive reaction in the presence of truth, of any truth (pp. 32-33).

Fr. Gonzalez’ views on reading provided fertile ground for 21st century teachers’ efforts at authentic learning. There are glaring similarities between what he considered as the real meaning of reading and the concept of authentic learning in the 21st century. Authentic learning in the 21st century goes beyond content, just as reading goes beyond the perceived texts. Authentic learning necessitates the appreciation of multiple disciplines and multiple perspectives just as reading is the ability to commune, to communicate, to converse with books or to interpret anything which conveys or implies a mental or rational image” (Lombardi, 2007).

It is obvious to see through these answers to the students’ questions and by the way he conducted himself that Fr. Gonzalez is a man devoted to truth and is undoubtedly a purveyor of truth. The speeches he delivered and articles he wrote are replete with truths that guided and edified his readers. In his address before the graduating students of the College of Education, he exposed the truth about the world in which the graduates live in, one that was characterized by hunger, disease, misery and ignorance. Yet he was also quick to add the consoling truth that these realities could be addressed if people adhere to the principles of solidarity. He also exposed the truth about education, stating that it was neither indoctrination nor mere transference of information. It was, according to him, the development of the moral, intellectual and aesthetic powers which would help them become useful, diligent, and responsible citizens of the society of God and of Man.

Fr. Gonzalez expertly exposed the truth about the relationship of faith and science when, in response to a student’s question sent through his regular column in the Education Journal, he explained that “there are diverse modes of coming upon

truth. Faith is the only way by which we can know the truths of the supernatural order; reason those of the natural order. Since both belong to different levels but on the other hand deal with Truth, which is only one, there really can never be any conflicts between them” (p.24). He also gave an exceptionally clear explanation of the truth that the educational rights of the family emanate from God. He asserted that “since children are brought to this world by their parents, the latter have an alienable right to provide them with means to attain growth and perfection both spiritual and physical. The means to achieve spiritual perfection is through education both of the will and the intellect. Thus, parents have the right to select the school where the children can acquire a formal academic education” (p.25). This right of the parents, according to him is enshrined in the Natural law, “the author of which is God.”

The answers of Fr. Gonzalez to the multifarious questions posed to him show that he was not just someone who discharges his functions according to what was written in handbooks or manuals of job description. It showed his authenticity. Young people yearn for authenticity (McCann Erickson, 2011). Moreover, young people are characterized in the same global study conducted by McCann Erickson as “truth hunters.” What does it mean to be truth hunters? Here is how the study describes the young people and their penchant for truth:

Truth is more rare and therefore more valued in a world of ‘fake friends’ and curated identities. Moreover, the democracy of the Internet has brought with it a sea of information, opinion, talent and ‘facts’. In the cacophony of noise it’s trickier to ascertain whom you should listen to and whom you should drown out. The young people we met in Chile placed a lot of emphasis on authenticity as a motivation because, in their view, nothing is original anymore; everything nowadays is a copy of a copy of a copy (p.15).

Thomsonian educators today can take the cue from Fr. Gonzalez on how to satisfy this craving for authenticity from the young. His authenticity lied in his staunch commitment to the truth. He was a purveyor of truth in words and deeds. He wrote in truth and about the truth. He lived the truth and inspired the people around him to do the same. There is no guile in him. The students of the College of Education attest to his genuineness, his fellow administrators praise his gallantry, sense of fairness and excellent work ethic and his confreres admire his dedication and fidelity to his commitments. His ‘yes’ meant ‘yes’ and his ‘no’ meant ‘no’.

Fr. Gonzalez: Servant Leader and Exemplar

Servant leaders are characterized by their ability to listen; they are patient and receptive. They have as model and example Jesus, thus they do not only listen, and

they also speak the truth even if in doing so they run the risk of rejection. They are courageous and are ready to confront injustice (Heft, 2013). Fr. Gonzalez epitomizes these qualities of a servant leader.

Fr. Gonzalez' servant leadership was evidenced by the various positions he assumed in the University. He was Prefect of Libraries from 1951-1952 and 1974-1976; Secretary General from 1955-1963; Dean of the College of Education from 1963-1972; Vice Rector from 1965-1969; Prior of the Community from 1969-1972; Editor of the *Philippiana Sacra* from 1970-1972 and until his demise, Regent of the College of Education and of the Graduate School. He also assumed the position of Dean of the UST Graduate School. Mere mortals made of lesser stuff would have reveled over the many prestigious positions that he assumed, but not Fr. Gonzalez. His was a sense of equanimity, an authentic humility that made him look at the positions he assumed not as reasons to lord over others but as opportunities to gladly assume the position of a servant leader. The testimonies of the people he closely worked with attest to his unassuming demeanor and strong commitment to service. Two renowned women stalwarts of the University with whom he worked in the Graduate School, Dr. Carmen G. Kanapi and Dr. Milagros Tanlayco, attested to his deep concern for his co-workers. He would always remind them to take their vacations in summer, although he would remind them not be absent at the same time so as not to compromise the efficient flow of the work in the Graduate School.

Fr. Gonzalez was not only a humble servant but also a hardworking University official. During his stint as Secretary General of the University, the management of summer classes was under his supervision. He carried out his duties with utmost dedication. He would make his rounds practically every hour in the Main Building to check whether classes are held regularly and efficiently. On several occasions when floods due to fierce storms would threaten the University, he would be in his office before 8:00 in the morning, personally answering queries about the suspension of classes. He was also a stickler for rules. As prefect of Libraries, he scrupulously enforced the rule on silence. He did not exempt anyone from the observance of this rule; in fact he was even stricter with his friends and peers.

Prof. Lourdes Custodio, Ph.D., the Dean of the College of Education who succeeded him attested to his being a "a true leader who was the first to serve and never demanded what he himself would not do" in the Eulogy she delivered during his wake and which was published in the 1981 Special Edition of the *Education Journal*. She emphasized that he was always saying that people work with him and not for him. In the same eulogy, she described Fr. Gonzalez as a delight to work with because of his jolly disposition. "He was one with a keen sense of humor, who made people laugh, and who, laughed heartily even when the joke was on him." A close examination of how he related with the students, how he accompanied them in their

search for answers to their questions, how he discharged his multifarious functions and how he, in a very humane and compassionate way treated his co-equals and subordinates show that indeed, has immersed himself in his role as servant leader.

Fr. Gonzalez was an exemplar of what it means to belong to a Catholic university because he possessed the essential attributes of an educator in a Catholic institution. His professional competence includes the ability to create, invent and manage learning environments that provide plentiful opportunities for student engagement. His regular column in the *Education Journal* and articles he wrote that address the demands of student life attest to this attribute. His involvement in student organizations and his devotion to steer them towards greater heights in terms of their academic pursuits and co-curricular activities are indicative of his respect for their different intelligences and his unstinting dedication to guide them towards significant and profound learning (CCE, 2007).

Fr. Gonzalez was an exemplar because of his outstanding qualities as administrator, academic and priest. In all the important engagements he embarked on, he was fastidious in following the highest ethical standards. As administrator he assumed the posture of a foot-washer who readily embraced the difficulties and challenges appertunant to his position. Aside from the administrative post he was asked to assume, he was also appointed the position of Chairman in two Ad-Hoc Committees – the Ad-Hoc Committee to Study the Faculty Problems (1969) and the Ad-Hoc Committee to Study the Faculty Compensation Plan. He also assumed Chairmanship of the Permanent Committee on Faculty Classification from 1967-1969 and was the representative of the administration to the Administrative Committee of the UST Faculty and Retirement Board. The aforementioned positions are sensitive and controversial and it can safely be deduced that his involvement in them is a tacit recognition of his unbiased and objective stance on concerns that impacted the university and its faculty. His service goes beyond the confines of the university community but would extend to those outside of the academe being the Chaplain of the Knights of Columbus from 1956-1970.

Fr. Gonzalez was a teacher any academic must emulate. He made sure that his busy schedule as administrator did not get in the way of his teaching duties. Sem. Hermida recounted in his Eulogy published in the 1981 Special Edition of the *Education Journal* his admirable traits as a teacher: He was highly methodical, extremely logical, and thoroughly philosophical. His excellent teaching method was matched by the caring way he relates with his students. He was, according to Sem. Hermida, “a conscientious professor who always looked after the welfare and learning of his students” (p.6) Proof of this was his reading materials were conveniently made available to them. In short, he was according to the seminarian, a great teacher.

As priest, Fr. Gonzalez lived his life for others. Archbishop Legaspi in paying

tribute to him during his wake extolled his virtues as priest. He said that “the true meaning of his life is not found in the embellished data of his curriculum vitae, but in the hidden course of his religious life.” The meaning of his life according to the former Rector, “is found in the way he lived as a Dominican Friar: in the humble and faithful compliance with his religious vows, in his self-effacing service to his fellowmen, in his priestly and Dominican apostolate and in the intimacy of his love for the Lord in who he found the way, the truth and the life.”

Fr. Antonio Gonzalez: Scholar

The Catholic University is not only a community where the members, especially the teachers and officials are called to actively engage in the evangelizing mission of the Church but are also called to be scholars. As an institution where scholarship is nurtured and consequently made to flourish, the academic community in the Catholic University is called upon to assist in the protection and advancement of human dignity and of a cultural heritage through research, teaching and various services offered to the local, national and international communities (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 12). The living out of this calling must be done in a rigorous and critical fashion; scholarship in the University then is not simply for the purpose of academic edification but is a vital means to achieve its mission of service. Seen in this light, it is without doubt that Fr. Gonzalez is a scholar in the truest sense of the word.

In this time and age when so much premium is placed on scholarship, there is need to spell out what makes a scholar and to list down with some degree of precision the attributes that make an academic a scholar. It is also through this lens that the scholarship of Fr. Antonio Gonzalez shall be scrutinized.

Two attributes that scholars must necessarily possess are ethics and immersion. These two have been singled out in a survey conducted by Andreas Tolk, Ph.D., a professor in the Department of Engineering Management and Systems Engineering of the Old Dominion University in Norfolk, VA, USA. Tolk (2012) laments that there is paucity of materials that delve on the essential characteristics of scholars. Undeterred by this setback, he fielded a survey among his teaching and research partners worldwide that sought to ascertain which among the 12 characteristics of scholars the respondents find as most essential and which they consider least essential. Ten of these characteristics were culled from a short essay of 2006 by the Colleges of the University of the Free State in South Africa while the remaining two were supplied by Tolk himself. The 12 attributes are definition, disposition, immersion, authority, persistence, passion, connection, recognition, productivity, competitiveness, ethics and loyalty. To facilitate ease in accomplishing the survey, each of the characteristics were defined. Although Tolk admitted that his survey lacks the scrupulous rigor required of academic undertakings, he is also

quick to add that his work constitutes a decisive steps towards gaining a better understanding of the defining characteristics of scholars (p.54).

Ethics and Immersion are considered by the respondents as the two most essential characteristics that scholars should possess, followed by Disposition, Authority, Persistence, and Passion. It would be good to look into the definitions that Tolk gave to these characteristics in order to substantiate this article's assertion of the scholarship of Fr. Gonzalez. Ethics as a characteristic of scholars means that they manifest unflinching adherence to ethical standards. They make no false claims in their work and about their work; in short, truth defines the body of work they produce.

A scholar cannot be called such if he or she is not steeped in the knowledge of classical and recent literatures relevant to his present inquiry (p. 55). There is depth as well breadth in his knowledge of the literature pertinent to the work he is producing. This is what is meant by immersion. It is easy to see why the respondents to the survey ranked immersion as the second most essential quality of a scholar for this title conjures an image of a person whose head is buried in piles of literatures, discerning, evaluating, discarding or applying the information he comes across so that his work can stand scrutiny by scholars like him/her. The mind of a scholar is like a sieve that filters the information he or she gets from a myriad of sources, those that are deemed relevant and useful are retained while those that are irrelevant and superfluous are done away with.

Pieces of evidence that support Fr. Gonzalez' immersion in his discipline shall be culled both from the personal testimonies of the people he worked with in the University and the body of work he produced as a scholar. One of his students, Sem. Heminda attests to his scholarship. He described him as "a paragon of a genuine philosopher who was open to instruction from all quarters of thought, always open to a possible revelation of a piece of truth in each of his students and at every instance." Sem. Hermida in the Eulogy he delivered during the wake of Fr. Gonzalez, paid tribute to his immersion in his discipline when he said that he was widely-read and he enlivened his lectures from sources as varied as classics in literature and philosophy, and latest best sellers, fiction and non-fiction alike." He, according to the seminarian, "was a profound thinker and in turn he could incite and gently force others to think for and by themselves."

Another testimony that emphasized the scholarship of Fr. Gonzalez was given by the First Filipino Rector of the University of Santo Tomas, the late Archbishop Leonardo Z. Legaspi, O.P. who himself is a recognized scholar. Part of his Eulogy published in the 1981 Special Edition of the Education Journal reads: "Father Antonio was intelligent and well-read and had acquired a mature wisdom which must have made him not only a good classroom teacher but also a good

counselor and guide. Even though his age would have excused him from publishing, he continued to write, and we may well profit from re-reading his articles” (p.10). The late Archbishop’s testimony proved that even before “publish or perish” became the litmus test for scholarship, Fr. Gonzalez was already writing and publishing his works.

Another scholar, a well-respected educator in the local and international scenes, Prof. Lourdes J. Custodio, Ph.D. attested to Fr. Gonzalez’ scholarship in an interview conducted by the Education Journal in the aftermath of Fr. Gonzalez’ demise. Dr. Custodio was the long time Dean of the College of Education. She was a member of the Pontifical Council for Cultures and the World Union of Catholic Teachers. She herself was a regular resource person in national and international conferences. In the said interview, Dr. Custodio attributed her immersion in and fascination for Philosophy to Fr. Gonzalez. She claimed that his firm grounding in the discipline and his incessant desire to hone his craft as philosopher were the same guiding principles she adopted in her career as philosopher, teacher and administrator.

Archbishop Legaspi’s, Dr. Custodio’s and Sem. Hermida’s descriptions of Fr. Gonzalez did not only attest to his being deeply immersed in his discipline and consequently of his being a scholar. They also pointed to his being a teacher-scholar. Teacher-scholars shun surface level processing; instead, they are staunch adherents of the deep approaches to learning. These approaches to learning focus on both substance and the underlying meaning of information instead of simply focusing on rote learning and memorization technique (Kuh, 2015).

Evidence culled from his writings gave credence to Fr. Gonzalez meaningful immersion in his discipline. The articles that he wrote revealed his facility in navigating the nuances of the discipline he specialized in. He was a philosopher not only because of the degrees he obtained but also because of the work he produced. In his address to the graduates of the College of Education reprinted in the 1981 Special Edition of the Education Journal, he reminded the graduates of a truth propounded by Kant. He said, “As Kant says, Science, Arts, Ethics and social principles cannot last unless they are grounded on those principles that have universal validity” (p. 12).

The other articles that Fr. Gonzalez wrote were also living and lasting testimonies to his being a well-regarded philosopher. His article titled, “The Spirit and Method of Thomas Aquinas” published in the *Unitas* Vol. 51, Nos. 3-4 (Sept-Dec. 1978) sang praises to impartiality of the Angelic Doctor and delved in no uncertain terms on the true nature of philosophy. He maintained that “Philosophy is not and can never be a closed, frozen system. It is not a collection of pat answers to trite questions. Philosophy, as any other human science it its own history; it is always in fieri; its tortuous roots extend its horizons by the combined efforts of the

succeeding generation of lovers of wisdom” (p. 524). It is worthwhile to note that the description he gives to philosophy is not only profound but also colorful.

What is also admirable in this particular article is that it showcased Fr. Gonzalez facility in traversing the boundaries of Theology and Philosophy. He asserted that all “honest inquiries after knowledge may appropriate for themselves what the inspired wise men of the Old Testament say” (p.36). He then quoted the following biblical texts:

I have not toiled for myself alone,
but for all who are seeking wisdom (Eccl. 24:47)

What I have learned without self-interest,
I put on without reserve (Wisd. 7:13).

He then juxtaposed these biblical texts with St. Thomas’ presuppositions about the nature and method of Philosophy. He listed down the four presuppositions as (p. 524):

1. Man attains his perfection by the possession of truth.
2. All truths come from God.
3. No man can attain the totality of truth, and so truth is discovered progressively by the contributory efforts of succeeding philosophers.
4. No doctrine is wholly false.

Fr. Gonzalez concluded his article by proclaiming the primordial role of the Holy Spirit in a person’s quest for truth. He said, “Hence, the conclusion that ‘every truth by whomsoever stated is from the Holy Spirit as bestowing the natural light, and moving us to understand and speak the truth’” (p. 525).

In another article, entitled “Musings on Structuralism by a Thomist” reprinted in the 1981 Special Edition of the *Education Journal*, Fr. Gonzalez dissected the phenomenon of structuralism. In his article, he did not immediately dive into the deep waters of structuralism, rather he waded into the shallow waters of Western and oriental philosophies, adequately preparing his readers to plumb the depths of this phenomenon in a spiraling manner. This does not mean, however that depth is sacrificed in the name of method. His comparison of Western and Oriental philosophies was profound, requiring an analytical mind. He pointed out in his article that “Western philosophers do not know how to take things as they are unlike the Oriental thinkers who give an impression of serenity, peace and calm both in thought, art and in their private lives” (p.38). He attributed these characteristics

of oriental philosophers to their “capacity to synthesize all as a way of life. Oriental philosophers according to him “do not oppose the truth of one field to that of another field but rather make them complement each other” (p.38).

After establishing the differences between the two philosophical polarities, Fr. Gonzalez made the claim that the rejection of dichotomy typical of oriental philosophers is characteristic of St. Thomas. He explained that “St. Thomas himself never accepted dichotomy in life because he was well-balanced both in mind and body.” For St. Thomas, according to Fr. Gonzalez, “virtue, both intellectual and moral resides in a happy man” (p.41). He also explained the temperate way that St. Thomas views reason, saying that he believed in reason but he never deified reason nor did he neither underestimates the power of the intellect. There is therefore balance or equanimity in the views of St. Thomas.

Fr. Gonzalez’ article “Musings on Structuralism by a Thomist” is an abstracted version of “St. Thomas and Structuralism.” The article published in the *Unitas* in 1979 evinces profundity. It is a step by step, spiraling journey into the phenomenon of structuralism beginning with a discussion of structuralism in its historical perspectives, proceeding to a dissection of the term and graduating into an in-depth treatise of structuralism as reaction, of the nature of structuralism itself and of the various influences that contributed to its birth and development.

Fr. Gonzalez first presented the notions of structuralism propounded by Claude Levi-Strauss, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes and R. De George. Levi-Strauss* claimed that the word ‘structure’ does not mean anything in particular but just a concession to fashion. He expressed lament when he said that “structuralism has acquired various meanings in the science and, unfortunately, at cocktail parties” (p.50). De George gave a more lengthy though negative description of structuralism in these words, “Structuralism is a loose, amorphous, many faceted phenomenon with no clear lines of demarcation, no tightly-knit group spearheading it, no specific set of doctrines held by all those whom one usually thinks of as being associated with it ... it is multidimensional with several independent leaders, each disowning any relation to the others ... who are frequently grouped together as leaders of the movements by non-structuralists” (p. 50). Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes, somehow breathed the same lines as those of De George when the former claimed that, “structuralism is a category which exists for other people who aren’t in it. It is only from outside that one can say: this man, or that man is a structuralist ... we ourselves don’t see unity” while the latter says that structuralism “is not a school, not even a movement for most of the authors, who are ordinarily labeled with this word, they are unaware of being united by any solidarity, or doctrine or commitment” (p.50).

After presenting a wide array of notions, contentions and arguments about structuralism, Fr. Gonzalez came up with a synthesis of the thoughts presented and

minted his own views on it. He said:

If by structuralism we mean 'to build up a mental construct,' a 'model' or a 'system' and try to explain the order of happenings around us or inside of us, then structuralism is as old as the human mind because it is the natural role of the mind to discover order in empirical focus and to produce order in our own conscious behavior.

To my knowledge, the word 'structure' as applied to knowledge was used for the first time in connection with the structural additive Psychology of Wundt; then Husserl's Phenomenology aimed at discovering the structure of the transcendental ego, and of the phenomena, or 'the things in themselves' through the *epoche* of reductions (p. 52).

Towards the end of the article, Fr. Gonzalez made a daring statement by saying that, "I think I can end with this conclusion which, of course, will not be gladly accepted by everybody: the Structuralist is St. Thomas!" (p.64) This claim of Fr. Gonzalez leads us to another characteristic of a scholar – Ethics.

Aside from immersion, Ethics is also one of the hallmarks of a scholar. Ethics as a dimension of scholarship speaks of the scholar's commitment to the highest ethical standards that govern his or her work. It also demands that scholars refrain from making false claims in their work. Fr. Gonzalez' claim that the structuralist is St. Thomas was not whipped from thin air. It is not a false claim since it is well substantiated. The following are the reasons presented by Fr. Gonzalez to support his claim (pp. 62-64):

1. The concept of order is the leitmotif for Aquinas, just as it is also for the structuralists who endeavor to find order in chaos.
2. The structuralists may count St. Thomas as an ally even in the question of binary. It is the doctrine of St. Thomas that when we want to define, to explain, to be specific in pointing the object we want to talk about, we have to add differences which are taken from contradictory, contrary or at least opposed characteristics of the other things or class.
3. St. Thomas teaches something similar to the structuralists' tenets on the relationship between structure (reality) and the model, code or simulacrum.
4. And finally, he said that the structuralists could find great help in Aquinas in their search for the common, basic, unifying structure of all human sciences only if they read his doctrine on the sub-alteration of the sciences in his *Commentary on Boethius De Trinitate*, or *The Commentary on the Posterior Analytics I*.

The pieces of evidence presented, indeed show that Fr. Gonzalez epitomizes

the two essential attributes of a scholar put forward by Tolk. These two characteristics are to be possessed by anyone who appropriates for himself or herself the title of scholar. But what distinguishes Fr. Gonzalez from other scholars is that his scholarship is for the service of the Church and not for personal aggrandizement. In this time and age when scholarship is like a Damocles sword hanging over every academic's head since upward mobility hinges on it, the idea of scholarship for the Church may seem ludicrous. Yet this should be an important, if not the most important part of the life of academics of catholic universities, after all, the Catholic university is born from the heart of the Church (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, 1).

Scholarship for the sake of the Church is originally vested on Origen (Heine, 2012), thus is it audacious to use the same phrase as descriptor for Fr. Gonzalez' scholarship? I believe not. His *telos* is not career advancement or promotion. His robust academic engagements are undertaken for the sake of effective evangelization. He believed that if he were to lead young people to the truth he needed to possess the requisite competencies – a mind sharpened by years of study, research skills honed by constant practice and rigor nurtured by habitual reading. This virtuous cycle of sharpening the mind, research engagements and rigor served as fertile ground upon which the seeds of the Word sown by the Holy Spirit grew and fructified.

The same scholarship for the sake of the Church is expressed by William Hinnebusch (1965) when he said, "The Dominican goes into the pulpit, the sick-room, because obedience sends him, because his apostolic yearning to help souls impels him to go. He does not undertake these works through natural eagerness to exercise his talents, or to fulfill his personality. It means only that his motive in going out to work is not personal gratifications but the glory of God and the good of neighbor" (p.40).

It takes great courage to lead, and it takes great sacrifice to serve, a sacrifice born out of great love for those whom one serves. It takes a heart aflame with God's love to embrace kenosis without which genuine service is reduced to mere rhetoric.

Conclusion

Fr. Antonio Gonzalez is a luminous exemplar of this genuine service born out of love. His being a purveyor of truth is born out of his love for Truth Himself, his scholarship is for the sake of the Church he loves and his life was lived for the service of others. In the cacophony of dissenting voices of people who promote their own brand of truth and in the midst of confusion that beset our world today, it would be wise to heed the admonition of the late Archbishop Leonardo Legaspi, former Rector of the University for us to re-read his articles because we will greatly benefit from them. ■

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