

The University of Santo Tomas and the Emergence of Thomism in the Far East

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Abstract: The University of Santo Tomas (UST) in Manila, founded in 1611, is the oldest existing university in the Philippines and Asia and has long been a bulwark of Catholic education. Over its four centuries of existence, UST has upheld the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas as a cornerstone of its academic and spiritual mission. However, the reception and influence of Thomism at UST and its contributions to the broader Thomistic tradition remain underexplored. This study examines UST's pivotal role in the emergence of Thomism in the Far East, positioning the university as a key force in shaping Thomistic thought outside of Europe. The article focuses on the university's first century, from its founding through the 1700s, to understand how Thomism took root in the region. This study seeks to confirm and elaborate on its central contribution to the spread of Thomistic thought in the New World and the Far East.

Keywords: Thomism, History of Thomism, University of Santo Tomas, *Escuela de Salamanca*, missionary formation, moral theology, evangelization

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Introduction

*It was not until 1611, when Spanish Dominicans
established a university in Manila,
that Thomism spread to the New World.¹*

The University of Santo Tomas (UST) in Manila is widely recognized as the oldest existing university in the Philippines and Asia. Founded by the Order of Preachers in 1611, UST has played a pivotal role in the intellectual and spiritual development of the region, becoming a bastion of Catholic education. Over its more than four centuries of existence, UST has upheld the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas as a cornerstone of its academic and spiritual mission. However, the reception of Thomism at the University of Santo Tomas (UST) and its potential contributions to Thomism have yet to be fully explored. In this regard, this article aims to examine UST's role in the emergence of Thomism in the Far East, highlighting the University as a key force in the dissemination and growth of the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas in this part of the globe at the threshold and height of the Modern Period.² Building on this, we seek to confirm and elaborate on the central role UST played in the spread of Thomism to the New World.

This article will take a historical perspective, focusing on the first century of the University of Santo Tomas (UST), spanning from the decades prior to 1611 through to the 1700s. This is an initial study, as comprehensive research on UST's relationship to Thomism, both in the broader historical context and specifically within the institution itself, especially in its beginnings, remains underexplored.³

¹ Romanus Cessario, *A Short History of Thomism* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 36.

² In addition to Cessario, the *Catholic Encyclopedia* entry on Thomism asserts: "The Thomistic doctrine had received strong support from the older universities. Among these, the Encyclical *Aeterni Patris* mentions Paris, Salamanca, Alcalá, Douai, Toulouse, Louvain, Padua, Bologna, Naples, and Coimbra as 'the homes of human wisdom where Thomas reigned supreme, and the minds of all, teachers as well as taught, rested in wonderful harmony under the shield and authority of the Angelic Doctor.' *In the universities established by the Dominicans at Lima (1551) and Manila (1645), St. Thomas always held sway.*" Emphasis added. The foundation year of UST cited here corresponds to when the institution was granted university status, i.e., 1645. Daniel Kennedy, "Thomism," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 14 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14698b.htm>.

³ The author wishes to acknowledge the course *Storia del Tomismo* (History of Thomism) that he audited at the Pontificia Università San Tommaso d' Aquino (Angelicum) in Rome, where, over the course of three semesters, Professor Fr. Efreim Jindráček, OP highlighted three key milestones in the history of Thomism in which the University of Santo Tomas played a significant role: the foundation of the Universidad de Santo Tomás in Manila, the emergence of Zeferino González (1831–1894), one of the great Thomists produced by the university, and the publication of the academic journal *Philippiniana Sacra*.

The modest aim is to present the available historical facts and references, which can serve as a foundation for further study and exploration.⁴ Regarding the terms employed, “Thomism” refers to the intellectual system that follows the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas in philosophical and theological matters. The terms “Thomist” or the “Thomist perspective” denote the adoption of St. Thomas as a foundational teacher. The significance of Aquinas and his doctrine for Thomists lies in the conviction, as Romanus Cessario, OP observes, that “what united all these followers of Thomas Aquinas, and continues to unite those who seriously study his works, is the conviction that the teaching of Thomas Aquinas provides a *sure guide to the truth of the Christian faith*.”⁵ Regarding the “Emergence of Thomism” and its association with UST, we take UST as a focal point in the arrival of Thomistic thought in Asia. While it is acknowledged that some Eastern scholars from the same period may have engaged with Thomistic ideas or that missionaries employed Thomism in their works in these lands, UST stands as the primary center in Asia where Thomism emerged as a distinct movement and school of thought, where the teachings of St. Thomas were systematically taught, studied, and disseminated.⁶ Regarding the use of “Far East,” the term is retained in accordance with how missionaries historically referred to the Philippines and the surrounding region, specifically as *Extremo Oriente*.⁷

⁴ As of date, the most comprehensive contemporary source of data on the topic is the two-volume Fidel Villaruel, *A History of the University of Santo Tomas: Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines, 1611-2011* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2012). Some details on the beginning of UST can also be seen in Alberto Santamaria, *Estudios Históricos de la Universidad de Santo Tomás de Manila* (Manila: Tip. Pont. de la Univ. de Sto. Tomas, 1938).

⁵ Cessario, *A Short History of Thomism*, 35. Notably, see also Serge-Thomas Bonino, “The Thomist Tradition,” trans. Bernhard Blankenhorn, *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition 8, no. 4 (2010): 869–881; Romanus Cessario, and Cajetan Cuddy, *Thomas and the Thomists: The Achievement of Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017).

⁶ For example, to a certain extent, drawing from the Scholastic tradition, Jesuit missionaries such as Matteo Ricci and Francisco Furtado employed the teachings of Aquinas in China. For a detailed account, see Thierry Meynard, “A Thomistic Defense of Creationism in Late Ming China: The Explanation of the Great Being (Huanyou Quan),” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (August 1, 2022): 319–34, <https://doi.org/10.5840/ipq2023824199>. In the case of Japan, see Bernard R. Inagaki and Joseph B. McAllister, “Japan, Philosophy and Thomism,” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 19, no. 2 (April 1956): 250–61. While these examples offer glimpses into how Thomism arrived in the East and how scholars applied Aquinas’ thought in these countries during the Modern Period, it is important to note that Thomism did not truly flourish as a prevailing framework of thought in these regions. Neither did a lasting center of Thomistic scholarship emerge.

⁷ See the Dominican missionaries’ writings, e.g., Provincia del Santísimo Rosario de Filipinas, *Los Dominicos en el Extremo Oriente* (Barcelona: Industrias Gráficas Seix, 1916); Provincia del Santísimo Rosario de Filipinas, ed., *Recuerdo del Séptimo Centenario de la Aprobación Pontificia de la Orden Dominicana, en el Extremo Oriente* (Manila: Imp. de Sto. Tomas, 1917); Manuel González Pola, *Dominicos Españoles en el Extremo Oriente: IV Centenario. Orientalia Dominicana* (Madrid: Inst. Pontificios de Filosofía y Teología, 1988); Hilario Ocio and Eladio Neira, *Misioneros Dominicos en el Extremo Oriente: 1587-1835* (Manila: 2000).

The Diffusion of Thomism in the 16th Century: Key Factors and Historical Context

Our examination begins by situating UST within the global context of the period, considering the factors that contributed to the diffusion of Thomism in the 16th century. To better understand the forces that shaped UST's foundation and the specific form of Thomism it embraced, it is essential to first examine the broader historical and ecclesiastical context in which these developments took place. Central to this context is the Catholic Church during this period, with one of the most significant influences being the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the 19th ecumenical council convened in response to the heresies of Lutheranism and Calvinism. Of particular relevance to this study are several key aspects of the Council. A widely circulated legend suggests that during the sessions, the *Summa Theologiae* was placed alongside the Bible on the altar. While this remains a matter of myth, it is certain that during the Council, St. Thomas Aquinas and his teachings were acknowledged by the council fathers, who expressed a desire to adopt him as a guide.⁸ It is also evident that the Dominican Thomists exercised considerable influence during the Council. Three prominent figures stand out: Domingo de Soto, OP (1494-1560), a major contributor to Thomistic logic and physics who defended the Thomistic doctrine of justification during the Council, Pedro de Soto, OP (1493-1563), confessor to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and appointed papal theologian for the final session of the Council of Trent, and Melchor Cano, OP (1509-1560), often referred to as the "founder of fundamental theology" as a discipline, as his key work *De locis theologicis libri duodecim* remains foundational.⁹ These Dominicans were Spanish, trained in Salamanca, and studied under Francisco de Vitoria, OP (1483-1546), a figure of considerable importance in this context. Another significant development of the Council of Trent was the establishment of diocesan seminaries. The Council's canon *Cum Adolescentium Aetas*, adopted in 1563, made it compulsory for every diocese to create a seminary for the education of local clergy. This initiative mirrored the vision of St. Dominic in the 13th century, who believed that the intellectual formation of preachers was essential in addressing the Albigensian-Manichean heresies. Similarly, the Council of Trent viewed the formation of diocesan clergy as vital in countering the heresies of Protestantism.

⁸ Cessario, 74: "Thomism itself quickly became identified with Catholic orthodoxy to such an extent that a popular but erroneous rumor circulated to the effect that the Fathers of the Council had enshrined the *Summa* of Saint Thomas Aquinas on the altar next to the Bible. What is true, however, is that, on 11 April 1567, Pius V gave official sanction to the directions of Thomist theology by taking the innovative step of officially ranking Thomas Aquinas among the four recognized Doctors of the Church."

⁹ Cf. Cessario and Cuddy, 86-91.

The second significant factor in the diffusion of Thomism in the sixteenth century is the Age of Exploration. As it was mentioned, the Spanish Dominicans in the Council of Trent studied and were trained in Salamanca. Years earlier, in the 1480s, explorer and navigator Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) proposed a plan to reach Asia, specifically the East Indies, by sailing west. It is said that it was the Dominican Diego de Deza, also of the Convento de San Esteban in Salamanca who accompanied Columbus to the royal court to explain the possibility of exploring the world.¹⁰ The proposal was met with royal approval, leading to Columbus's historic voyage in 1492. This expedition resulted in the discovery of the New World, though Columbus mistakenly believed he had reached the outskirts of Asia. The subsequent Spanish colonization of the Americas and later, the Philippines, further extended the reach of European influence across the globe, marking the beginning of a new era in global exploration and the spread of Christianity, including the teachings of Thomism, into the Far East. A notable historical site connected to these developments is the *capítulo antiguo* (old chapter room) of San Esteban, now known as the *Panteón de los Teólogos*.¹¹ It was here that the Dominicans made the historic decision to venture to the New World. At present, an inscription at its entrance reads:

In this place, the community of San Esteban made decisions that helped shape the modern world. Here it was decided to send numerous groups of missionaries for the evangelization of America (16th century) and later the Philippines and Japan (17th century). And here the community supported the doctrine of Francisco de Vitoria, his 'Right of Peoples', which recognizes the dignity of indigenous people ('because they have a soul'), their rights as individuals and those of their free and organized societies.¹²

Alongside the exploration and mission, the intellectual works of the *Salamantinos* effected a transnational influence in Europe, America, and Asia. These intellectual works can now be collectively known as the works of the *Escuela de Salamanca*.¹³ It is the community of thinkers initially rooted in the Universidad de

¹⁰ Thomas F. O'Meara, "The Dominican School of Salamanca and the Spanish Conquest of America: Some Bibliographical Notes," *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 56, no. 4 (October 1992): 555–82, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.1992.0000>.

¹¹ Pantheon or mausoleum where the renowned Dominican theologians are buried.

¹² The original Spanish text reads: "En este lugar, la comunidad de San Esteban tomó decisiones que contribuyeron a dar forma al mundo moderno. Aquí se decidió el envío de numerosos grupos de misioneros para la evangelización de América (siglo XVI) y más tarde de Filipinas y Japón (siglo XVII). Y aquí la comunidad respaldó la doctrina de Francisco de Vitoria, su 'Derecho de Gentes', donde se reconoce la dignidad de los indígenas ('pues tienen alma'), sus derechos como personas y los de sus sociedades libres y organizadas."

¹³ On discussions about the *Escuela de Salamanca*, among others, see Juan Belda Plans, *La Escuela de Salamanca y la renovación de la teología en el siglo XVI* (Madrid: BAC, 2000; Thomas Duve, José Luis Egío e Christiane Birr, ed., *The School of Salamanca: A Case of Global Knowledge Production* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2021); David Torrijos Castrillejo e Jorge Luis Gutiérrez, ed., *La Escuela de*

Salamanca in the 16th century, who, while dealing mainly with questions of philosophy, theology, law, and economy, created their scientific methods and initiated a global production of theoretical-practical knowledge. In this way, to use the words of the playwright Lope de Vega (1562-1635), Salamanca became the modern emulation of the old Athens (*Émula moderna de la vieja Atenas*).

Alongside these endeavors, the said Dominican convent of San Esteban was also brewing to be a center of the second scholasticism, primarily defined by commentaries on the works of St. Thomas Aquinas. Twentieth century Thomist Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, OP describes the 16th century as the period of the *Commentatores*: a time when the attention of Thomists was fixed on Aquinas's systematic treatises, especially the *Summa Theologiae*, and on an article-by-article explication of these texts.¹⁴ The three Dominicans we previously mentioned, who played key roles at the Council of Trent, greatly benefited from this scholarly tradition. Among the many Thomist commentators of the time, one of the most significant was Domingo Báñez, OP (1582-1604), known for his commentary on the *Summa Theologiae* and his involvement in the “*De Auxiliis Controversy*,” defending the traditional Thomistic position on grace, free will, and divine assistance. In San Esteban, there remained the speculative aspects of theology, as can be seen in the commentaries, and yet, as new questions are coming in, practical theology was also gradually shaping up. An evolving exchange of speculative principles was accompanied by the emergence of practical questions and ideas from the field. While it is true that practical concerns were already being addressed in Europe prior to this, the experience in the New World further necessitated engagement with these practical issues.

This dynamic will be best demonstrated in the *Salamanca – New World Exchange*.¹⁵ In the context of 16th century, it refers to the historical dialogue between

Salamanca: La Primera Versión de la Modernidad (Madrid: Sinderesis, 2022); Simona Langella and Rafael Ramis-Barceló, eds., *¿Qué es la Escuela de Salamanca?* (Madrid, Porto: Sinderesis, 2021).

¹⁴ See the chapter 3 of Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Reality: A Synthesis of Thomistic Thought* (Herder, 1950), which was originally an entry by Garrigou-Lagrange for “Thomisme” in the *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*. A reprint of *Reality* was later published by Ex Fontibus Company in 2016. For this movement as part of the “Second Scholasticism,” see Simona Langella and Rafael Ramis Barceló, *¿Qué es la segunda escolástica?* (Madrid: Editorial Sinderesis, 2023); Rafael Ramis Barceló, *La Segunda Escolástica: Una propuesta de síntesis histórica* (Madrid: ESIC, 2024).

¹⁵ For its contemporary application, refer to the Salamanca Process as promoted by the Dominican Order since 2013, as reflected in its official legislations. For articles that elaborate on and cite these legislations, see Pablo Carlos Sicouly, “The ‘Salamanca Process’: Origins, Meaning and Implementation of a Dominican Theological-Pastoral Category,” *Philippiniana Sacra* 58, no. 175 (January-April 2023): 3-21, <https://doi.org/10.55997/1001pslviii175a1>. See also Leo-Martin Angelo R. Ocampo, “The Salamanca Process as an Embodiment of Dominican Charism Today,” *Philippiniana Sacra* 58, no. 177 (September-December 2023): 491-514, <https://doi.org/10.55997/3002pslviii177a2>.

academic scholarship—specifically the Thomist professors of Salamanca, who are also prominent commentators—and the lived experiences of preacher-missionaries in the New World, particularly in regions where the dignity and rights of individuals and peoples were either violated or ignored. In discussing this exchange, three key figures stand out: Antón de Montesinos, OP, Bartolome de las Casas, OP, and Francisco de Vitoria, OP.¹⁶ Our discussion will focus specifically on Vitoria: On the one hand, as an academic, Vitoria was teaching and commenting on the works of St. Thomas. He has written commentaries on some parts of the *Summa Theologiae*.¹⁷ As previously mentioned, he was also a professor to the Dominican theologians at the Council of Trent. Additionally, he made a groundbreaking contribution by replacing the *Sentences of Peter Lombard* with the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas as the standard textbook for theology at the Universidad de Salamanca. In St. Thomas, particularly in the *Summa*, Vitoria found a comprehensive and unified framework for theology, one that encompassed all aspects of knowledge.

On the other hand, when he became involved in the political affairs of the time, Vitoria placed the dispute about the New World within a university context

¹⁶ Antón de Montesinos, OP (1475–1540) is best known for his fiery sermon in 1511 (“¿Con qué derecho?” *By what right?*), in which he denounced the mistreatment and enslavement of the indigenous peoples by Spanish colonizers in Hispaniola. His bold stance on human rights and justice laid the groundwork for later debates on the moral and ethical treatment of indigenous peoples. Bartolomé de las Casas, OP (1484–1566), a former encomendero who later became a Dominican, is famous for his writings and advocacy against the exploitation of indigenous peoples. He is best known for his work *Brevisima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (*A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*) (1552), which condemned the brutal treatment of native populations by the Spanish. Las Casas was an important voice in the debates surrounding colonization, advocating for the protection of indigenous rights and legal reforms to prevent their abuse. See Abelardo Lobato Casado, “Dignidad del hombre y derechos humanos en Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas y en la doctrina social de la Iglesia,” *Communio: revista semestral publicada por los Dominicos de la provincia de Andalucía* 18, no. 1 (1985): 59–81; Mauricio Beuchot, “El fundamento de los derechos humanos en Bartolomé de las Casas,” *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 52, no. 1/4 (1996): 87–95. Writing in the 20th century, one can find a valuable and comprehensive exploration of Bartolomé de Las Casas and his historical context in the works of Lewis Hanke. See Lewis Hanke, *All Mankind Is One: A Study of the Disputation Between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in 1550 on the Intellectual and Religious Capacity of the American Indians* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1994); Lewis Hanke, *Aristotle and the American Indians: A Study in Race Prejudice in the Modern World* (Franklin: Creative Media Partners, LLC, 2021). For a recent, comprehensive analysis of Las Casas, see David Thomas Orique, O.P., and Rady Roldán-Figueroa, eds., *Bartolomé de Las Casas, O.P.: History, Philosophy, and Theology in the Age of European Expansion* (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2018).

¹⁷ Some of Vitoria’s commentaries on the *Summa* available in English include his *De homicidio* (*STh* II-II Q. 64) and *De legibus* (*STh* I-II qq. 90–108). See Francisco de Vitoria, *De Homicidio*, trans. John P. Doyle (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1997) and Francisco de Vitoria, *Vitoria: Political Writings*, ed. Anthony Pagden and Jeremy Lawrance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Concerns have been raised about the Thomism of Vitoria and the later *Salamantinos*, particularly regarding its influence from Erasmus’s humanism and, at certain points, from later nominalism. However, this topic warrants a separate study and will not be discussed here.

and is remembered for his correspondence with his former students, who were missionaries in the New World. In his 1539 lecture *De Indis*, he argued that the issue was not merely a legal matter, but primarily philosophical and theological. Vitoria declared that the natives demonstrated clear signs of rationality: they had customs, laws, and forms of government; they organized themselves as a society, and were capable of self-governance. The rationality of the natives, although less developed compared to others, was not due to their nature but rather to their lack of education. There was no doubt in Vitoria's mind about their rationality and intellectual capacity. This insistence on their rationality is reflected in his approach to conversion and evangelization: it should never involve coercion, but must respect freedom and employ reason in communicating the Gospel. By acknowledging the rationality of the natives, Vitoria also affirmed their freedom and rights. This raises the question: do the commentaries of St. Thomas have a connection to the affairs of the mission? Although St. Thomas's writings are often perceived as speculative, they do, in fact, have practical, tangible relevance. Cessario and Cuddy affirm this view:

Caricatures of the Thomist commentatorial tradition sometimes suggest that those who inhabit it may display speculative acumen but little practical usefulness. Among the many possible rejoinders to such superficial remark, one may point to the application that Francis de Vitoria makes of Thomist teachings to the vexing questions occasioned by the discovery of the New World and the people native to the American continent.¹⁸

These factors: the Council of Trent, the Age of Exploration, the Escuela de Salamanca, and the Thomistic commentaries, and the encounter and exchange with the New World, will have an impact in the foundation of UST and the further spread of Thomism. The influence and impact of these factors are what the missionaries will carry with them as they embark on their journey to the Philippines.

UST and the Birth of Thomism in the Far East in the 17th Century

The factors and historical context of Thomism in the 16th century played a significant role in shaping the foundation of the University of Santo Tomas. As already mentioned in the previous section, notably, the Council of Trent, which upheld St. Thomas Aquinas as a key guide to the truth of the Christian faith, strongly influenced this development. The Council also proposed the establishment of diocesan seminaries, further embedding Thomistic thought in religious education. Additionally, the Escuela de Salamanca, where St. Thomas's works were extensively commented upon, contributed to the intellectual climate of the time. This school

¹⁸ Cessario and Cuddy, 84.

of thought provided important responses to the challenges posed by the missions in the New World, addressing both theological and practical concerns in light of emerging global contexts. These factors will be clearly reflected in and will influence the foundation and the “infancy stage” of the University of Santo Tomas Manila.

UST: A Center for the Formation of Priests and Missionaries

The Universidad de Salamanca would influence the establishment of numerous universities across Hispanic America and, later, Asia. The University of Santo Tomas is one such example. The common thread that unites these universities regarding their history is that their purpose was to train the missionaries in charge of evangelizing the territory. In the case of UST, it was also influenced by the universities in Avila, Mexico, and Lima. Fidel Villarroel, OP narrates: “Salamanca’s statutes, form of government, faculties, privileges, and traditions were replicated, through concession from Church and state authorities, by other centers of learning, making it the *de facto* academic parent of the universities in the New World, including the University of Santo Tomás.”¹⁹ Hence, in its early years, the university adopted the statutes of Salamanca.²⁰ Along with these statutes, its intellectual framework, deeply rooted in Thomism, significantly influenced both the curriculum and teaching methods of the university in Manila, particularly in the formation of the clergy.²¹ Fidel Villarroel, OP narrates:

By itself, the urgent need for a sound theological training of the Manila clergy could not have moved the Dominicans to found the Colegio de Santo Tomás... The establishment of the Colegio de Santo Tomás flowed naturally from an essential Dominican ministry: the doctrinal and intellectual apostolate... To lay down the foundation for the doctrinal and intellectual mission of the Dominican Order, [St. Dominic] sent some of his earliest and most capable disciples to study at the great European

¹⁹ Villarroel, *A History of UST*, 17.

²⁰ Águeda María Rodríguez Cruz, OP extensively explored the impact of the Universidad de Salamanca and the broader Spanish intellectual tradition on the development of thought and identity in Hispanic America, particularly through the “daughter universities” established across the Americas. See Águeda María Rodríguez Cruz, *Salmantica docet: La proyección de la Universidad de Salamanca en Hispanoamérica* (PhD diss., Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 1963). It was turned into a book, published by *Universidad* in 1977. See also Águeda María Rodríguez Cruz, *La Universidad de Salamanca en Hispanoamérica* (Universidad de Salamanca, 2005) and Luis Enrique Rodríguez San Pedro-Bézares and Juan Luis Polo Rodríguez, *La Universidad de Salamanca y sus confluencias americanas* (Universidad de Salamanca, 2018). While Rodríguez’s work focuses on Hispanic America, Villarroel adds further context, noting that UST based its statutes on both “Spanish models” such as Salamanca and Ávila, and “colonial models” like those of Mexico and Lima. See Villarroel, *A History of UST*, 15-20.

²¹ The Foundation Act of 1611 of UST can be found in the Archivo de la Universidad de Santo Tomas, Libros 48, doc. See Santamaria, 53-120. These chapters were originally published in *Unitas* vols. XV-XVI. See also Villarroel, *A History of UST*, 35-53.

universities like the University of Paris where Dominicans like St. Albert the Great and St. Thomas Aquinas excelled as students and professors.²²

It can therefore be said that Thomism was introduced to the Philippines and the Far East primarily through and for the formation of priests, with the University of Santo Tomas (UST) serving as a central hub for the dissemination of St. Thomas's teachings.²³ Aligning with the demands of the Council of Trent, from the outset, the University's curriculum was predominantly focused on ecclesiastical and theological studies, with the University playing later on a significant role in training students who would pursue careers in the civil service.²⁴ In the 1580s, before the establishment of UST, the Dominican bishop of Manila, Domingo de Salazar, expressed concern over the shortage of well-trained clergy to serve in the cathedral and parishes of Manila.²⁵ With this, he emphasized the need for rigorous academic formation for his clergy.²⁶ Salazar, having been trained in Salamanca with Francisco de Vitoria, OP as professor, was particularly persistent in advocating for proper education, especially for priests, understanding firsthand the value of intellectual rigor. Before UST was established, Dominicans would go to the Manila Cathedral to teach dogmatic theology in the morning and moral theology in the afternoon.²⁷

The vision of establishing a formal institution for the rigorous training of priests was later fulfilled by Miguel de Benavides, OP (1552–1605), *socius* of Bishop Salazar and his successor as Bishop of Manila. However, the colegio would only come to fruition after Benavides's death.²⁸ Fulfilling the will of Benavides, who bequeathed

²² Villarroel, *A History of UST*, 15.

²³ Among the universities in the Americas that trace their origins to the University of Salamanca and still exist today, notable parallels can be observed between the University of Santo Tomas in Manila (UST Manila) and the Universidad de Santo Tomás in Bogotá, Colombia (USTA Bogotá). Founded in 1580—several years before UST Manila—USTA Bogotá was modeled after San Esteban in Salamanca. It began as a *Studium Generale* for the Dominican Order, where scholars studied and taught Aristotle through the commentaries of Thomas Aquinas. Before the establishment of the *colegio-universidad*, the Dominican friars founded the Convent of Our Lady of the Rosary with the primary mission of disseminating Thomistic thought and training missionaries tasked with evangelizing the region. See USTA, *La Universidad Santo Tomás de Colombia ante su historia. Siglos XVI – XIX* (Bogotá: Universidad Santo Tomás, 2005).

²⁴ Villarroel, *A History of UST*, 66.

²⁵ Although the Convent of Santo Domingo in Intramuros served as a “house of studies” for a time, UST Manila, unlike USTA Bogotá, was not initially established as a *Studium Generale* for the Dominican Order. Instead, it was founded as a *colegio-seminario* to provide intellectual training for the clergy of Manila. See Villarroel, *A History of UST*, 26.

²⁶ Lucio Gutiérrez, *Domingo de Salazar, O.P.: First Bishop of the Philippines, 1512-1594: A Study of His Life and Work* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas, 2001), 101-122. See also Villarroel, *A History of UST*, 5-6.

²⁷ Villarroel, *A History of UST*, 25-26.

²⁸ Benavides joined the elderly Salazar in pleading for the rights of the natives in the royal court. See Fidel Villarroel, *Miguel de Benavides, O.P. (1550–1605), Friar, Bishop and University Founder*

his library and goods to serve as the foundation for an institution of higher learning, the document establishing this institution was signed on April 28, 1611, by Baltasar Fort, OP, Francisco Minayo, OP, and Bernardo de Santa Catalina, OP. Originally named *Colegio de Nuestra Señora del Santísimo Rosario*, it was founded to provide intellectual and religious training for young men, particularly those preparing for the priesthood. The institution was later renamed *Colegio de Santo Tomás* in honor of Thomas Aquinas. In 1645, Pope Innocent X elevated it to university status.²⁹ Benavides was trained in Valladolid and was a student of the Thomist commentator Domingo Bañez, OP. Also, in the newly established University, all Dominican professors teaching the sacred sciences were required to adhere strictly to the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas. Thus, the Thomism inherited from Salamanca had a profound influence on the early development of UST. This influence shaped the mindset both of its founding fathers and professors and also the formation of its students.

Since the goal is priestly formation, the University's first courses and faculties established were Theology and Philosophy. The teaching of philosophy was clearly modeled after the method used in Spain, though it faced challenges due to the lack of available textbooks and manuals. Lectures were delivered through dictation, with professors offering a running commentary on Aristotelian texts. Additionally, the Dominican missionaries who arrived in the Philippines brought with them books on Aristotelian works. The current UST Miguel de Benavides Library still holds copies of the *Corpus Aristotelicum* from that period: the eight books of *Physica*; the two books of *De Generatione et Corruptione*; the three books of *De Anima*; the *Praedicabilia Porphyrii*, the *Praedicamenta*, and the *Posteriora*.³⁰ As regards the teaching of Theology, Villarroel notes that in the doctrinal content and exposition of theological

(Manila: UST Publishing House, 2005), 33-35. This monograph was originally published as an article: Fidel Villarroel, "Miguel de Benavides, O.P. (1550–1605)," *Philippiniana Sacra*, 2005, 267. See also Domingo Peñaflor, "Miguel de Benavides: Advocate of Human Rights in the Spanish Regime," *Philippiniana Sacra* (1985): 233–42; Pedro Tejero, "Miguel de Benavides, O.P.: Founder of the University of Santo Tomas, Manila," *UNITAS*, 2005, 169-187. See also Pedro G. Tejero, *Fray Miguel de Benavides, O.P.: Fundador de La Universidad de Sto. Tomás de Manila* (Madrid: Institutos Pontificios de Teología y Filosofía, 2006).

²⁹ Aside from Villarroel and Santamaria, for the context of the foundation of UST and the other missionary activities of the Dominicans in its early years in the Far East, see Manuel González Pola, *Evangelización de los Dominicos en Filipinas en los siglos XVI y XVII* (Publicaciones de los Institutos de Filosofía y Teología, Serie VI, Cuadernos de Misionología; Edición en Español, 1 enero 1992); Anna Busquets, "La fundación de la Provincia del Santísimo Rosario de Filipinas y las primeras acciones de apostolado en las Islas," *Archivo Dominicano* 44 (2023): 71–87.

³⁰ For a partial list of philosophy professors of the period, see Villarroel, *A History of UST*, 69. For a glimpse on philosophy in the Philippines in its early years, see Leo Cullum, "Notes for a History of Philosophy in the Philippines," *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 7, no. 4 (1959): 448-460.

subjects, scholasticism was omnipresent. The texts used were those written by great medieval masters, St. Thomas Aquinas and Peter Lombard.³¹ Professors also provided their students with complementary insights drawn from the commentaries of contemporary theologians at Spanish universities. The missionaries also brought these commentaries to UST.³² It is also worth noting that examinations were taken very seriously. The exam period, known as *noche triste*, involved a professor randomly selecting passages from the *Libro de los Piques*, which contains Aristotelian theses, or from the *Sentences*. The candidate was required to defend two *lecciones*, with the professor drawing from these texts three times for each. An hourglass was used to indicate the time allotted for the student to elaborate on their answer. Grading was done using chips marked with “S,” “A,” and “R” for *Sobresaliente*, *Aprobado*, and *Reprobado*, respectively.³³

Thomism in the Rare UST Commentaries

Thus far, we have discussed the reception of Thomism—specifically, how it was embraced and applied in the context of priestly and missionary formation. While a commentarial form of Thomism was dominant in Europe during this period, the question arises: were there any Thomistic commentaries produced in the Philippines in the 17th century? The answer is yes, though limited in scope. While UST professors did write commentaries, particularly on moral and practical issues encountered on the islands, there was no extensive commentarial tradition akin to the one established in Salamanca.³⁴ It can be said that the history of Thomistic commentaries at the University of Santo Tomas in the 17th century is marked by a handful of notable figures and works, though many of these contributions have been

³¹ Villarroel, 69-70.

³² For a partial list of theology professors at that time, see Villarroel, *A History of UST*, 70. For example, the *Summa*, together with the commentaries of Tommaso de Vio Gaetano, Domingo Báñez, Domingo de Soto, Francesco Ferrariense, Paulus Soncinas, Bartolomé de Medina, Pedro de Ledesma, which the missionaries brought to Manila, are still preserved in the rare books section of the UST Miguel de Benavides Library.

³³ Villarroel, *A History of UST*, 71-73.

³⁴ Like Salazar and Benavides, the Dominican missionaries who arrived in the Philippines during this period were trained in the Salamanca school of thought, particularly in the commentaries on Aquinas's works and the theological framework applied to the New World. They can be considered second- or third-generation successors to earlier missionaries and inheritors of this intellectual and spiritual tradition. Consequently, their works can be understood as a continuation and development of that tradition. For context on this intellectual lineage and their predecessors, see: David Lantigua, “Aquinas and the Emergence of Moral Theology during the Spanish Renaissance,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception of Aquinas*, ed. Matthew Levering and Marcus Plested (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 173–190; and Matthew Gaetano, “The Catholic Reception of Aquinas in the De auxiliis Controversy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception of Aquinas*, ed. Matthew Levering and Marcus Plested (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 225–279.

lost to time. The late UST historians Pablo Fernandez, OP and Fidel Villarroel, OP give a glimpse of what happened to the scarce commentaries.

The manuscript of UST rector Baltasar Fort, OP (d. 1640), has been lost, leaving only a legacy of his reputation as “an oracle in learning and virtue.”³⁵ Similarly, Pedro Fernández de Ledo, OP (d. c. 1660), authored a *Cursus theologiae scholasticae*, but this manuscript disappeared during the British occupation of Manila between 1762 and 1764.³⁶ He would later be appointed bishop-elect of Nueva Caceres. Santiago Mimbela, OP, rector and professor at UST, is known for his *Suma de Teología Moral*, yet this work too cannot be located today.³⁷ Sebastian Oquendo, OP, (d. 1651), is often noted for his contributions to moral theology.³⁸ Fernández mentions that Oquendo is said to have annotated the *Summa Theologiae*, but he would later become more widely known for his moral theological works, particularly his *Consultas y Dudas* and *Disputadas y Resueltas*. This collection of moral questions was presented to him from various regions of the Philippines, highlighting his role in addressing cases of conscience. One of his notable works, the *Tractatus de Instructione Confessorum seu Summa Casuum Conscientiae* (1637), dealt with how confessors should approach censures, excommunications, and the sacrament of penance, as well as the commandments of God and the Church and the various states of life.³⁹ Another of his work is titled *De peccato originali*.

Despite these contributions, the condition of Thomistic commentaries in the Philippines during this period was less than ideal. They were few in number, and many were either lost or destroyed over time, often “feasted on by bookworms,” as Francisco de Acuña, OP, a UST professor cited by Villarroel, lamented.⁴⁰ Additionally, the influence of these commentaries was largely confined to the Philippines and the broader Far East. With the University’s publishing house just beginning to emerge, the production of printed works was costly and fraught with challenges. In contrast to Europe, where a tradition of commentaries directly on the works of St. Thomas Aquinas developed, it is rare in Manila to find, for example, a “commentary by UST

³⁵ Villarroel, *A History of UST*, 67. Pablo Fernandez, *History of the Church in the Philippines, 1521–1898* (Manila: National Book Store, 1979).

³⁶ Villarroel, *A History of UST*, 127.

³⁷ Villarroel, *A History of UST*, 127.

³⁸ Villarroel, *A History of UST*, 129-130.

³⁹ We will not undertake a detailed discussion of the merits and limitations of casuistry, or case-based reasoning in moral theology. However, it is sufficient to note that this method shaped the moral instruction delivered by missionaries in the Far East, reflecting the intellectual and theological context of their time. For an analysis of moral theology in the era of the manuals and a critique of the overemphasis on conscience, see Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Sr. Mary Thomas Noble, O.P. (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 1995), 254–279.

⁴⁰ Villarroel, *A History of UST*, 126.

professor so-and-so on the II-II of St. Thomas” from the 17th century. The tradition of Thomistic commentaries in the Philippines was not as developed or widespread as it was in Europe, especially in institutions like Salamanca. What is evident in the writings of the Dominican missionaries to the Philippines is a focus on practical concerns, as well as the theological insights and perspectives the missionaries sought to offer in response, as will be elaborated in the next section.

A “Humanistic and Practical Thomism”

The Philippines was a young nation at the time, just beginning to take shape, and the University was in its infancy as well. Perhaps this is why one cannot find Thomism in the form of formal commentaries, but rather in the actual teaching, as pointed out, and in the interaction of Thomist professors and missionaries with the Far East. In this context, it can be said that from the very beginning of UST, a “Humanistic and Practical Thomism” emerged and evolved.⁴¹ The philosophical and theological concerns of the missionary professors were shaped by the new realities they encountered. Thus, a “humanistic and practical Thomism” took root, evident in the ways these missionary professors addressed the pressing questions of their time, responding to the immediate needs of the people. This approach was less about detailed commentaries on the *Summa Theologiae* and more about the trace of Thomas Aquinas found throughout the writings of the missionaries. Even if these works were not technically and explicitly commentarial, they reflected Thomistic thought, given that the professors were deeply formed in his intellectual tradition. As Villarroel notes,

The [UST] *lectores* of the mid-seventeenth century continued to be authentic heirs of the Spanish theological movement that had achieved a glorious revival of scholastic and Thomistic theology in the previous century. That revival had achieved a happy combination of Thomism and humanism, of scholastic and moral theology.⁴²

⁴¹ Since the exploration and evangelization of the Philippines occurred later than in Hispanic America, we can trace how this humanistic and practical Thomism developed, for example, in its “elder sister,” Mexico, where the Philippines was once under the viceroyalty of Nueva España. See the chapter “Teología humanista en la Orden de Predicadores al comienzo de la colonia” in Mauricio Beuchot, *El pensamiento de los dominicos novohispanos en el siglo XVI* (Madrid: Universidad Francisco de Vitoria, 2021), 23–34. For additional context on philosophy, see also his earlier work, particularly the chapter “The Sixteenth Century: The Humanist Philosophers” in Mauricio Beuchot, *The History of Philosophy in Colonial Mexico*, trans. Elizabeth Millán (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 19–59.

⁴² Villarroel, *A History of UST*, 125.

In his *A History of the University of Santo Tomas*, Villarroel devotes one chapter to the moral theologians of UST's first century with the title "Moral Theologians of the Orient."⁴³ In a similar vein to his reflections on the commentaries, he expresses a kind of lament that "there were many writers, but few publications."⁴⁴ The works of these theologians suggest that the commentaries were not merely intended as academic exercises on St. Thomas's works but were instead practical responses to the pressing issues of the time. One of the key figures in this period was UST rector Domingo González, OP (d. 1649), who tackled a range of moral and theological questions. His most significant work, *Resolución de las dudas graves acerca del modo de evangelizar en la gran China* (1637),⁴⁵ addressed complex issues related to evangelization in China. During the 1630s and 1640s, as the Church awaited Rome's definitive pronouncement on the legitimacy of the Chinese rites, Dominican missionaries turned to the theological expertise at the University of Santo Tomas for guidance. González was the most consulted figure during this time, offering insight and counsel regarding the controversial issue. As his writings were primarily focused on the application of moral principles to the specific historical and cultural context of the Philippines and the wider Far East, many of the moral queries he answered came from areas like Formosa (modern Taiwan) and China, reflecting his deep engagement with the realities of missionary work. As a moral theologian, González also grappled with questions of justice, particularly regarding the Spanish presence in the Philippines. He raised important ethical concerns about the colonial impact on the native population, advocating for restitution and fair treatment of indigenous peoples. His treatise *Tratado en que se resuelve que tanto deban guardarse y esconderse los religiosos ministros en tiempo de persecución como la que hay en Japón* (on whether it is prudent to offer oneself for martyrdom) responded to the martyrdom of his confrères in Japan, addressing the personal and moral implications of missionary sacrifice.

Another towering figure in moral theology at UST was Juan de Paz, OP (1622-1699), known as the "Oracle of Asia."⁴⁶ He is often regarded as the greatest theologian of UST in the 17th century. His work *Consultas y Resoluciones varias*,

⁴³ This group of missionaries can be viewed as part of the succeeding generations to the first wave of Salamantino thinkers, with a particular focus on moral life, the sacrament of penance, and economic and political ethics. For context, see footnote 34.

⁴⁴ Villarroel, *A History of UST*, 125.

⁴⁵ See Villarroel, *A History of UST*, 315, footnote 21.

⁴⁶ Villarroel, *A History of UST*, 130-134. See also Edilberto Santos, "Juan de Paz (1622-1699), 'The Oracle of Asia,'" *Philippiniana Sacra* 12 (1987): 281-289; Norah L. A. Gharala, Marya Svetlana T. Camacho, and Juan O. Mesquida, *Everyday Life in the Philippines, 1657-1699: Selections from the Manuscripts of Juan de Paz* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2025).

Teológicas, Jurídicas, Regulares y Morales (“Various Consultations and Resolutions, Theological, Legal, Regular, and Moral”) was a significant contribution to moral casuistry. While not a direct commentary on St. Thomas, it offers valuable insight into the moral concerns of the time, particularly in the context of Southeast Asia, and the Philippines in particular. The work reflects the 17th century desire to find moral justification for actions, both in public and private life, as individuals sought to ensure moral integrity and a clean conscience. De Paz later became embroiled in controversy over accusations of *probabilism*—the view that a person could act based on a probable opinion in moral uncertainty even if the opinion wasn’t the most certain.⁴⁷ Though his reputation was initially tarnished, later generations would restore his name, acknowledging the depth and relevance of his contributions to moral theology.

As it was seen in González, it is also interesting to explore the intersection of belief and worship, particularly in the context of the UST theologians’ responses to the Chinese rites controversy. While perhaps not really evident, it remains an intriguing avenue of inquiry to examine the influence of Thomism in the stance taken by UST professors regarding these rites. In the case of the rites in Tonkin, de Paz was consulted by missionaries in the region. Given the considerable distance between Tonkin and Rome, they sought his theological opinion via Manila. His response was encapsulated in his 1680 work, *Opusculum in quo ducenta et septuaginta quatuor Quaesita a RR. PP. Missionariis Regni Tunkini proposita, totidemque responsiones ad ipsa continentur* (“A booklet that contains 274 questions proposed by the Reverend Missionaries of the Kingdom of Tunkin, and as many answers given by the Rev. Fr. Juan de Paz. Manila, 1680”).⁴⁸ Paz’s treatise tackled issues concerning the licitness of financial contributions to pagan ceremonies, participation in the construction of pagan temples, and the omission of certain Church sacraments to avoid offending Chinese or Vietnamese sensibilities. His stance, which aligned with the Dominican position in China and Manila, was that such rites were superstitious and contrary to the faith.

Another key figure is Domingo Fernández Navarrete, OP (1619–1689), who was a key player in the Chinese rites controversy.⁴⁹ His monumental works, *Tratados históricos, políticos, éticos y religiosos de la Monarquía de China* (Madrid, 1676) and *Controversias antiguas y modernas de la misión de la gran China*, made significant contributions to the debate. Although he spent only two years as a professor at

⁴⁷ See footnote 34.

⁴⁸ Villarroel, *A History of UST*, 132 and 316, footnote 41.

⁴⁹ Villarroel, *A History of UST*, 127. See also Fidel Villarroel, O.P., “The Chinese Rites Controversy: Dominican Viewpoint,” *Philippiniana Sacra* 28, no. 82 (1993): 5–61.

UST, Navarrete's extensive missionary work in Southern China positioned him as a prominent champion of the Dominican perspective on the rites, carrying the fervor of the controversy back to Europe. A compelling area of research would be to explore how Thomistic thought shaped the responses of UST theologians in the 17th century, especially in their writings on the Chinese and Tonkinese rites. Although these theologians did not primarily focus on writing commentaries on St. Thomas Aquinas, their theological works often implicitly reflected Thomistic principles, particularly in their practical application to the missionary field. The UST professors did not merely engage in abstract theological inquiry but were concerned with the immediate needs and challenges of evangelizing in foreign lands. In this sense, Aquinas' teachings on human nature and the capacity for knowledge of God were seen as foundational to the missionary efforts.

At the time, the Philippines was still in the early stages of embracing Catholicism, with the late 16th and 17th centuries marked by a missionary emphasis on demonstrating the intelligibility of the Catholic faith to the local populations. This practical concern is reflected in the diverse genres of written works produced by missionaries: dogmatic and moral treatises, catechisms (as urged by the Council of Trent), sermons, devotional manuals, pastoral letters, as well as grammar books and dictionaries, many of which were compiled by the missionaries themselves. Through these works, the missionaries, informed by Thomistic thought, emphasized the innate capacity of all humans to know and relate to God. This theological stance was in direct opposition to the earlier Spanish claims, which suggested that the indigenous peoples lacked reason—a view that figures such as Vitoria and Bartolome de las Casas actively opposed.⁵⁰ For the university founder Benavides and the Thomist missionary-professors of UST, the emphasis was clear: the indigenous peoples were capable of receiving education in the faith and should be educated accordingly.⁵¹

Another distinctive feature of the professors and students at UST during this period was not only their dedication to teaching the faith but also living it to the point of martyrdom. Their unwavering commitment to the missionary cause and

⁵⁰ For a discussion, particularly on the Valladolid debate between Las Casas and Sepúlveda, aside from the work of Hanke, see Part II of Kevin White, ed., *Hispanic Philosophy in the Age of Discovery* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1997). For further insights on Vitoria, consult Simona Langella, *Teología y ley natural: Estudio sobre las lecciones de Francisco de Vitoria* (Madrid: Biblioteca Autores Cristianos, 2011); Simona Langella, *La ciencia teológica de Francisco de Vitoria y la Summa Theologiae de santo Tomás de Aquino en el siglo XVI a la luz de textos inéditos* (Soria: Editorial San Esteban, 2013); and Santiago Pinon Jr., *The Ivory Tower and the Sword: Francisco Vitoria Confronts the Emperor* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016).

⁵¹ This is why the elderly Salazar and Benavides traveled to the royal court—to defend the rights of the natives, as noted in the previous section.

their theological convictions which they learned from, among others, the writings of St. Thomas—often leading to their deaths—stand as a powerful testament to the depth of their faith. Several of these martyrs were professors at UST, and their sacrifices remain emblematic: Domingo Ibañez de Erquicia, OP (Spanish, Professor of Theology, c. 1621–1622, martyred in Nagasaki, 1633); Lucas Alonso del Espíritu Santo, OP (Spanish, Professor of Philosophy, c. 1621–1622, martyred in Nagasaki, 1634); Tomás Hioji Nishi de San Jacinto, OP (Japanese, Student of Philosophy and Theology, 1621–1626, martyred in Nagasaki, 1634); Antonio González, OP (Spanish, Professor of Theology, 1633–1636, Acting Rector, 1636, martyred in Nagasaki, 1637); Guillaume Courtet, OP (French, Professor of Theology, 1635–1636, martyred in Nagasaki, 1637).⁵² The lives and martyrdom of these professors offer a powerful narrative about the practical integration of Thomistic theology and missionary life. Their unwavering commitment to the faith, even to the point of sacrificing their lives, underscores the deep devotion that characterized their teachings and actions. These individuals did not simply impart theological knowledge; they embodied the very principles they taught, living out their convictions in the most extreme and selfless way. Their martyrdoms serve as a testament to the profound impact of UST’s theological education, highlighting how Thomistic thought not only shaped their intellectual pursuits but also fueled their missionary zeal. This devotion to both belief and action further illustrates the formative role UST played in the development of Catholicism in the Philippines during this critical period, showing that the university’s influence extended beyond the classroom to the very heart of the missionary endeavor.

The role of Thomistic thought among the UST theologians of the 17th century is of profound significance. The application of Aquinas’ teachings to the realities of missionary work, combined with the theologians’ lived faith and unwavering dedication, opens a rich avenue for further exploration into the intersection of theology, culture, and evangelization during this pivotal period. With this, we have approached Thomism not in the strict sense of providing detailed commentaries on the works of St. Thomas but in a broader, more interpretive way. In this context, St. Thomas is regarded as both a guide and a teacher – a *sure guide to the truth of the Christian faith*, whose influence permeated the professors’ and students’ understanding of reality, faith, and life. As Thomasian poet Ophelia Dimalanta fittingly puts it, “St. Thomas [is] in a minor key”; or as Michael Coroza translates, “[Si] Santo Tomas [ay] nasa isang tabi” (Thomas is on the side).⁵³ He is present—not overtly, but subtly—in

⁵² Villarroel, *A History of UST*, 85-95.

⁵³ Ophelia Dimalanta and Michael Coroza, *Thomas in a Minor Key: A Play in Three Acts* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Publishing House, 2013).

what the missionaries did and wrote. He is “on the side” in the sense that his influence is woven through their actions and intellectual endeavors, shaping their approach to missionary life. These professors were deeply formed in the thought of St. Thomas, with his teachings serving as a foundational lens through which they engaged with the world and the challenges of their missionary work.

Conclusion: UST as a Custodian and Cultivator of Thomism

In conclusion, we briefly examine the developments that followed the initial stages of the university’s first century. As the saying suggests, “The beginning is perhaps more difficult than anything else.” The missionaries of the succeeding centuries reaped the benefits of the foundational work laid by their pioneering predecessors.⁵⁴ Although their approach may have differed in form and style, the tradition of commenting on the works of St. Thomas would continue at UST, with Zeferino González emerging as one of its most prominent representatives.⁵⁵ The role of UST in this development is particularly significant, as González was primarily trained not in Europe, but at UST Manila. His contributions, which were initially shaped by his education in the Philippines, eventually gained recognition in Europe, further cementing the university’s critical role in preserving and advancing Thomistic thought.⁵⁶ *The Catholic Encyclopedia* of 1912 reports:

The tremendous upheaval which disturbed Europe from 1798 to 1815 affected the Church as well as the State. The University of Louvain, which had been largely Thomistic, was compelled to close its doors, and other important institutions of learning were either closed or seriously hampered in their work. The Dominican Order, which naturally had supplied the most ardent Thomists, was crushed in France, Germany, Switzerland, and Belgium. The province of Holland was almost destroyed, whilst the provinces of Austria and Italy were left to struggle for their very existence. *The University of Manila (1645) continued to teach the doctrines of St. Thomas*

⁵⁴ Also worth mentioning are, among others, Francisco de Alvarado, OP (1756–1814), known as the *Filósofo Rancio*, and Joaquín Fonseca, OP (1822–1890). However, this is better suited for another study. For now, it suffices to focus on the beginnings of Thomism in UST and in the Far East.

⁵⁵ See Levine Andro Lao, “The Nineteenth-Century Thomist from the Far East: Cardinal Zeferino González, OP (1831–1894),” *Philippiniana Sacra* 56, no. 167 (2021): 277–306.

⁵⁶ Thomas Marschler writes: “A prominent figure in Spanish neo-Thomism was the Dominican Zeferino González (1831–94). He studied as a missionary of his order at the still Thomist-orientated university of Manila (Philippines), where from the 1850s on, he also taught as a professor. The fruit of his reading of Thomas was a work on Aquinas’ philosophy (González 1864), which is accounted foundational for Spanish neo-scholasticism.”, 369. Emphasis added. While Thomistic centers and Thomism as a frame of mind collapsed in Europe, Manila is standing. Thomas Marschler, “Nineteenth-Century Catholic Reception of Aquinas,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception of Aquinas*, ed. Matthew Levering and Marcus Plested (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 369.

*and in due time gave to the world Cardinal Zephyrinus González, O.P., who contributed in no small degree to the revival of Thomism under Leo XIII.*⁵⁷

As Europe was engulfed in war, many Thomistic centers were forced to close. However, during this turbulent time, UST in Manila emerged as the steadfast custodian of Thomism, continuing to uphold and promote its legacy. It was here that figures such as Zeferino González, OP, Norberto del Prado, OP (1852-1918), and Francisco Marín-Sola, OP (1873-1932) were formed and nurtured, enabling them to emerge later on to become widely recognized, particularly in Spain and Switzerland. Another notable figure from this period who can be considered as a Thomist is Blessed Buenaventura García Paredes, OP (1866-1936). Trained in Valencia and Madrid, he went on to teach at UST Manila.⁵⁸ His two doctoral theses, which focused on aesthetics and politics in the works of St. Thomas, further solidified his Thomistic credentials. He would go on to serve as Prior Provincial of the Province of Our Lady of the Rosary, Master of the Dominican Order, and ultimately, he became a martyr during the Spanish Civil War. Another significant contribution of UST to the preservation and promotion of Thomism is the establishment of the academic journal *Philippiniana Sacra*. In the 20th century, the growth of Thomistic scholarship was marked by the rise of academic journals dedicated to the study and dissemination of Thomistic thought. Notable examples include *Revue Thomiste* in France, *Blackfriars* and *New Blackfriars* in England, and *Ciencia Tomista* in Spain. Following this intellectual movement, *Philippiniana Sacra* emerged, especially in its early years, as a vital platform for the dissemination of Thomistic thought, helping to further integrate the Philippines into the global scholarly discourse on Thomism.

Much more can be said about the development of Thomism in the Far East, and we have only begun to scratch the surface of its fundamentals. For example, there is still much to explore regarding how the Philippine and broader Asian experiences have contributed to the global history of Thomism. However, any discussion of this topic must consider the role of the University of Santo Tomas (UST). While much remains to be explored about how UST became the custodian of Thomism in the past, there is also much to consider regarding its present and future. By establishing itself as a vibrant institution dedicated to St. Thomas's intellectual legacy, engaging with and promoting the study of his teachings, UST can embrace the Angelic Doctor not only as its patron in name but also as a true teacher and guide. In doing so, UST can continue to serve not only as a custodian but also as a focal point for the cultivation of Thomism.**PS**

⁵⁷ Kennedy, "Thomism," <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14698b.htm>. Emphasis added.

⁵⁸ See Vito-Tomás Gómez García, "El Beato Buenaventura García Paredes, mártir," *Vida sobrenatural: revista de teología mística* 100, no. 729 (2020): 206–19.

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En el año de mil e quatrocientos e sesenta e tres
el día de San Juan el Rey e Reyna mandaron
que se faga un libro de las cosas que se han
hecho en el Reyno de Castilla e de las Indias
que descubiertas son.

En la qual se contiene la vida e reynado de los
Reyes e Reynas que en el dicho Reyno e Indias
han reynado.



En el nombre de Dios Rey e Reyna
de Castilla e de las Indias.

Dios te salue atillanamos los deste
rrados hijos de Eva. Qui suspi
ramos gimiendo y llorando en
aquella valle de lagrimas. Ca
pues abogada nuestra. buelue
nosotros a Dios tus misericor
diosos ojos. y despues deca.