

# The University of Santo Tomas and the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Revival of Thomism

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**Abstract:** The paper tells of the circumstances surrounding the University of Santo Tomas during the 19th century Philippines that positioned the University to adequately respond to the call of Pope Leo XIII in *Aeterni Patris* for the restoration in Catholic schools and Universities of Christian philosophy according to the mind of Thomas Aquinas. It argues that the times, the thought, and the thinkers were all favorably prepared so that Thomism could take deep roots in the University of Santo Tomas even if most of the Catholic Universities in Europe suffered from the attacks against the Church brought by the political and intellectual upheavals that occasioned the 19th century rationalist humanism. It was not then difficult to pursue in the University of Santo Tomas the aims of *Aeterni Patris* because Thomism was already a dominant paradigm in its academic activities.

**Keywords:** Thomas Aquinas, University of Santo Tomas, Ceferino Gonzalez, Thomism in Asia

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## Introduction

I am neither a Thomist nor a historian. I am a friar of the Philippine Province, and I currently work at the University of Santo Tomas. It is in this University that I had the privilege to have lived with a saintly Spanish Dominican historian who published something about the topic at hand. He is Fr. Fidel Villarroel, OP, otherwise known as a saint-maker of the Philippines, having processed the elevation to the altars of the first Filipino saint, Lorenzo Ruiz.

In his work, Fr. Villarroel stated that the movement for the restoration of Thomism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century received ecclesiastical approval and support when Pope Leo XIII issued in 1879 the *Aeterni Patris*, his encyclical “On the Restoration in Catholic Schools of Christian Philosophy According to the Mind of the Angelic Doctor Saint Thomas Aquinas,”<sup>1</sup> which could be considered the *magna carta* of the revival of Thomism.

As “scholars still debate the best way to identify the movement,”<sup>2</sup> I would place my understanding of Thomism here in the broad sense as defined by D. J. Kennedy, namely, “the system which follows the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas in philosophical and theological questions.”<sup>3</sup> Indeed, if we could describe how the 19<sup>th</sup> century protagonists of Thomism rallied in defense of Aquinas, it would be that of an endeavor to confront the issues of the time by making known the authentic spirit and main principles of his doctrine.

*Aeterni Patris*, according to Villarroel, contained unmistakable references to the works of Fr. Ceferino Gonzalez (1831-1894), a Professor of Philosophy and promoter of Neo Thomism, who became Archbishop of Sevilla and Toledo in Spain, and later on a Cardinal of the Church. His philosophical writings, principal of which was his *Estudios sobre la Filosofía de Santo Tomás*, helped pave the way for the teachings of St. Thomas to become relevant once more, eventually even contributing in some way to the creation of the encyclical. As one modern scholar observed:

In his appreciation of the philosophy of St. Thomas, the Pope uses expressions that reflect, at times almost literally, the evaluation made by Zeferino in his *Estudios*. So much so, that some scholars have thought that his *Estudios* were present in the conception and even in the composition of the said encyclical.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Romanus Cessario, *A Short History of Thomism* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 25.

<sup>2</sup> Cessario, *A Short History of Thomism*, 11.

<sup>3</sup> see Cessario, *A Short History of Thomism*, 13.

<sup>4</sup> cf. Fidel Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines: A History of the University of Santo Tomas*, Vol. I (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2012), 66.

If any credit is to be given to the University of Santo Tomas, it would be the fact that Gonzalez, whom Villarroel dubbed as “the greatest philosopher produced by UST,”<sup>5</sup> received his intellectual formation not in any of the universities in Europe, but in an archipelago in the far East, then still considered a mission area of the Spanish Dominican friars. As a way of looking back to these events, I would like to focus on three aspects: the times, the thoughts, and the thinkers.

## From Spain to the Philippines

### *Religious Turmoil at the Turn of the Century*

Fr. Villarroel describes the 19<sup>th</sup> century as an age of reforms and revolutions, the first period of which was marked not only by the crises that arose, but more importantly, the plans that paved the way for countering transformations.<sup>6</sup> It was likewise in this period that the University played a crucial part in keeping the fire of Thomism burning as Catholic teaching faced the ordeal of religious persecution in revolutionary Spain, and in liberal Europe in general.

Following Napoleon’s invasion of Spain in 1808, the French occupation of the peninsula led to the ideology spawned by the French Revolution, which was fundamentally anti-clerical, humanistic, and abolitionist – taking root among the influential institutions of Spain. Soon the constitution of Cadiz was drafted and enforced, thus paving the way for various laws to be enacted against the Church: suppression of religious educational institutions in Spain; suppression of the military Orders and the Society of Jesus; and the reform and regulation of the Mendicant Orders.<sup>7</sup> In 1834, an outburst of anti-clericalism led to a massive assault of the convents of Madrid by the mob, and the assassination of almost one hundred religious. This was followed by a royal decree, through which the admission of novices in all convents and monasteries was suspended. Then, in what could be considered the most anti-clerical move in the history of Spain, various edicts of expulsion of all religious from their monasteries and convents were issued in 1836, and along with these was the confiscation of all the ecclesiastical properties by the government all throughout Spain. Since a good number of Spanish universities were then established in religious communities, the same treatment was rendered these institutions. On

<sup>5</sup> Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 533.

<sup>6</sup> The following narrative is an abridged account of the work of Villarroel (cf. Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 3-95).

<sup>7</sup> The Cadiz constitution was enforced during the period of the *Liberal Triennium* (1820-1823). Taking advantage of the then ongoing political chaos in Europe, the Spanish colonies in America fought for and claimed independence from 1816 to 1826. Thus, the declining Spanish empire lost control over all of its territories with the exception of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines (cf. Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 4).

July 5, 1807, a royal decree was carried out upon which the universities of Toledo, Osma, Oñate, Orihuela, Avila, Irache, Baeza, Osuna, Almagro, Gandia, and Sigüenza were abolished and aggregated to the 11 remaining Spanish universities. This was to resonate in the Dominican Order not only in Spain but also to its colonies in the Far East.<sup>8</sup>

In the Order of Preachers, an ordeal was under way even before the French invasion of Spain. Under the pressure of King Charles IV, Pope Pius VII was forced to remove the Dominican Provinces of Spain and its respective overseas colonies from the direct jurisdiction of the Master of the Order in 1805. Instead, these were placed under a Vicar General, who assumed all authority of the former, thus resulting to an anomalous situation that adversely affected the Province of the Most Holy Rosary. The Province then had no novitiate of its own, and had to recruit all its missionaries and university professors from the Spanish Provinces, in which the missionary spirit subsequently declined. This and the ensuing politico-religious turmoil in the peninsula led to a considerable decline in the number of personnel coming to Manila for their missions, including UST, in the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup>

Providing a consoling episode in these dark times was the foundation of the College - Seminary of the Dominican Province of the Most Holy Rosary in Ocaña (Toledo), and its preservation from the religious persecution by the government. Founded in 1830 as a novitiate of the Province for its missions in Asia, the formation house in Ocaña was established upon the recommendation of then Vicar General of the Order in Spain, Fr. Joaquin Britz, for the Province of the Holy Rosary to serve its missions in the Philippines and in Asia. Following the royal decree in 1834 suspending the admission of novices in all convents and monasteries, the Augustinian Archbishop Jose Segui, together with three suffragan bishops of Manila, pleaded before his Majesty for the exemption of the three seminaries run by missionaries to the Philippines: the Augustinians in Valladolid; the Dominicans in Ocaña; and the Discalced Augustinians in Monteagudo. Villarroel credited the granting of such exemption to the political advantage that was most likely seen by the authorities, that is, the continuous formation of future missionaries was a necessary means to maintain stranglehold over the colonies. Accordingly, “the government believed that as long as these religious orders continued to send missionaries to the Philippines, the colony would remain loyal to Spain.”<sup>10</sup> This

<sup>8</sup> cf. Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> From 1805 to 1864, an average of only 9 Dominican friars arrived in the Philippines per boatload, which had to be dispersed throughout the missions in the northern part of the Philippines, and also in China and Vietnam. Because of this, very few could be assigned to the University of Santo Tomas in Manila for the teaching chairs (cf. Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 10).

<sup>10</sup> Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 10 & 49.

allowed for the continuous inflow of Spanish missionaries to the Philippines, thus providing assurance of personnel, however insufficient, for its parishes, missions, and educational institutions like the University of Santo Tomas in Manila.

It was during these intense events taking place in Spain that historical progress unfolded in the University of Santo Tomas. As Spanish universities were summarily abolished by a period of cultural, political, social, and religious disorder in Spain and its colonies in South America, UST remained one of the main strongholds of Spanish influence in the Philippines, where, compared to Spain, life was relatively calm and was even marked by an improved economy.<sup>11</sup> In 1844, the country was even described by Fr. Jose Fuixa, a Dominican friar then teaching at UST, as “the most peaceful and fortunate place in the world.”<sup>12</sup>

Although the first four decades of the century were periods of irrelevance and great dangers for the University, the next five were times of academic prominence. There was a high degree of literacy in the islands, most especially in Manila, where the only secondary and tertiary schools were established. With the expulsion of the Jesuits towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the consequent end of their two educational institutions, namely, the University of San Ignacio and the College of San Jose, university education became the exclusive responsibility of UST at the turn of the century.<sup>13</sup> Such academic prominence was—unfortunately for the university, but probably fortunately for the country—abruptly ended by the Philippine Revolution in the last decade of the century.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Villarroel, citing the lack of historical proof from Vicente De la Fuente regarding the inclusion of the University of Santo Tomas in the sweeping extermination of Spanish universities, surmised that such may have been due to political reasons. (cf. Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 5). A few instances of minor uprising took place in 1841 and 1844, but these were immediately suppressed (Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 6).

<sup>12</sup> Fr. Fuixa’s letter was addressed to Fr. Francisco Enrich, OP, on 21 March 1844 (cf. AGOP<XIII, 22795 cited in Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 6).

<sup>13</sup> Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 7.

<sup>14</sup> In his book, Fr. Rolando de la Rosa, a friar of the Dominican Province of the Philippines, discussed a controversial aspect of Spanish colonization of the island, claiming that a strong sentiment of racial discrimination led to the rather long road towards the admission of native candidates into the religious Orders in the Philippines, including the Dominicans. Cf. Rolando V. de la Rosa, *Beginnings of the Filipino Dominicans: History of the Filipinization of the Religious Orders in the Philippines*, Revised Edition (Manila: UST Publishing House, 1996). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a wide opposition to the idea of admitting natives to the orders. There were *indios* who had been ordained priests, but only as members of the diocesan clergy, which were regarded with less esteem than the religious. This sentiment corroborated the centuries-old practice of the importation of Spanish religious to the Philippines. Thus, with the constant inflow of religious personnel from the Peninsula, there ensued a tide of nationalism in the Philippines, which led to greater polarization between the native and religious clergy (Cf. *Ibid*, 86-91).

## From Ocaña to Manila

### *Bridging Thomistic Tradition in Intellectual Formation*

If ever the University of Santo Tomas had something to do with the revival of Thomism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it would have to be due to its connection with the missionary Dominican Province of the Holy Rosary, whose sons faithfully continued the Thomistic intellectual tradition both in Spain and in the Philippines.<sup>15</sup>

As previously mentioned, the formation house in Ocaña was established in 1830 to prepare friars for the mission in the Far East. Prior to this, missionaries and professors were recruited by enlisting volunteers from different convents in Spain. Thus, for three centuries, the Dominican missionaries who went to the Philippines were trained in various Spanish universities. It is important to note that the friars endeavored to approximate the quality of intellectual formation in Spain to that of the colonies as far as the circumstances allowed. This is because many Dominicans who started their formation in Spain were sent to the missions even before the completion of their academic training. Young Spanish friars who arrived in the Philippines eventually received ordination after completing their formation in the University of Santo Tomas.

In Ocaña, initial formation began with the secondary education or the *colegiatura*, where boys were prepared for entry into the Dominican Order with courses in the Humanities such as religion, Latin, Spanish grammar, history, and mathematics. This training lasted for an indefinite number of years until the student was seen fit to proceed to the novitiate, that is, a one-year probation where the novice needed to be acquainted with the theories and practices of the religious life. This included lectures on Spirituality, church history, the Bible, Gregorian chant, and the history and constitutions of the Order. At the end of the novitiate, the candidate formally embraces the Order by an act of profession of the vows, thus signaling the beginning of the *studentate*. Normally taking seven years, the *studentate* formation

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<sup>15</sup> The University of Santo Tomas in Manila was established in 1611 by Archbishop Miguel de Benavides from the Province of the Holy Rosary. It had been under the direct jurisdiction of the Master of the Order for a number of years after the foundation of the Dominican Province of the Philippines in 1971, until it was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Philippine Province in the last decade. Although the university was first established in 1611 to be a training ground for future priests, it has developed throughout the centuries to become an educational institution not only with 3 faculties for ecclesiastical studies, but also 18 civil faculties, colleges, and institutes, 3 high schools, and 1 teaching hospital. To date, it offers 101 degree offerings in the undergraduate level, 72 degree offerings in the graduate and post-graduate levels, and 9 degree programs in the ecclesiastical faculties, for a student body of 41,000, of which around 371 come from outside the country (Cf. [www.ust.edu.ph](http://www.ust.edu.ph)).

was intended to cover the required ecclesiastical studies, namely, three years in philosophy, and four years of training in Theology and Canon Law.<sup>16</sup>

In the Philippines, however, there was no secondary education until the educational reform of 1865. Thus, students were able to enroll in the Faculty of Philosophy only after taking courses in Latinity, which included Grammar, Rhetoric, and Poetry. The manner of promotion was not according to the completion of year levels, but as the professor deemed each candidate as eligible.<sup>17</sup> This did not matter much for the arriving Spanish student friars, who normally proceeded to Theology, having earlier received their philosophical training in Ocaña. Since the curricular courses offered in Manila were synchronized with those of the College of Ocaña, there was facility in the transition for these students who were sent to the Philippines even before completing their training in Spain.<sup>18</sup> For instance, the textbooks prescribed in Ocaña, which were those written by authors considered most faithful to Aristotelico-Thomistic thought, were the same textbooks used by the Dominican missionaries in Manila. *Philosophia Thomistica* by Antoine Goudin was prescribed for Philosophy, until it was replaced by *Institutiones Philosophiae* by Felix Amat. On the other hand, the official textbook for theological training, which consisted of courses in scholastic (dogmatic) theology and moral theology, was always the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas, which was available in various European editions in the library of UST. Furthermore, commentators of Aquinas were likewise studied by the students as supplementary sources.<sup>19</sup> Such synchronicity of the philosophical and theological training in Manila with that of Ocaña represented the intention of the Dominican friars to maintain the Thomistic tradition not only in the peninsula, but also in the colony. It is this fidelity to the continued transmission of the teachings of St. Thomas that contributed not only to the survival of the movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but also to its eventual revival in the same century.

<sup>16</sup> Among the courses in Philosophy were Logic, Psychology, Metaphysics, Criteriology, Theodicy, Cosmology, History of philosophy, Natural History, Chemistry, and Physics. The three years of philosophical training were classified into the *año de Lógica*, *año de Metafísica*, and *año de Física*, all of which correspond to the categories of students as *lógicos*, *metafísicos* and *físicos* respectively. In the Theology courses, the subjects taught included Dogmatic and Moral Theology, Canon Law, Church History, and Sacred Eloquence. It was in the studentate that the *corista* received the sacred orders leading to the priesthood: acolyte, exorcist, reader, porter, sub-deacon, deacon, and priest (cf. Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 50).

<sup>17</sup> The degree of Bachelor of Philosophy was attained by completing courses in Logic, Physics, and Metaphysics (which likewise included Ethics), as well as the graduation examinations (cf. Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 25).

<sup>18</sup> cf. Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 50-51.

<sup>19</sup> Fr. Francisco Larraga, a Dominican moralist of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, was the author of *Pontuario de Teología Moral*, the prescribed textbook for moral theology. Like in Philosophy, students who complete the courses in theology receive the degree of Bachelor in Sacred Theology, which qualified them to pursue licentiate or doctorate degree in Theology, or to enroll in Canon Law (cf. Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 26 & 50).

## From Alvarado to Gonzalez

### *The Place of UST in Aid of Thomism*

With the incessant challenges, scholasticism in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, coming from pervasive rationalistic ideas, experienced a dramatic decline. A wave of anti-Catholic literature in all its forms swept against the Church, its institutions, the Roman Pontiff, and the religious Orders. Villarroel observed that during these years, Thomistic philosophers who championed the revival of Scholasticism turned from speculative philosophy to the practical arena of Apologetics.

### *Los Dos Filósofos Rancieros: Alvarado's Impact in the Philippines*

The most prominent apologist of that period in Spain was Fr. Francisco Alvarado, who was pejoratively referred to as the Rancid Philosopher for his ardent support of sacred traditional Philosophy against rationalist thinkers and writers. He devoted his remaining years to oppose the liberal ideas dominating the Cortes of Cadiz and, from 1810 to 1813, wrote his main ideas in his *Cartas Críticas* under his adopted pen name *Filósofo Rancio*, which pleased both himself and his critics and sworn enemies. These he accomplished while in self-exile to Portugal in order to avoid persecution by the French in Seville. In his resolve to refute the ideals of Cadiz, however, Alvarado was weighed down not only with financial difficulties, but also with the general lack of freedom to have his work published. A year before his death in 1814, receiving only disdain and indifference in Spain, his letters and his cause were instead to find welcome in Manila, and eventually created a significant impact to the University of Santo Tomas and the Philippines.<sup>20</sup>

It is worth noting that, as Villarroel claimed in his work, the impact of Alvarado's *Cartas Críticas* on the Philippines was missed by historians, both in Spain and in the Philippines. Even at that time of turmoil in Spain, when communications between the colony and the peninsula were few and far between, the Dominicans in the Philippines managed to follow the events with concern. Thus, when Alvarado's letters reached the country in 1813 aboard the frigate "Rey Fernando," it immediately awakened enormous interest from the ecclesiastical sectors of Manila.

In a resolution by the Provincial Council of the Dominicans in the Philippines, monetary remuneration was sent to Alvarado from the combined contributions of the Province, Colegio de San Juan de Letran, and the University of Santo Tomas. Furthermore, the Dominicans proceeded to publish Alvarado's *Cartas Críticas* in the UST press, and ensured distribution to its numerous subscribers although it was not

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<sup>20</sup> cf. Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 34-35.

put on sale. Alvarado's letters appeared individually and periodically on Sundays and were distributed among the subscribers: friars and religious communities; members of the colonial government and the military; ordinary citizens; and members of the secular clergy, including academics and ranking officials of ecclesiastical hierarchy.<sup>21</sup>

As expected, among the main promoters of Alvarado's *Cartas Críticas* were the professors of UST. Worth noting among these was Fr. Carlos Arbea who taught Philosophy, Theology, and Canon Law for 20 years, and authored several doctrinal writings that defended scholastic philosophy against the liberal ideas of Europe that by then had arrived in the Philippines.<sup>22</sup> These political, philosophical, and religious trends that brought about massive changes in Spain were eventually felt in the university, especially in the field of doctrine and philosophy. In 1820, the constitutional monarchy in the Philippines was declared by an edict, thus leading to a similar battle as that in Spain between the liberal thinkers and the Catholic apologists.<sup>23</sup> The professors of UST took an active part in these debates, with Arbea at the forefront of producing several apologetic works even as early as 1814.<sup>24</sup> Villarroel surmised that it was on account of these rather modest but significant writings, more apologetic than philosophical,<sup>25</sup> that Fr. Carlos Arbea was nicknamed by some historians as *El Filósofo Rancio de Filipinas*.

### *El Filósofo Óptimo: Gonzalez's Impact To The World*

Further influences from the Peninsula that were implemented in the Philippines included the educational reforms that later transformed UST from a school of ecclesiastical and juridical studies into an institution with more course offerings on the sciences and other secular disciplines.<sup>26</sup> When Ceferino Gonzalez

<sup>21</sup> cf. Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 36-37.

<sup>22</sup> Like Ceferino Gonzalez, he finished his ecclesiastical studies in the Philippines, where he arrived in 1790. Arbea likewise served in administrative capacities: Regent of Studies; Prior of the convent of Santo Domingo; Prior Provincial; and Rector of the university for six years (cf. Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 31).

<sup>23</sup> The edict was declared by the Acting Governor General Mariano Fernandez Folgueras on 9 September 1820. The liberal thinkers published the *Ramillete Patriótico* and the *La Filantropía*, which were respectively countered by periodicals *Latigazo* and *Noticioso Filipino*, respectively (cf. Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 38).

<sup>24</sup> Mariano Velasco, a Dominican biographer, attributed to Fr. Arbea several works of apologetic character written between 1814 and 1823 (cf. Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 31).

<sup>25</sup> To this I would add that his style of counteracting the arguments somehow mirrored how Alvarado disputed the liberal thinkers of his time.

<sup>26</sup> On 4 May 1832, A royal decree addressed the Governor General and the Archbishop of Manila to conduct visitation of UST in line with the reforms that were to be introduced, a move that was met with suspicion by the Dominicans and ecclesiastical hierarchy in the Philippines, due to the prevailing anticlerical sentiments in Spain during that time. Though the visitation did not push through, the university began its curricular reforms. Another royal decree was addressed on 8 September 1842 to the new Governor of the Philippines to work on expanding the educational programs of UST so that the

arrived in Manila in 1849 at the tender age of 18, he was a simple acolyte and already had three years of philosophical training from the formation house in Ocaña.<sup>27</sup> It would be difficult to describe anything about his study habits or his aptitude for teaching because there were no extant records about them. Nevertheless, we could speculate the brilliance that he must have shown in intellectual formation early on, since he was already alternating his ecclesiastical studies with teaching Humanities at the University.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, many historians described him as a self-taught man, notwithstanding the fact that he had brilliant professors in the university who introduced him to the philosophy of St. Thomas.<sup>29</sup>

It was at the young age of 31 when he produced his first and best philosophical work, the *Estudios sobre la Filosofía de Santo Tomás*. This work, which was printed in three volumes in the Philippines, soon reached Spain and even other countries in Europe, where it was welcomed as a significant contribution to the revival of Thomism.<sup>30</sup> In this first and most important work, realizing how many philosophers and theologians of his time had unwittingly contributed to an inaccurate presentation of Aquinas, he endeavored to bring out the authentic spirit and main principles of the doctrine of St. Thomas. Furthermore, he exposed the defects of the philosophical trends that dominated the intellectual circles in Europe. This he carried out by carefully studying these trends and comparing their method with that of St. Thomas in solving the great problems of science. Rather than rejecting the many volumes written by the major philosophers of the Enlightenment, he devoted much effort in studying them

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university could be up to par with the educational institutions in Europe (cf. Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 41-44).

<sup>27</sup> Gonzalez took the habit of the Order in the convent of Sto. Domingo de Ocaña on November 28, 1844. On April 9, 1848 he renewed his profession, which was done invalidly on February 13, 1846 due to lack of age [cf. Hilario Ocio and Eladio Neira, *Misioneros Dominicos en el Extremo Oriente 1587-1835* (Manila: Orientalia Dominicana, 2000), 63].

<sup>28</sup> Gonzalez was appointed to teach on 23 May 1851. He was promoted lector of philosophy on 12 June 1853, and was ordained to the priesthood in January 1854. Shortly afterwards, he passed the examination for confession, and was then confirmed as professor of philosophy. In 1855, he became vice-rector of the university (cf. Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 63).

<sup>29</sup> Gonzalez confessed in his *Estudios* that he quoted the authors he knew from direct reading. Although perhaps lacking in many modern books at that time, the library of the University of Santo Tomas had a collection unrivalled both in quantity and quality by any of its kind in the Philippines. Furthermore, while Villarroel affirmed that none of Gonzalez's professors in Ocaña and Manila was notable by any standards of fame in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it could be observed that there was a vigorous philosophical and theological atmosphere that permeated the university with the arrival of young and outstanding Dominicans who helped immensely in cultivating Gonzalez's love for philosophy and the sacred sciences (cf. Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 65).

<sup>30</sup> Other notable works of Gonzalez include the *Philosophia Elementaria* in 1868, the *Filosofia Elemental* in 1873, and the *Historia de la Filosofía* in 1878, all of which were published in Spain. *Philosophia Elementaria*, a comprehensive Latin textbook in Philosophy, was written in Manila and was used not only in UST but also in many seminaries in Spain and Europe, as well as in houses of studies of the Dominican Order (cf. Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 63).

to prove that the truths taught by Aquinas remained valid. By taking time to study the thoughts opposed to Catholic doctrines and values, Gonzalez represented an approach that showed more understanding and a stronger desire to dialogue, unlike the earlier Catholic apologists of the century who rejected liberalism outrightly.<sup>31</sup>

## Conclusion

Recalling the three aspects that guided this presentation, I now conclude by once more affirming how the groundwork for the revival of Thomism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was laid by *times* endured and confronted, by *thought* preserved and promoted, and by *thinkers* learned and inspired, and particularly how the University of Santo Tomas contributed to letting this process unfold.

**Times endured and confronted.** Villarroel claimed that, though the religious persecutions continued in Spain even after the signing of the concordat between the Holy See and the Spanish government in 1851, the dark period of intense trials produced a Spanish church that is “purified, renovated, more vigorous, and evangelical.”<sup>32</sup> For the local church in the Philippines during that period, this, therefore, meant the arrival of Dominican friars, such as Ceferino Gonzalez, who were not only competent, but also fully committed to their missionary vocation and ready to devote their whole lives for the evangelization of the islands. Thankfully, that dedication was to resonate not only to the islands in the East, but to the whole world as well.

**Thought preserved and promoted.** At that moment in the history of the church, when the teachings of St. Thomas found considerable adversaries from opposing thoughts that dominated Europe, it was as if they were seeds that the farmer in the Gospel parable sowed: some fell along the path; some fell on rocky ground, where there was not much soil; and some fell among thorns, which later on choked them. Perhaps it was by Divine providence that the seeds of Thomism likewise found fertile ground in the Far East, where the doctrines of the Angelic Doctor were to reach maturation in the minds of Dominican friars, most especially of Ceferino Gonzalez, whom Villarroel dubbed as the greatest philosopher produced by the University of Santo Tomas.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, even if Gonzalez was not directly involved with the drafting of the encyclical, he was certainly one of the strong voices of Thomism in a time of silencing, enough to contribute for the crop to yield a hundredfold. UST could not be happier in celebrating this gift, especially for having been part of that story of revival, no matter how little that part may be perceived.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> cf. Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 62-64.

<sup>32</sup> cf. Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 4.

<sup>33</sup> cf. Villarroel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 533.

<sup>34</sup> Following its publication, the encyclical was received in Manila with great rejoicing, with

**Thinkers, learned and inspired.** The Catholic philosopher Marcelino Menendez y Pelayo had only the highest esteem for Gonzalez, whom he described as one with “a philosophical mind far superior to all other scholastic philosophers.”<sup>35</sup> As for Gonzalez’s *Estudios sobre la Filosofía de Santo Tomás*, Pelayo similarly declared it as “the best of the modern expositions of the scholastic philosophy”<sup>36</sup> that he had ever read.

A philosophy student from the UST Central Seminary, who in the time of Ceferino Gonzalez would be the equivalent of the *colegiales*, affirmed a counter question to this conference’s title: *What can Asia do to Aquinas?* He wondered how Asia can enrich and broaden our perspectives on the love of God for all nations. May the times continue to challenge today’s thinkers. May today’s thinkers continue to grow in the understanding of the thought of St. Thomas. May the thought of St. Thomas continue to be “the defense and beauty of the Catholic faith, for the good of society, and for the advantage of all the sciences.”<sup>37</sup> **PS**

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grand celebrations organized in the University of Santo Tomas under the direction of its Rector, Fr. Joaquin Fonseca, who had just returned a year earlier from Spain, and was himself a staunch defender of the encyclical and of Thomism. Fonseca was another defender of Thomism from UST who, after serving as Rector of UST, was sent to Spain in 1882, and there took upon himself the task of debating against Marcelino Menendez y Pelayo in defense of the just published encyclical *Aeterni Patris*. Though Pelayo was a Catholic and even an admirer of Aquinas, he believed that Thomism should be open to contributions from other Spanish cultural and intellectual traditions as well. He claimed that Catholicity implied being open to all philosophical schools of thought, which would, therefore, include not only that of the Thomistic, Franciscan, or Jesuit, but also of the Enlightenment. Fonseca, on the other hand, believed that Thomism was the only *philosophia perennis*, and demanded that Pelayo rectify the latter’s erroneous statements that distorted the doctrines of St. Thomas. Their debate ended only when both parties called off their verbal dispute (cf. Villaruel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 57).

<sup>35</sup> cf. Villaruel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 65.

<sup>36</sup> cf. Villaruel, *Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines*, 65.

<sup>37</sup> *Aeterni Patris*, 31.