

Fr. Jesús Merino Antolínez, O.P.
(1911-2001): Pilgrim of Love.
Profile of a XXth Century Missionary.

ANGEL APARICIO ABAD, O.P.

Fr. Jesús Merino Antolínez, O.P. died in Manila at 5.40 a.m. on December 18, 2001. He was 90 years old. He had been confined in the University of Santo Tomas Hospital for one week, though he had already been bed-ridden for about six months, during which he received communion daily but he no longer celebrated the Holy Mass. For the last couple of years he had been in and out of the hospital. When out, he would join the community for lunch, and the Spanish members of the community for recreation, though he no longer shared in the conversation. Only when directly asked would he respond with very short words or with monosyllables. Strange? For a man who had all his life been teaching and sharing his knowledge with others this attitude may seem strange. Though some are of the opinion that Fr. Jesús had been like that all his life. His extrovertness and his multiple activities were only a veil to cover his complex personality. Perhaps. Man is a mystery, and "Jesus" (as we fondly referred to him) was a mysterious person, he never revealed his intimacy to his brethren. Or at least not in the manner in which some would expect him to do. Can such a rich personality be revealed in just a few strokes? The pages that I am writing will try to follow the different stages of the long journey of a man fully dedicated to the service of God and neighbor as a missionary.

I will start with the last words that he wrote, dated June 3 of 1998. By the way, Fr. Jesús Merino had acquired the habit of signing and dating all his writings.

"It is more than eighty years ago and I keep this reminiscence. The procession that started from the church of Our Lady of Bethlehem with the venerated image descended towards the church of Saint Andrew of my hometown, Carrion. I was a little child and my mother carried me in her arms. She kissed me, pointed to the image and told me, "Look at her." I did so and under a golden crown I saw a pair of the most sweet shining eyes smiling at me. "Send her a kiss," – my mother insisted. I remember it very well – I brought my little hand to my mouth and sent her my heart.

Thousands upon thousands of times along my life have I repeated that first gesture of my infancy, for the brightness of the eyes of the Virgin of Bethlehem has filled me with sweetness all the moments of my life.

In a book whose title will be MARIA, VIDA Y VIVIR I intended to tell what I saw and what I knew of the Mother of Bethlehem. But ... I fell sick and the written pages (six hundred and seventy five already typewritten, plus the notes for as many other pages) fell to the voracity of the white ants, which in our Philippines we call 'anay' ...

Here I am, beloved reader, trying to resuscitate and to watch with you, the brightness in the gaze of the Mother of Bethlehem.

(The translation is mine)

Fortunately what he thought to have been eaten by the 'anay' was only a forgetfulness of old age or, perhaps, another trait of his complex personality. For a casual reader these last words of Fr. Jesús may seem a literary device and consequently devoid of meaning. However, there is a factor in his life that may help us to shed light on his personality. Nobody among us knew that Jesus was a motherly orphan at age six, and fatherless at age thirteen. This explains a lot of things. According to psychology a child who becomes orphan at an early age needs to build up an inner sanctuary to protect his intimate life. Fr. Jesús Merino never had a real mother to confide his little secrets to. He made Mary the Mother of Jesus his mother. To her he confided all his life.

In 1987 he was invited to the centennial celebration of the Ecole Biblique taking place in Jerusalem and in Toulouse. Upon his return to the Philippines he was affected by one of his recurrent

depressions. As a consequence he would not talk about the festive celebrations which he had been looking forward to with much expectation. Instead he kept complaining angrily about the convent of Toulouse designed by the famous French architect Le Corbusier. It is difficult to discern the true motivation for this irritation. He blamed it on the smallness of the rooms, the malorientation of the windows allowing outsiders to peep into them and other such inconveniences not present in traditional convents. At the time, we thought that all these reactions revealed some lack of attention on the part of the organizers of the centennial to someone who considered himself an outstanding alumnus of the great masters of Ecole Biblique. Perhaps the wound was deeper. A poem composed at this time and signed at Lourdes goes thus:

¡Madre mía, estoy aquí!

Tú, que sabes de cariños,
Porque amaste al mismo Dios;

Tú, que sabes de ternuras,
Porque el mismo Dios te amó;

Mírame con esos ojos,
Que son luces de esperanza,
Que son prendas de bonanza,
Que son vida del amor.

¡Madre mía, estoy aquí!

Mira lo hondo de mi ser,
Que en el alma llevo amores;

Tengo dudas y temores,

Tengo penas y llorar.

De esos besos que tu sabes

Colocarnos en la entraña,

De tu luz que no se empaña,
Dame, Madre, los primores.

¡Madre mía, estoy aquí!

Quiero, Madre, en los tus brazos

Reposando descansar;

Quiero, Madre, batallar,

Alentado por tu amor;

Quiero, Madre, que me guíes,

Que me ayudes y sostengas;

Quiero, Madre, yo que vengas

A esperarme al fallecer.

¡Madre mía, estoy aquí;

Virgen Madre, junto a ti!

(Lourdes, 18 de Junio, 1987)

Mary? Mother? Woman? Lover? It is difficult to discern between sublimation and the projection of our own inadequacies. We do not understand our own personalities. It is said that behind any great man there is usually an inspiring woman. A feminine companion who aids him not only in his heroic endeavors but who even

channels his human affections and colors his life. The gospels speak of Mary Magdalene. In our own times, the great American mystic Thomas Merton seems to have been deeply influenced by his nurse. I hope that browsing over the writings of Fr. Jesús Merino will help us to see into and understand the deeper mystery of our own lives. Yes, we have his typewritten life of Mary, and many other writings that could help us trace the spiritual and psychological portrait of a great Dominican who dedicated his whole life to the service of God and his fellow human beings as a missionary in the Orient.

Fr. Jesús was born on July 2, 1911 in Carrión de los Condes, in the province of Palencia, Spain, to Eugenio Merino Ignacio, a widower in second marriage to Eusebia Antolínez Liqueste. His grandparents were, on the father's side, Práxedes Merino Álvarez and Victoriana Ignacio Muñoz, and on the mother's side, Sebastián Antolínez Caballero and Paula Liqueste Rodríguez. He was the eldest in three sons, followed by Gerardo and Restituto. His father was a shoe mender and night watchman. His mother was a housewife.

Jesús was baptized seven days after his birth, in the parish of San Andrés Apóstol of Carrión, and the confirmation took place at the age of seven, in the parish of Santa María del Camino, also in Carrión. His godmother was his aunt María Antolínez.

He attended primary school in one of the public schools at the Municipal Hospital, and at age eight he was taken into the Jesuit school of San Antonio, as one of the outstanding students. Here he was recruited by the Dominican missionary of Tonkin, Fr. Francisco Romón Zorita, who brought him to the Apostolic School (Minor Seminary of the Dominicans of the Holy Rosary Province) in La Mejorada, Valladolid, where he finished his first studies and prepared for the study of philosophy. He was accepted into the novitiate in Avila on September 9, 1926, and made his first religious profession in the hands of the prior of the convent, Fr. Alberto Blat, on September 10, 1927, at the age of 21, being Master of the Order Fr. Buenaventura García Paredes.

After finishing his studies in philosophy he was sent, together with his classmates, to the convent of Rosary Ville, Louisiana, U.S.A. Here he made his solemn profession as a Dominican in July 3, 1932

and then studied theology, 1931–1935. At the end of his theological studies he was ordained priest, on August 10, 1935.

In 1935 he was assigned to the convent of Santo Domingo, Manila. He received the Lectorate in the University of Santo Tomas, February 22, 1936. That same year, because of his inclination for the Sacred Scriptures, he was sent to the Ecole Biblique et Archeologique Francaise in Jerusalem for special studies in Sacred Scriptures, 1936–1939. After finishing his studies he took the exam for the degree of *Prolyta Sacrae Scripturae* at the Pontifical Biblical Commission in Rome, June 1, 1939, and then he was assigned to the Studium Generale of the Province in Hong Kong, where he started his teaching profession. We will describe all these stages in the formation of Fr. Jesús in another chapter, but before closing we must still mention his Licentiate in Theology in March 1954, and his Doctorate in Theology in March 1956, both obtained at the University of Santo Tomas, Manila.

Carrión de los Condes (1911–1922)

It is difficult for us to assess up to what extent Fr. Jesús was marked by his hometown. Carrión is a small sleepy town in the heart of “Tierra de Campos,” with more history than present, situated on a hill over the river that takes its name from it. There are a few famous names associated with this town, already from the Middle Ages, such as the cruel “Infantes” who flogged the daughters of the “Cid,” the hero of Spanish legend, as reported in the “Cantar del Mio Cid.” Here were born the famous Jewish poet Rabi Don Sem-Tob (c.1370), in a vibrant Jewish community, and the equally famous Iñigo López de Mendoza, Marquess of Santillana (1398), and the archbishop Miguel de Benavides, O.P., founder of the University of Santo Tomás of Manila. Carrión was an important station in the famous “Camino de Santiago” as can be testified by one of its numerous churches dedicated to the Apostle Saint James.

We have little information about Fr. Jesús’ early years. He seldom spoke about his family. In the dedicatory inscription of a book entitled “Dios Mío. Mis Apuntes sobre la Historia de las Religiones” he writes:

Mother, I treasure this remembrance in my soul. You fidgeted about kneeling in front of the fireplace and I was reading a book sitting on top of it. The last rays of light of the winter setting sun in Castile gave your long hair a golden brilliancy, and the flames of the fireplace reddened your cheeks. I gazed at you with tenderness, closed the book, and asked you for an explanation: 'Mother, what is heaven?' I noticed that your eyes flashed while your words were framing an answer. 'Son, heaven is a great palace, made of sweet and marzipan, where trees made of candy produce fruits and bonbons, and have leaves of pancake and syrup and flowers of buttercake. There are rivers of milk and sugary ... and look, there go all the children who are good.'

'O mother! – I cut her short – then heaven will not last long. There are so many little mouths ...'

Suddenly you stood up, embraced me, and kissed me in rapture. What did you see, holy woman? Your word molded my soul. 'Jesús' – you said – 'heaven never ends. Its sweetness is a sweetness of the innermost side of our being. The more you taste it the greater it becomes. Heaven belongs to all and it sweetens the life of all people.'

I believed what you told me and this has kept me wondering. Later on when still in my infancy death deprived me first of your presence and life brought its labors and sufferings, fatigue and sorrow, I understood what was meant by the sweetness of the heart that you were talking about.

Now, when I observe how humanity searches for the sweetness of life in the inscrutable expectations of heaven I hear in my heart the echo of your words, "... sweetness of the soul ... the more you taste of it the greater it becomes ... it belongs to all." And I see the whole of humanity reaching for the happiness of finding God, the Father of the sweetness that never ends.

I learned demythologization at your side, in the warmth of your kisses. Mother, whatever understanding of the sincerity of man in his search for God may be found in these pages belongs to you. It is a sparkle of your looks and the fire of your kisses, when you engraved in my heart the idea of heaven.

Receive this gift.

(Signed, Jesús Ma. Merino Antolínez, O.P. Manila June 24, 1982)

Occasionally, in his light moments, he would mention “la tía María” (aunt Mary), and his grandmother. Among his letters I have found a few from the early years in La Mejorada. One by his grandmother is moving,

Carrión de los Condes, 23 de Noviembre de 1924
SDR. Jesús Merino. La Mejorada

Dear Grand Child: I have received your loving letter that has given me much consolation getting to know about you and seeing that you have not forgotten me, and that shows once more the deeply rooted love that you have for me, for which I thank you and ask God Our Lord that He blesses you from heaven.

I am writing this letter through a person whom I totally trust to tell you, my beloved child, with tears in my eyes and with a broken heart that I am bedridden more than fifteen days already with a grave illness, having already received the Holy Sacraments through Viaticum and the Extreme Unction.

My days are counted; perhaps this will be the last letter you will receive from your beloved grandmother. I lack strength, each day it seems to me that my life is spent. Therefore, beloved child, pray for me to God so that He will bring me soon to heaven to accompany your good and beloved mother, and from there we will intercede for you and your little brothers.

Be good, my son! Try to study assiduously and be faithful and obedient to your superiors so that you will be well loved by them as well as by your companions. When Divine Providence will decide that you receive the Holy Habit of the Dominican Order, live up to the expectations of that uniform that will become preordination of the salvation of your soul.

I say good-bye to you, perhaps for the last time. May God bless you and give you the necessary graces to be a good religious and to persevere in the vocation you have chosen until death.

Good-bye, beloved child. Receive my blessing together with that of God Our Lord.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

God-bye. Good-bye. Until we see each other again in heaven.

Your Grandmother who carries you in her heart and who sends you one million kisses and embraces.

(Signed) Paula Liquete

Regards from your father and many kisses from your little brothers.

The impact of this letter upon a child of thirteen who had already lost his mother cannot be disregarded. I personally think Fr. Jesús was marked all his life by its impact. Just a few days after the death of his grandmother his father also died.

He also frequently mentioned "la tia María." Actually he had two aunts with the name María. Sr. María Ignacio was a nun in the convent of the Poor Clares, in Carrión. Jesús kept several of her letters in which she would remind him of his religious duties. But I think that he was referring to another aunt, his godmother, María Liquete, the one who took care of him and of his brothers after the death of his mother. She became blind, and she was present to him all his life, associated with his mother. In a poem written at the age of seventy-seven, entitled "Ella!" he writes,

Desde mi Madrina y mi Madre ...

Sol mañanero
Resbala en dedines de nácar
Que acarician flores...
¡Hermanita!

Cabecita, que escuchando el acorde
Se inclina para oír...
Cascada de cabellos negros
Hasta el corazón...
¡Cariño!

Ojos claros, que miran, se cierran...
Y tornan a mirar...
Terciopelos del alma azules y rojos
Jades en flor...
¡Novia!

Se quedan los velos blancos
Y las flores de azahar...
Firme y enhiesta, inmaculada
Dulce rubor...
¡Esposa!

Labios, que besan capullos...
Manos, que restañan penas...
Pechos, que apagan sollozos...
Ojos, que alivian...
¡Reina!

Alma muy dentro del alma,
Luz que consume...
Estrella, sol y luna
Con que el alma vive...
¡Madre!

Corona de níveos cabellos,
 Ojos viviendo recuerdos,
 Labios que tiemblan besando,
 Corazón sin olvidos...
 ¡Viejecita!

¡Gracias a Dios!...
 ¡Aquí y en el cielo!...
 ¡Para siempre!...

(signed) *Jesús Merino Antolínez, O.P.*

14 May 1989

*St. Joseph Seminary –Dunwoody-
 Yonkers- N.Y*

Sol, que el ocaso abrillanta
 Y dora nubes y flores...
 Eso eres tú para mí...
 ¡Tú, y tú sola!

His uncle, Juan Salas Merino, the parish priest of Calzada de los Molinos, near Carrión, became for him a figure to imitate. He dedicated to him the commentary to the Book of Psalms (that he started and never finished). He writes of him in these terms:

“He was a Castilian parish priest, noble and distinguished as a king, open and plain as the fields of his homeland, without ambitions, without meanness, devoted totally and sincerely to his ministry of salvation and to God, loved and respected by his parishioners, by his colleagues and by his bishops. His person filled the church as well as the surroundings of this small place with his frank cheerfulness. When in his eighties I saw him advancing along the road among the trees it seemed to me like one of the old knights ... Yes, a knight of Jesus Christ. How many Don Angels in the world! I wish there were more still! I write thinking of them.”

La Mejorada (1922-1926)

Fr. Jesús entered the Apostolic School of La Mejorada (Valladolid) in 1922 at the age of eleven. This was the minor seminary of the Province of the Most Holy Rosary at that time, recently established following the latest instructions of the Holy See and of the Order (see Fr. Alberto Santamaría, O.P., “El Plantel de Nuestros Misioneros,” in *Misiones Dominicanas*, 4, 1918, pp.1-5; Fr. R. Casado, O.P., “El Colegio del Santísimo Rosario de la Mejorada,” in *Misiones Dominicanas*, 4, 1918, pp. 43-45, 71-75, 107-110).

This is how he remembered it in 1932, at the age of twenty-one. He was in the train bringing him and his companions from Madrid to Santander to board the boat for the USA.

"Leaving Medina del Campo we arrived at Pozaldez and our eyes searched in the horizon any small light that would point to us the place of La Mejorada, the school one thousand times blessed where we received our formation for the religious and intellectual life! Sweet memories fell upon our minds in that moment! The little chapel, the hall of study, the cattle-path, the gardens, the river, the pine-grove and a thousand incidents linked to all those places; the companions of our school days, the Fathers who educated us in the first years of our youth. All had a place in our heart, and for all we had a farewell, a summary of our love and gratitude.

Oh Mejorada! How many happy days have we spent within your precincts! Countless dreams and ideals have germinated hearing your maternal words! Now, when we bid you the last adieu, our lips, our hearts barely can articulate anything more than good-bye; good-bye mother; god-bye, perhaps forever..."

(Hacia las Misiones de Oriente)

The school of La Mejorada was patterned, in the academics, after the secondary education of the schools of that time, and in character formation it followed the strictest internship programs focused on the religious and humanistic ideals.

The child was admitted at twelve after consultation with the parents and the parish priest, and having taken an entrance examination.

This was the curriculum:

- First Year:* Spanish Grammar, Latin Grammar, General Geography, Arithmetic, and Geometry.
- Second Year:* Spanish Grammar, Latin Grammar, Spanish Geography, and Arithmetic
- Third Year:* Latin Grammar, Spanish History, Literature, Introduction to Rhetoric and Poetry.
- Fourth Year:* Latin Grammar, General History, Algebra, Trigonometry, and Greek.

Besides these they were also taught Physical Education, Catechism, Morals, Music and Courtesy on Thursdays and Sundays.

This was the schedule of a regular day:

6.00 a.m.	Wake up and personal toilet
6.30 a.m.	Mass
7.00 a.m.	Breakfast
7.15 a.m.	Study period
8.00 a.m.	First class
9.00 a.m.	Physical education and recreation
9.30 a.m.	Study
10.30 a.m.	Second class
11.30 a.m.	Cleaning
12.00 a.m.	Lunch
12.30 p.m.	Recreation
2.00 p.m.	Study
3.00 p.m.	Third class
4.00 p.m.	Snacks and recreation
5.00 p.m.	Rosary
5.30 p.m.	Study
6.30 p.m.	Fourth class
7.30 p.m.	Study
8.30 p.m.	Supper
9.00 p.m.	Recreation
9.30-10.00 p.m.	Bed

The School Year started September 14, and final examinations took place in the first half of July. There were no classes on Sundays and festive days.

Vacation periods were:

December 23 to January 2 (Christmas)
 From Holy Tuesday to Wednesday of Easter
 Three days during Pentecost
 March 7 and January 28

During summer vacation they took up their hobbies or learned some special skills. They were not allowed to vacation with their families.

Special attention was given to their religious and spiritual formation by inculcating the following observations:

Daily Mass, Rosary and Meditation
 Weekly confession
 Praying of the Office of the Blessed Mother Mary on
 Sundays
 Solemn celebration of feasts
 Annual recollection of eight days
 Personal participation in one of the pious associations
 Monastic observance of silence indoors
 Listening to reading during meals
 Constantly being accompanied by one of the Priest in
 charge
 Instruction on Dominican traditions

To modern readers this may seem a too Spartan or rigorous training, but the children grew healthily and when later they remembered those days, all spoke with affection and gratitude. This is how Fr. Jesús Merino would speak about those days,

“I dedicate this to the memory of my professors in La Mejorada:

To P. Casado who read to us the Bible.

To P. Santonja who directed the setting of Christmas and painted the drop curtain for our drama presentations.

To P. Amado who sung carols for us.

To P. Jenaro who disciplined us in the study of Latin

To PP. Matellán, Vergés, Ayuela, Garay, Moreno, Saladich...

All of them gave us the perfume of a fresh and honest faith... Some even testified to it later with martyrdom. They did not ask for praises, but I and my readers owe them this homage of a remembrance.”

(This was written December 16, 1970 in the dedication of his intended commentary to the Gospel according to Saint Luke).

Avila, Novitiate (1926-1927)

After those four years they were admitted to the Novitiate of the Convent of Santo Tomás in Avila. His other aunt, Sor María Ignacio, wrote to him on this most memorable occasion. Through this letter we learn that Jesús had adopted the protection of Saint

Thomas by adding to his name “Fr. Jesús Merino de Sto. Tomás de Aquino.” He always referred to Saint Thomas Aquinas with the familiar “Fray Tomás” to whom he had a great devotion all his life. He tried to identify with him. This is how he remembered his own novitiate, as described in a discourse that he pronounced in one of the literary activities that young Dominicans had in Hong Kong at the time when he became the Regent of studies of the Studium Generale established by the province of the Holy Rosary there. You substitute Fr. Tomás for Fr. Jesús and you see the young Dominican in 1926.

The First Day of a Dominican Novice in the XIII Century

With the first beams of sunrise Fr. Tomás heard the sound of the bell calling to Prima (Prime: Midmorning Prayers of the Catholic Liturgy of the Hours). Yesterday he was clothed with the habit and today he was filled with the first feelings of a satisfied desire and of curiosity. He gently left his book and proceeded towards the choir expanding the vision of his soul and the sensitiveness of his heart to extract contentment from his new life. Would the image of the Crucified fill his soul with the heavenly beauty that had left a sacred mark in his heart one time when he sensed Him very close... looking at him very close?

During the celebration of the Holy Mass Fr. Tomas observed how the ministers approached several times the presider's chair because there were few friars and some of them had been called to hear confessions...

The following hours Fr. Tomás noticed the imposing silence reigning in the convent. He passed through the hall of study and saw immersed in their studies most of the members of the community. When a little later he heard the sound of the bell he followed the Friars to the classroom where he admired the first lesson of the master addressing the whole community and even some lay visitors. It called his attention to how all, starting with the Prior, listened to the arguments. He started dreaming how he could emulate that young friar. But the Novice Master brought him back to reality with the lesson for the day, “Nullus conventus instituatur sine Priore et Doctore. Cum Ordo noster specialiter ob praedicationem et animarum salutem ab initio noscatur institutum fuisse studium nostrum ad hoc debet principaliter intendere ut proximorum

animabus possimus utiles esse." This reminded him of Jesus teaching his disciples, explaining the parables and the mysteries of God during the Last Supper.

At noontime he entered the refectory still savoring the words of "Sexta" (Midday Prayer). He was surprised to see the morning mass celebrant climb the pulpit and start preaching in a formal manner. How could this people simultaneously take food for the body and food for the soul? Well, this seemed the most natural thing for them. After the meal he noticed how they would comment on the incidents of the sermon and even make jokes about it... This was good training for future preachers. He felt inspired to get this opportunity.

Late in the afternoon he accompanied the Novice Master to the garden. But after a while he was left alone with the brother gardener who enumerated to him all the important people from the city who used to visit the Father Master. The Brother explained that he was happy just taking care of his vegetables without being disturbed by visitors...

In the evening the novices were assembled to listen to a Father who came from the university or from the missions ... His soul was aflame by these stories of brilliant lessons or by the exploits of the missionaries.

The day would end with the singing of the Compline (Night Prayer). How sweet those melodies! The sound of the *Salve Regina* made him shiver. At the words "eja ergo" he fell on his knees and uttered an oath of eternal fidelity to the Lady of his thoughts. On coming out of the choir he noticed that the evening star shone with a light he had never seen before.

At midnight he was awakened by the bell calling to Matins and he heard the strong voice reciting "Ave Maria Gratia Plena Dominus Tecum." After the Matins he observed the *Capitulo de Culpis* where the friars made public confession of their faults. It surprised him when attention was called to the librarian who had delayed a call to hear confessions because he wanted to close the library first. "The Friar Preacher's function is to support not the walls of his convent but the walls of the church like the founder Dominic."

Fr. Tomás had things clear from the first day of his novitiate: Like the Lord the friar-preacher will go through the world searching for souls for God in words and in action.

Like the Lord the friar-preacher will divide his time between preaching to the people and teaching future preachers.

Like the Lord the friar-preacher will dedicate his day to the apostolic life, and his night to prayer.

Like the Lord the friar-preacher will go through the world trusting in God's Providence and in the kindness of his friends, in order to be free from earthly interests.

Like the Lord the friar-preacher will equally relate with the great or with the small, to become the friend and redeemer of all.

Like the Lord the friar-preacher will overflow with a warm sweet light of truth, love and life.

Like the Lord the friar-preacher will have always in front of his eyes the cross.

Like the Lord upon earth thus shall the friar-preacher live.

When he opened his eyes next morning he saw upon a very blue portion of the skies a shining star with the colors of the rainbow but very white.

Then he remembered the star of his father Saint Dominic... He thought that he also carried a star... The star of truth... The white morning star, forerunner of the rising sun.

*Read in the session of February 21, 1946
Convento de San Alberto Magno,
Rosaryhill, 43 Stubbs Road
Hongkong*

This is how Fr. Jesús remembered his own novitiate. Perhaps it is clothed with religious fervor and romantic enthusiasm. Nevertheless one could already discern the major ideas that guided his life: love for the solemnity of the liturgy, spirituality founded on the liturgical prayer, admiration for the life of the apostolate, the life of study and teaching, observance of the traditions of the order, devotion to the blessed Virgin.

Avila, Philosophy (1927-1931)

After the Novitiate Fr. Jesus made his profession as a Dominican and started his studies in Philosophy. First he would finish his fifth year of High School that served as introduction to it. He wrote his first personal work entitled *Apuntes de Historia Natural* which was "an integration of the text of Fr. Canuto [his professor] and my own reflections."

Everything went on normally during these years. There are five short essays that he had preserved from this period. They are signed "Fr. Jesús Ma. Merino Antolínez." "Ma." stands for María, indicating already his devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary:

El Amor del Sacrificio, 31, Mayo, 1928

El Sagrado Corazón de Jesús y España, 30, Mayo, 1929

Acción Social de San Vicente Ferrer, 4, Abril, 1930

El Apologista Católico, Disertación del Fin de Curso, 1930-31

Legalidad de la Iglesia, Con Motivo de la Fiesta de Santo Tomás, 16. II. 1931

We have also found three poems of this period that may reveal a little of his soul:

The first, *Primicias* (First-fruits) speaks about love, the second *Desilusión* (Disappointment) speaks about a lost love that may be his mother, or an idealized lover. And the third, *En el Camposanto de Avila* (In the Cemetery of Avila); perhaps this is a veiled allusion to his dead mother and grandmother. His younger brother Gerardo, who entered La Mejorada three years after him, had to abandon his studies due to a serious illness, of which he would die a couple of years later.

PRIMICIAS

Oh, qué pura es, Madre mía,
La flor bella del amor,
Si su jardín es tu pecho,
Si tu mirada es su sol.

Conoces, dulce María,
Conoces lo que amo yo.
Danos la luz de tus ojos,
Y abrigo en tu corazón.

Signed Fr. Jesús Ma. Merino Antolínez, O.P.
Avila, 1927

DESILUSION

De gratos ensueños pletórica el alma,
 Ansiando mi lira en tu santo pulsar,
 Busqué del poeta la lúcida palma,
 La musa canora, que en plácida calma
 Pusiera en mis labios su alegre cantar.

Gozoso, alegre la busqué en la aurora,
 Que sus áureos rizos comenzó a esparcir,
 Y creí "mi lira cantará sonora"
 Mas, ¡Ah! ¡Ilusión! Llorar a aquella vi
 En bellas perlas de fugaz lucir
 Su ala encogió mi frente soñadora
 Sentíme frío y dije, "no hay aquí."

La busqué en el sol ardiente,
 Que su cenit recorría
 Y solemne se movía
 Como rey solo y potente.
 Soñó también mi mente,
 Y creí que os decía
 La tierna melodía
 De amor canto ferviente.
 Mas ¡Ah! Que cuando ardía
 Con más calor mi frente
 Una nube parda y fría
 Ocultóme al sol naciente
 Y ahuyentó mi poesía.
 Con tiernos hechizos
 De tarde calmada
 Pensé la ahuyentada
 Poesía volver.
 Mas ¡Ah! Cuando en rizos
 De grana bordada
 Su frente rosada
 Comienza a esconder.
 Vi a las rosas
 Que ya ajadas

Y embriagadas
 De calor
 Caen medrosas
 Deshojadas
 Por el sol.
 Mi lira
 Ya no halla
 Su luz.
 Suspira
 Y acalla
 Su rudo
 Mudo
 Son.
 Ayer fanal de amores
 Y bellas ilusiones
 Busqué en dulces canciones
 Mi tierno amor cantar.
 Hoy cerco de dolores
 Perdidas tengo aquellas
 Y pido a las estrellas
 Me presten su llorar
 Y triste
 Me quedo,
 Diciendo
 No puedo,
 Tu santo
 Cantar.
 Os ofrezco este llanto,
 Cual resto perdido
 De suave canto,
 Y sentido,
 Que leve
 Breve
 Ya
 Se fue.

Signed Fr.J.Ma.M. de Sto. Tomás
Avila 14, IV, 1928

EN EL CAMPOSANTO DE AVILA

Yerta y fría ciudad, tierra de olvido,	¡Aquí los aires hablan, y el silencio!
Mansión techada de fúnebre ciprés,	¡Aquí gimen blandones, y el ambiente!
Que al viento lanza con mortal angustia	Aquí quedó, para que tú leyeras...
La voz de su murmullo en lánguido vaivén.	Mortal que pasas, por favor, detente...
¡Cuántos seres queridos en el seno	No ha muerto, no, quien en fingida calma
Encierras de tus tumbas mudo y triste!	La paz disfruta de la tumba fría
¡Cuánta ilusión, bajo la losa fría,	Muertos son... los que tienen muerta el alma
Que tus sepulcros de blancura viste!	¡Y viven todavía!
¡Cómo viven en ti los que murieron!	El alma del ser justo siempre vive
¡Cómo mueren en ti los que están vivos!	Aunque no vaya de su cuerpo en pos.
¡Cómo calla la flor en tus macetas!	La tuya es feliz, porque percibe
¡Cómo canta la piedra en tu recinto!	¡La gloria de su Dios!
Para el romero de la tumba aquella,	Tú no te has muerto, no, y en cruda guerra
Para las flores que arrancó la brisa	Batallamos nosotros sin consuelo.
Talló el duro cincel el blanco mármol	Mientras muertos estamos en la tierra
La imagen del amor en agonía:	¡Tú vives en el cielo!
Doliente virgen con los ojos fijos	Adiós, fría ciudad, tierra de olvido,
La frente inclina para ver la huesa,	¡Tu voz resonará por siempre en mí!
Una gota le tiembla en la mejilla	Que en una tumba, cual las tumbas tuyas,
Mientras sus brazos una cruz estrechan.	¡Velado por la cruz quiero morir!
¡Cómo luce la cruz en las mansiones	
Del luto, del dolor, de la esperanza!	<i>Signed Fr. Jesús Ma. Merino Antolinez, O.P.</i>
La cruz del panteón, la de la fosa...	<i>Ávila, 2 de Noviembre de 1928</i>
¡La nueva, la vieja, la rota, la olvidada... ¡	

Rosaryville (USA), Theology (1931-1935)

On June 16, 1931, Fr. Jesús, aged 21, together with another thirteen young Dominicans, left the Convent of Santo Tomás de Avila "filled with memories," for the United States. He describes in detail this memorable journey by boat in an article he published in

Misiones Dominicanas, entitled *Hacia las Misiones de Oriente*. At the end of this account he states:

This convent of Rosary Ville will be for us during the last three days of our studies what La Mejorada and Avila had been, plus another stage away from home between the motherland and the missions of the Far East. (Misiones Dominicanas, 1931, pp. 302-304; 336-337; 8-10)

Let us describe now this new stage in the formation of Fr. Jesús. Perhaps we can start from an article of an outsider who describes the life of Fr. Jesús and his companions in this new place entitled *Life in Rosary Ville*.

The 'Colegio' of Rosary Ville, located in the parish of Tangipahoa, Louisiana, is surrounded on all sides by pine trees and strawberry fields. It expands through 600 acres with forests of pine trees and cypresses, oak trees and magnolia that contribute to its isolation. There are only a few and scattered neighbors.

It communicates with New Orleans, 85 kilometers away, through the Natalbany River that crosses the Lake Pontchartrain. A small vapor for the transportation of logs from the neighboring mills commutes twice a week bringing at the same time all the goods needed in the small places where it anchors. It lays ca. 8 kilometers from the railway Illinois Central in Ponchatoula.

These are the two doors that link Rosary Ville to the outside world except on occasion when the road is unsurpassable and the vapor non operational. Actually the road has two conditions, one in which the mud makes it almost impossible to travel, and the other when the dust makes it unbearable.

But the post arrives everyday, which allows us to break the barrier set up by nature and that allows us to reach beyond the seas.

This would be an ideal place were it not for the marshes breeding mosquitoes and malaria. Though the young students enjoy good health, they are sometimes prevented from venturing outside due to dangers of the marshlands...

Here the young students who prepare themselves for the missions of the orient find very similar conditions to what awaits them in China, Japan, Formosa and Tonkin. At times solitude is as solid as the darkness of Egypt, though they are so busy with their studies and prayer life that they have little time left to think of other matters.

From 4.30 a.m. to 10.30 p.m. they alternate study and choir, interrupted only by short breaks for recreation, meals and noon siesta. It seems as if they have discovered perpetual motion, such is the utilization of their time. On good days this routine is bearable, but there are some cold days when the fields of martyrdom seem preferable to this desolated area. Fortunately these are few....

Once or twice per year this monotony is broken by a holiday. 'We go to the world' (*Vamos al siglo*), they shout as soon as they cross the walls of the Colegio. And these entertaining and long sought after holidays are no better than a pilgrimage—so I call them—and no less laborious. But these young students enjoy them, if only for the change it means in their customary lives.

After the morning prayer and the Mass and the meditation they take a healthy breakfast (something also very rare), then they put aside their monks habit and dress like civilians. This change in clothes operates a transformation such as if they were marching towards the land of the rising sun. The pilgrimage lasts 12 kilometers or even further to a place where they wait for 'Gascon'.

Gascon is part of the institution: he is the coachman, farmer, gardener, messenger. A man of all trades who in his own view, holds the most important position in that place. His vehicle, a luxurious coach, is an old and dishonorable carriage covered by a canvas, pulled by two horses, or two mules when the road is less negotiable, and it serves for all purposes: it brings the lunch of the 'coristas', it carries the laundry of the monastery, food for animals and friars, visitors, etc.

I have entertained myself in its description because Gascon and his carriage are the most relevant figures of the Colegio in the eyes of the neighborhood.

Perhaps this will be changed in the future, though the word "change" seems to be excluded since time immemorial from the monastic vocabulary. Old customs and old habits are as

firm as the constitutions of the Order. Lacordaire says that the monks are like the oak trees that seem to challenge time and moods.

Besides these holidays there are no other vacations, though they call it vacation when they do not study the Summa or other solid subjects. Vacation is dedicated to the study of foreign languages, such as English or French, music, literature, etc., and to practice their sermons.

‘Always busy and always joyful and happy, one can say that these young people have found the secret of life. Thus when some people would think that they live like in a prison or reformatory they do not understand the moving spirit, the love of sacrifice, and the desire to please their divine master. Joyfully they depart to the exile in the East as others go on holiday or tourism in the same direction. Their only ambition is to go to the lands of martyrdom where their elder brothers preceded them or to places of deprivation where missionaries used to go before. I cannot find words of praise for such devotion...

When one poses to observe this group of young souls, clothed with the white habit, absorbed by their studies, devotedly praying, playing in their recreation, ... the words of Scripture come to mind, ‘As lambs brought to slaughter and not opening their mouths.’ And this is precisely how one would view them from the distance ...

(J. Malone, O. P., Rosaryville, May of 1920)

Could we get a closer view of these young Dominicans? In one speech written and read on the occasion of the installation of the new “Maestro de Coristas” in Rosary Ville, Fr. Tomás Martínez, Fr. Jesús disclosed some of his thoughts at this time. He spoke about expectations, ‘a young spirit, undaunted by the difficulties, generous to the point of sacrifice, dreaming of future glories.’ But he also said, ‘it is not enough to dream. We dream because we are young, but most of the time we mistake the dream for the reality. We are bound to conclude that the bulk in the horizon is a pedestal ready for us to climb, but when we are close to it we may realize it is just a shrub.’ The address ends with an appeal to the new young educator to guide them in their formation as missionaries. (*Rosaryville*, 22, IX, 1932)

In another address to the members of the Academia entitled *Doctor y Maestro* he recalled the promise to go to the Ultramarine missions that he and his companions together made with the solemn profession to the religious life as Dominicans. Then he talked about those who did not go to the missions but had become professors in the University of Santo Tomas of Manila or in other schools of the Province. For him the "Doctor Misionero" ought to be an apologist of the Catholic faith following the example set in the *Summa contra Gentiles* of St. Thomas Aquinas, written to help the missionaries. And he ended his speech with a call to both missionaries in the schools and missionaries in the field to share their experiences for the glory of God,

"We are the army of God. Some will be fighting in the front lines, others in the reserve. But one is our effort, one is our fight, one is our motto: to bring to the whole world the kingdom of God. One is our flag: the redemptive cross. One is our King: Christ Jesus."

Perhaps at this time he had been already assigned to continue further studies and he was giving an explanation of the ongoing conflict in his own soul between the missionary vocation proper to the Holy Rosary Province, and the reality of many members of the Province who never did go to the missions.

I have also found two poems pertaining to this period. They let us peep into the exalted spirit of devotion and expectation of the young Fr. Jesús preparing for the priesthood and for his future 'missionary' activity in the Orient.

MESIAS

Rompiste ya los cielos y bajaste,
Divino Salvador; ya descendiste
Al abismo sin luz de nuestra nada
Y al luciente fulgor de tu mirada
Las sombras del error se disiparon;
Y las lirás proféticas callaron;
Y las ansias del pueblo que esperando
Cruzó de la Historia las edades

Llamándote en cantares su Mesías,
Anhelando tu luz y tus bondades,
Pensando en Tí los días
Penosos del combate y del destierro,
Pidiendo, Rey augusto, que rompieras
El duro y torpe hierro
Que arrastraba sin gloria y abatido,
Cesaron superadas.

Que vencido

De solo tu amor bajaste al suelo
Trayéndonos tesoros de consuelo,
De luces y de amor inesperados.

Veíate Israel en sus transportes
Llevando triunfador a tus soldados
Victoriosos por tierras y por mares,
Domando los imperios y poderes,
Dictando al mundo leyes
E inundando a Salem con tus tesoros;
Y al ritmo de los cánticos sagrados
Inmolar, Sacerdote, tus ofrendas,
Inmensas hecatombes do brillaran
Tu gloria, tus riquezas, tus victorias;
Y al llegar las columnas que se alzarán
Del templo de Sión hacia la altura,
Al trono de Jahwéh de allí tornaran
En benéfica lluvia de raudales
De paz de bienestar y de venturas.

Mas Tú naciste pobre y abatido
Sin regia majestad, ni humana gloria;
Y en el grácil mirar de un tierno infante
La majestad eterna convertiste;
Y el inmenso poder que centelleando
Hizo temblar del Sinaí las cumbres
Trocaste en dulce sonreír de niño.
Una cueva es tu templo y tu palacio;
Un pesebre es tu trono y es tu altar;
Tus joyas las estrellas del espacio;
Y tu manto es un cándido pañal;
Tu dosel, el azul del firmamento;
Tus guardias, una vaca y un jumento;
Y el frío, el desamparo y el olvido,
Templados por dos pobres artesanos,
Te son, Oh Rey divino, cortesanos
En el mundo cruel en que has nacido.

Mas no pueden fallar las profecías
Del santo de Israel.
Tú eres Rey, Sacerdote, Tú Mesías.
Jahwéh lo ha dicho, y así es.

El hombre, que inundado de oscureces
Yacía sin amparo ni solaz,
Oyó el canto de gloria en las alturas,
Y vio en la tierra la estrella de la paz.
Al eco sin igual de tus palabras
Surgieron por doquiera tus legiones
Sojuzgaron los pueblos y naciones;
Los mundos se postraron ante Tí.
Los hierros del esclavo se rompieron;
Los dioses del gentil se disiparon;
Las lágrimas del triste se enjugaron;
Y en el dulce reposo de tu pecho
Hallamos un asilo y un amor.
Eterno Sacerdote sin mancilla
Tu mismo te inmolaste en redención
Y la lluvia divina de tu sangre
Lavó a la humanidad, e hizo brotaran
Martirios y ternuras por doquier.

Sacerdote de las viejas profecías,
Rey Mesías de los hombres redentor,
Este mundo azorado en que vivimos
Parece desertar de tus banderas
Batallar renegando de tu luz.
Tenle amor, que es insensato
Y está yerto; y solo anhela
La sombra redentora de tu Cruz.

(Fr. Jesús Ma. Merino Antolínez, O.P.
Rosaryville, January 1, 1933)

¿POR QUÉ?

¿Por qué la rosa de tan corta vida,
Que ayer nació y a de morir mañana,
Tendrá nuevo color, un nuevo aroma,
Un nuevo encanto que despliega ufana
A cada aurora que al salir la besa,
A cada gota que al caer la baña,
A cada brisa que al volar la mece
A cada instante que sobre ella pasa?

¿Será que acaso sin pensar ni amores
Se diera cuenta de tener un alma,
Que vestida de luces y colores,
Brindando aromas, regocijo y gracias,
Va cumpliendo con calma su destino,
Y se siente feliz?

*(Fr. Jesús Ma. Merino Antolínez, O.P.
Rosaryville 18. VIII. 34)*

Certainly these years were for intense theological study in the most traditional and serious way of the Dominican Order. Fr. Jesús has preserved his scholastic exercises:

The first year his 'dissertatio' under the professor of Moral Theology, Fr. Pedro Lumbreras, O.P., entitled "De Systematibus Probabilitatis" Rosaryville, 1932.

The second year his 'dissertatio' under professor Fr. Antonio Fernández, O.P., entitled, "De Animae Humanae Immortalitate secundum Fidem et Rationem seu Criticus Commentarius in Articulos II et VI Quest. LXXV, P. I, Summae Theologiae Sti. Thomae" Rosaryville, 5a. Maii, Anni 1933.

The third year his 'dissertatio' under professor Fr. Antonio Fernández, replaced later by Fr. Tomás Martínez, O.P., entitled "De Conceptione Immaculata Btae. Mrae. V." Rosaryville, 3 Martii, 1934.

This same year he did another 'Dissertatio Exegetica' under professor Fr. Narciso M. Domínguez, O.P., entitled "De Regno Messianico in Oraculis Isaiae" Rosaryville 10-V-34.

He finished his 'Dissertatio pro Lectoratu Suscipiendo' in Rosaryville also, in 1935, though he defended it in the University of Santo Tomas in Manila, in 1936. The title is "De Divina Inspiratione S. Scripturae."

This is the summary of his thesis:

DOCTRINA A NOBIS EXPOSITA:

Inspirationis Biblicae, cujus existentiam probavimus dogma esse fidei, sicut et ejus possibilitas, (Art. 1), rationem essendi, seu finem statuimus: Ecclesiam providere de doctrina salutis divinitus scripto consignata mediante agiographo (2), finis quidem non absolute neccesarius, sed ex libera Dei voluntate et misericordia pendens, qua ecclesiam dotare voluit doctrina divina scripto consignata (2), convenientissime tamen.

Hoc principio innixi, statuimus Inspirationem Biblicam esse motionem Dei tanquam agentis principalis, agiographi vero tanquam agentis instrumentalis rationalis et liberi, et veram habentis rationem doctoris ecclesiae supernaturalis (3); motio quidem intellectuallis, seu ad cognitionem pertinens (4), in agiographo causans cognitionem prophetica eorum omnium quae Deus vult scripto tradere ecclesiae, eorumque expressio (5), et consistens essentialiter in immissione divini luminis prophetici, qui aliquando potest adjungi divina speciarum intelligibilium immissio (6). Actus autem cognoscitivus in quo inspiratio perficitur et lumen divinum manifestatis veritatem divinam inspiratorum set judicium speculativum ultimum de veritatem rerum, judicium ultimum practicum de convenientia et modo tradendi doctrinam, et judicia ultima varia quae in expressione a ratione dirgente et signa aptante perficiuntur (7). Objectum hujus judicii, proinde et luminis divini et Inspirationis, sunt omnes res in S. Scriptura contentae, non exclusis scopum libri, genere litterario etc., immo nec ipsa verba quibus sensus divinus exprimitur, quae judicantur secundum quod dicunt relationem signi ad doctrinam salutis prout ab agiographo et per ipsum a Deo intenditur tradi (8 et 9). Unde Inspirationem Biblicam definivimus: "Supernaturalis [et charismaticis] spiritus Sancti motio intellectus agiographi per immissionem divini luminis, qua agiographus cognoscit et [accedenti charismatica et infallibili motore voluntatis] et scripto docet Ecclesiam veritatem divinam illarum rerum quas Deus vult." Hanc Inspirationem, specificè unam, multiplicem in gradibus diximus haberi secundum quod excellentia veritatis tradendae postulare. (10)

Sed praeter essentialia quae ennumeravimus, aliquandam requiruntur ad hoc ut de facto habeatur doctrina scripto consignata, quae quidem quasi profluunt ex ipsa natura Inspirationis, efficax, nempe, motio voluntatis agiographi per gratiam actualem, (11) et motio facultatum corporearum ejus ex refluencia divini luminis et divinas gratias, voluntatem moventis (12), et etiam quando inspiratio agiographi non poterat dirigere opus notarii, siquando adhibebatur, hujus etiam facultatum motio divina (13).

Quasdam etiam conditiones se circumstantias Inspirationis statuimus, videlicet, quod Inspiratio sit quantum ad ea quae sunt de perfectione Inspirationis mediantibus angelis (14); quod in agiographo absolute loquendo nulla requiratur dispositio inspiratione praevia, Deum tamen aliquando et ex fine sit libere preposito determinatis dispositionibus agiographis uti (15); quod Inspiratio sit aliquid quod non habet esse fixum in agiographo, seu quod est quid transiens et a voluntate divina omnino pendens et actione continuata (16); denique quod necessario debet esse quid concomitans redactionem libri, sed quod habetur dum agiographus scribit (17).

Effectus Inspirationis Biblicae diximus esse: agiographo cognitionem, sed non omnimodam sive divinam sive humanam, rerum edoctarum, secundum quod opus erat pro scopo attigendo (18); a quarum tamen cognitione quilibet error vi ipsius inspirationis excluderetur (19). In ipsa autem S. Scriptura Inspirationem causare diximus: et omnimodam veritatem in his quae ibi docentur et affirmantur (21); et pluralitatem sensuum, literalis nempe et triplicis spiritualis (20); et auctoritatem praeter humanam divinam (22); et denique sufficientiam, non simpliciter perfectam, sed utique in suo ordine doctrinae divinae scripto traditae, et exponendae per Ecclesiae Magisterium (23).

Criterium denique et viam dignoscendi existentiam Inspirationis determinavimus non esse ipsam, nec etiam pro agiographo, ordinarie et necessario (24), sed divina revelatio proposita per auctoritatem publicam in Ecclesia, illa scilicet quam Apostoli et Prophetae munere habent, quorum propterea testimonium de Inspiratione alicujus Libri, sive expressum sive tacitum, vel implicitum, est ultimum et definitivum criterium pro Ecclesia, cujus vicissim definitio est criterium pro Fidelibus (25).

**UTRAQUE DOCTRINAM ITA CONJungere POSSUMUS
INSPIRATIONEM BIBLICAM EXPONENTES:** Supernaturali

ipse Deus virtute ita agiographos excitavit et movit ad doctrinam salutis scribendam in Ecclesiae utilitatem, et ita scribentibus illis adstitit, ut omnia quae Ipse juberet, et recte mente conciperent lumine prophetico eorum intellectu illustrato, et gratia efficaci divinitus eorum voluntate mota fideliter conscribere velint, et refluentia luminis et gratiae divinae, necnon, ubi opus fuerit angelis adjuvantibus, aptis signis et verbis infallibili veritate exprimerant. Ex quo factum est ut quod dictum agiographorum esset a Deo auctore, quoad omnia, seu quod Deus est auctor vere et proprie S. Scripturae universae, et proinde quod in ea nihil admodum a Veritate alienum invenire posse; sed e contra illam fecunditate prorsus divina gaudere, et constituere perfectissimum thesaurum divinae revelationis scriptum, secundum regulas a magisterio vivo et divino Ecclesiae emanatas interpretandum, et cujus extensio, id est quantitas librorum inspiratorum, definiri et determinari oportet ab Ecclesia quae depositum Traditionis servat et exponit.

HAEC EST IGITUR NOSTRO JUDITIO VERA NATURA INSPIRATIONIS BIBLICAE, quae misericors Deus homines excitavit et movit ad veritates salutiferas Ecclesiae suae tradendas in scriptis, quibus per Ecclesiae ipsius magisterium propositis et explicatis homines consequi possent Dei haereditatem, quam Sanguine suo nobis meruit et acquisivit.

SALVATOR NOSTER, TOTIUS REVELATIONIS CENTRUM, ET SACRAE SCRIPTURAE FINIS DOMINUS NOSTER JESU CHRISTUS, OMNIA LAUS ET GLORIA IN SOECULA SOECULORUM, AMEN.

The theology of inspiration has evolved so much since that time. But already Fr. Jesús was showing insights that after Vatican II have become common doctrine.

We have an evaluation of this school exercise by the same Fr. Jesus written some fifty five years later which he used as an introduction to his manuscript:

We speak of God the Author [of Scriptures] in the same manner in which we speak of God Creator and Redeemer.

We begin the knowledge of God, origin and end of all the blessings that we human beings have, through one of his works from which we could benefit most if we properly understood it, the Sacred Scriptures.

Many years ago, in my youth, when in the Catholic schools of theology the interest was on Biblical Inspiration, I wrote on this topic the thesis required for the Lectorate in the Dominican Order. Following the strict scholastic method, I analyzed the theological phenomenon in detail and in principle.

Today, after long reflection and after weighing changes and different points of view, my exercise, which I still believe to be solid and sound in doctrine, looks like a table of dissection on which a researcher has placed separated one from the other the different parts or organs of a plant, animal or human body.

As a human being is not only the ensembling of a nervous, digestive, vascular and skeletal structure, but the life that those elements possess integrated and animated in a concrete living being, thus the biblical inspiration is more than the assembling of different elements of divine and human communication.

If the problem of biblical inspiration remains still obscure it is largely due, I think, to the fact that the living element continues to be sidestepped. Divine inspiration of Scriptures is neither a quality of the books of scripture themselves nor a divine impulse received by the human writer. It is a living action of God that gives supernatural life to the individual chosen as his instrument.

This concept of the living action in God and living action in man called Divine Inspiration is the subject of my discussion. Because I honestly believe that the confusion and disputes originate from the fact of considering it as a "theological phenomenon," and neglecting the fact that it really is an act of God giving life to the individual whom he raises to the task of being a divine writer. (*Manila, June 27 1990*).

We have several articles written during the years he spent at Rosaryville. I will cite them chronologically:

1. *Lo que esperamos.*

En la Instalación del P. Tomás García como Maestro de Novicios en Rosaryville. Rosaryville 22.IX.1932

2. *El Acto y la Potencia en la Doctrina de Santo Tomás*. Discurso para el Certamen que organizó la Academia de Santo Tomás, de Rosaryville, para honrar a su Santo Patrono. Rosaryville 16. II. 1932. Signed Fr. Tomás Daniel, O.P.
3. *Doctor y Misionero*
Rosaryville 17. I. 1933
4. *La Fe y la Ciencia según Santo Tomás*
Rosaryville 15. II. 1933
5. *Nuestro Programa*
Jesús Ma. Merino, O.P., Director
6. *Nuestra Primera Palabra*
Para el Primer Número de 'Ensayos' Revista Privada de Nuestros Coristas en Rosaryville. Publicado el 25 Noviembre, 1933
7. *Sesión del tres de Noviembre*
8. *Alocuciones: Nuestro Espíritu*
9. *El Misionero en el Concepto de NSJC*
Leído en la solemne sesión misional de la Academia de Sto. Tomás.
Rosaryville 12. XII. 1933. JMM, O.P.
10. *La Inspiración Verbal de la Sagrada Escritura*
11 de Abril de 1934. Fiesta de San León Magno
11. *Inspiración Bíblica e 'Historia Primitiva'*
Leído en la Academia de Sto. Tomás de Rosaryville. 13. XII. 1934
12. *El Misionero según N.S. Jesucristo*
Rosaryville 25 de Julio, 1935. Fr. Jesús Ma. Merino, O.P.

When he finished his theological studies he was ordained priest on August 10, 1935.

His understanding of his priesthood can better be summarized from the choice of the text for the 'estampita' printed on this occasion and used also for his Golden Anniversary, "Hoc sacramento est tantae dignitatis quod non conficitur nisi IN PERSONA CHRISTI" (*Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 82, art. 1).

Manila (1935-1936)

After the ordination he and his coordinandi (thirteen young priests) crossed the United States from Florida to San Francisco by train and there they boarded the 'President Jefferson' heading towards Manila where they arrived on September 24, 1935. They were assigned to the old convent of Santo Domingo in "Intramuros." Fr. Jesús presented his defense for the Lectorate and prepared himself for further studies in Sacred Scriptures in the Holy Land.

He wrote a description of the feast of the Rosary for the magazine *Santísimo Rosario*, entitled "Las Fiestas del Rosario en Manila". Signed, Manila 15, October, 1935.

Jerusalem, Ecole Biblique (1936-1939)

Fr. Jesús arrived in Jerusalem on October 3, 1936, and was met at the train station by then Director of the École, Fr. Raphael Savignac, O.P., who introduced him to the other six Dominican professors of the already famous school.

The first Catholic school specializing exclusively in biblical studies was founded almost half a century before by the famous Dominican scholar Fr. Marie-Joseph Lagrange. It was also the first modern academic institution to be established in Jerusalem. It is now known as the École Biblique et Archeologique Francaise. When it was opened on November 1890 it was called the École Pratique d'Études Bibliques.

"The qualification "Practical School" highlighted what made it different from the great universities of Europe and the Americas. It was situated in the Land in which the Bible was written, and thus it could offer more than good libraries and well-qualified teachers. Climate and geography had not changed since biblical times. Many place-names remained the same. The terrain was strewn with ruins, which could be identified. The student hardly needed to reflect in order to absorb the most important lessons concerning the environment of the Bible. What elsewhere took a tremendous imaginative effort, in the Holy Land came as naturally as breathing. One was part of the same scene. One could shop where Abraham traded, and make the observations on which Jesus based his parables." (Jerome Murphy O'Connor, O.P., *The École Biblique and the New*

Testament: A Century of Scholarship (1890-1990), Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz, 1990).

During this time the number of students did not exceed ten: three Dominicans living in the School, two intern non-Dominicans, and three or four living outside the School.

This was the curriculum followed by Fr. Jesús:

School Year 1936-1937

Greek	(Fr. Pierre Benoit)
Hebrew	(Fr. Bernhard Couroyer)
Exegesis of the OT:	
Genesis, Pentateuch	(Fr. Luis Dumeste)
Exegesis of the NT: Mark	(Fr. Perre Benoit)
Introduction to the NT	(Fr. Pierre Benoit)
Theology of the NT: Baptism	(Fr. Pierre Benoit)
Archeology	(Fr. Hughes Vincent)
Topography of Jerusalem	(Fr. Felix M. Abel)
Geography and History of the Holy Land: the cities of Judah	(Fr. Felix M. Abel)
Biblical History: From the Patriarchs to the Judges	(Fr. Roland De Vaux)

School Year 1937-1938

Geography of the Holy Land:	
Palestine from the XV cent. B.C. to the Roman occupation)	(Abel)
Special Introduction to the OT:	
The Historical books	(Dumeste)
Special Introduction to the NT:	
The Pastoral Letters, The Catholic Letters, Apocalypse	(Benoit)
Semitic Epigraphy: Hebrew, Samaritan and Phoenician Inscriptions	(Fr. Raphael Savignac)
Biblical History: From the Judges to Solomon	(De Vaux)
General Introduction to the OT:	
The Massoretic Text	(Dumeste)
Archeology: Hebrew Familiar Institutions	(De Vaux)

Topography of Jerusalem	(Vincent)
Exegesis of the OT:	
The Books of Samuel	(Dumeste)
Exegesis of the NT:	
The Letter to the Romans	(Benoit)
Asyro-Babylonian	(De Vaux-Vincent)
Syriac	(Savignac)
Greek of the NT	(Benoit)

School Year 1938-1939

Semitic Epigraphy: Ancient Aramaic	
Inscriptions	(Savignac)
General Introduction to the NT:	
Formgeschichtliche Methode	(Benoit)
Exegesis of the NT: The Passion and	
Resurrection of our Lord in the	
Fourth Gospel	(Benoit)
Biblical History: The Monarchy	(De Vaux)
Archeology: Military and Civil	
Institutions	(De Vaux-Vincent)

Besides the regular curriculum Fr. Jesús attended all the field trips organized by the School during the three years that he studied there:

1. To the territory of Samson: November 10, 1936
2. Jaffa: December 10, 1936
3. Bet Hanina: December 17, 1936
4. Djerash and the Jordan Valley: December 27-31, 1936
5. To the Desert of Cades: March 2-5, 1937
6. To the Desert of Negueb, 1937
7. To Galilee, 1937
8. Syria: March 29 – April 11, 1937
9. Cyprus, 1937
10. Sinai and Transjordan: April 19–May 3, 1938
11. Egypt: June 30 – July 17, 1938
13. Turkey: August, 1938

He meticulously followed the instructions of his mentors of taking personal notes of all their observations. He drew illustrations of temples, altars, dresses, etc. I have selected one of his descriptions

chosen from his journey to the desert of Qades, just after visiting the famous oasis Ain Qades:

When at five in the morning I climbed a mound of ruins a white line marked the contour of the horizon between the sky starting to look blue and the penumbra almost black of the earth. As light increased, the colors started to blend from the most delicate rose of the subtle mist that in no other place as here a poet could call 'the veil of the daybreak'. Four rays cast their light into the space cloaking the morning star that presided over the scene. As the clarity appeared they gathered behind the veil that was turning more rose, until they vanished, the veil broke down and the magnificent smiling disk rose majestically between the blue sky and the infinite horizon of the desert.

Was it, perhaps in the sterile and overheated sands of the desert where the myth of the Chariot of the Sun was born?

Obviously here Fr. Jesús had in mind Ps.19: 1-6, which praises God whose 'glory' (radiance) is displayed in the heavens. This seems to be an old song where the singer affirms that the phenomenon of the heavens, especially the sun is constantly proclaiming the glory of El in a great anthem of praise inaudible to human ears. In these verses man's elemental response to nature, as expressed in the myths of the ancient world, is reinterpreted in the light of the faith in the God who is not a power of nature but is the Creator who transcends nature. The light which suffuses the universe is more than the radiance of the sun: it is the 'glory' of deity, the shining light which both reveals and hides God's being.

Fr. Jesús remained grateful and loyal all his life to the spirit imbued in him by his professors at the École. He always had reverent words for his beloved Pere Abel, Abuna Mansur, Le Pere Savignac, etc. This is how he concludes a note on the occasion of the death of Fr. Roland De Vaux,

We feel sad writing only a note and not a book because the more one thinks about him the more merits one discovers in the life of P. De Vaux. He was the friend and companion of his own disciples, the enthusiastic and selfless collaborator of all who worked with him, whether acknowledged professors or lowly beginners, the humble supporter of all who needed him. He settled only for the truth that he laboriously searched.

Human honors accumulated in his person ... but P. De Vaux continued working restlessly and without ambitions, grateful for the recognitions and invariably searching and spreading the truth. (*Studium*, Vol. XI, 1971, pp. 319-322)

Rome, 1939

Finished his studies in Jerusalem, he left the Holy Land for Rome via Beyrouth, Izmir, Istanbul, with the purpose of taking the examination of the Pontifical Biblical Commission.

He arrived in Rome on May 5, 1939, and took his examination on May 24-26 and June 1.

On June 4 he went to Santa Sabina where exiled King Alfonso XIII had been invited for a lunch.

This is the testimony of his examination attached to the papal blessing:

Gradum Licentiae in Re Biblica apud eandem Commissionem obtinuerunt, examinibus diebus 24 et 26 Maii et 1 Junii feliciter superatis RR. PP. Chrisostumus Larcher, O.P. (Prov. Lugdunensis), Jesús Maria Merino, O.P. (Prov. Hispanensis Insularum Philippinarum), Henricus de Bienaïssis du Couleison, O.P. (Prov. Tolosana), Richardus Thomas Murphy, O.P. (Prov. Sti. Joseph Foed. Am.); duo priores candidati digni habiti sunt 'mentione'

Bendigo sus Estudios.

(Audiencia pasada con el Sr.D.Fr. Juan Casado, O.P., el P. Mariano M., y el P. Francisco Romón. June 5, 1939. His Holiness Pope Pius XII).

This Roman visit was memorable to Fr. Jesús and he would often recall this audience with the Pope and his greeting of the King of Spain, despite the ironic comments of his Dominican brothers.

Spain, 1939

On July 10, 1939 he returned to Spain after a long absence of ten years. This return coincided with the end of the Spanish civil war. July 18 was declared "Día de la Victoria."

The three months spent in a Spain coming out of a terrible civil war, understood by the victors as a new crusade, left a profound mark in the spirit of Fr. Jesús, as can be seen in a talk given to the young students upon his arrival at his new destination and in some of his most patriotic writings and poems.

Let me reproduce here a refrain of his poem entitled *Canción de Guardia*

Sí, Falangista soy
Y en los cielos azules de mi Patria
En guardia estoy.

Como fugaz estrella que se ofusca
Así murió.
Escucha, escucha, camarada mío,
Que vives en la paz de Dios eterno.
Te juro, pese a extraños o al averno,
Luchar cual tú, marchando con tu brío
De cara al sol.

The missionary, the student of Sacred Scriptures may have realized in these months spent in the motherland, that the ones dying were the ones left behind who never dreamed of vast empires or martyrdom. This explains, perhaps, the commitment of Fr. Jesús, renewed upon the cruel reality of a broken and poor Spain, “to fight as you have done it, going forward with your own courage ...”

Hong Kong (1939-1954)

While in Spain Fr. Jesús received his assignment as Master of Studies in the Studium Generale Saint Albert the Great of the Province of the Holy Rosary in Hong Kong. He left Spain October 10, 1939, and was registered in the Police Department of Hong Kong in November 20, 1939.

Rosary Hill would become his convent for fourteen years, and he may have spent there some of the most fruitful years of his long life. Besides his position of Master of Studies from 1939-1951, he was appointed Secretary of Studies, 1951-1953, and General Secretary of the Missional College, 1947-1953. He taught a variety of subjects, from Sacred Scriptures, his field of specialization, to

subjects on Culture and Religion. He undertook the study of the Chinese language and Chinese culture. And he became very active among the families of Hispanic expatriates living in Hong Kong.

Let us start with his arrival to his new home:

Those who arrive in Hong Kong harbor on board a ship for the first time and look towards the south cannot avoid taking notice of a majestic white quadrilateral building topped with a great cross jutting out the green hillside midway between the base and the crest of Mount Nicholson. It looks as if it is the center of the island of Hong Kong. This is Rosary Hill, the site of the convent of Saint Albert the Great.

Upon arrival one is struck by the simplicity, symmetry, elegance and sobriety of its architectural form and design. The façade, the entrance hall, the cloisters, the facilities, classrooms and church, are all free from any ornamentation, except the shades of light and the sounds of silence. A silence that is broken only by the echoes of Latin, Chinese, or English as classes go on, prayers are murmured, psalms are sung or a Gregorian melody resounds to the chords of the organ.

Rosary Hill in all its simplicity, however, houses a number of departments that we will try to describe: Besides being a large convent with seventy (70) friars, Saint Albert is a Studium Generale of Philosophy and Theology, Novitiate, Minor Seminary and Missionary College.

The idea of founding a convent in Hong Kong was the product of a long and difficult search. In 1922 the Provincial of the Holy Rosary Province, Fr. Serapio Tamayo entrusted to the Procurator of the Missions in Hong Kong, Fr. Francisco Noval to implement the wish of the provincial chapter to found a house of studies and a novitiate in the British colony, which he effectively undertook.

On January 24, 1924 the Provincial wrote a letter to the Apostolic Vicar of Hong Kong, His Excellency Domingo Pozzoni. This kind man died soon after for which reason the approval was signed by the Vicar General, P. Jose M. Spada, July 18, 1924.

With this document and the Rescript of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide in the hands of the Provincial the negotiations for the acquisition of the land were started in

October 23, 1924. The location chosen was the village of Tai-po in the New Territories, about 15 miles from Hong Kong island as the crow flies.

When everything was ready for the signature, there occurred some commotions in China caused by the events in Canton of June 1925 that affected the Colony with a boycott and a strike that threatened the economy to the point of danger and bankruptcy. This situation made the Procurator of the Missions and the Province of the Holy Rosary to rethink about the project of such proportions.

The idea was launched again in the Provincial Chapter of 1931 and the new Provincial, Fr. Ricardo Ma. Vaquero asked Fr. Noval to renew the negotiations. His Excellency Mgr. Enrique Valtorta, the Apostolic Vicar at the time was briefed on the procedures followed before. After a series of negotiations he granted his consent on September 23, 1932. But this time the decision was to locate the convent on the Island of Hong Kong, on a plot of 291,500 square feet acquired in public bidding on May 2, 1933. Fr. Noval registered the property with the name of Rosary Hill.

The supervision of the work and the multiple details of the construction of the building demanded a great effort on the part of the Procurator and his assistants, but this is not the place to detail them. Finally, in September, 1935 the construction was finished and in October 15 three Cooperator Brothers, Fr. Francisco Valencia, Fr. Domingo Bañares and Fr. Modesto Estébanez were assigned to prepare the place for the arrival of the new community.

Other members arrived within the year 1935, and by November 4 the School Year was opened in the newly inaugurated Studium Generale with the following officials:

Fr. Marcelino Sánchez, O.P. as Regent.

Fr. Juan Ortega, O.P. as Bachelor.

Fr. Salustiano Reyero, O.P. as Master of Studies.

Six professors and twenty seven students.

The convent was formed with the installation of Fr. Marcelino Sánchez as Prior on November 5, and on November 15 the community of 38 members celebrated the feast of their patron, Saint Albert the Great. A few days later, on November 24 there was a sort of open house to which diplomats and friends of the Colony were invited.

In School Year 1936-37 a new contingent was added: the students of philosophy arrived from Avila, and different postulants from the Philippines, Formosa, Japan, China and Tonkin came to start their novitiate in Saint Albert. Thus Saint Albert of Hong Kong offered the whole formation in the Province, from the Novitiate to the Lectorate in Theology.

School Year 1937-38 saw the launching of "Albertina" the publication of the Studium, very well received by the academic authorities.

In the School Year 1938-39 Saint Albert became a community of many nationalities: Spanish, German, Chinese, Philipinos, Japanese, Tonkinos and Portuguese.

As we have said above, Fr. Jesús arrived in Hong Kong November 10, 1939. One gets this information from his documents, for he will not mention it, as he rarely does mention his own person. One gets snippets of his biography and personality through insights in his accounts, as when he goes on to narrate the onset of the Hong Kong occupation by the Japanese and the consequences for life in the convent,

This was the routine we followed in the formation of the religious for the different apostolic ministries when we were caught by the war between Japan and the allied powers. The echoes of the organ accompanying the hymn for the feast of the Immaculate Conception of 1941 was still lingering in the chapel when the crash of the first bombs fell over Hong Kong. A few minutes after this the British military authorities appeared personally in the convent with the order of evacuation to give way for a field hospital. We left and spent the remaining seventeen days of the occupation of Hong Kong in the residence of the Procurator of the Missions and in the school of the Dominican Maryknoll Sisters...

Conventual and academic life returned in February 1942, but until 1945 it was carried on with extreme difficulties. In 1945 some of the students and professors were transferred to Macao.

On August 15, feast of the Assumption, the loudspeakers that the Japanese army had placed throughout Hong Kong, announced the message of H.M.I. Hirohito ordering the end of hostilities. And by August 30 the first boats of the British

Navy entered Hong Kong. This meant peace, and with it the restoration of normal life for Rosary Hill.

In 1947 the Studium Generale was transferred to Avila and Saint Albert was converted into a Missional College.

On August 25, 1947 the Provincial in the presence of missionaries of different missions of the province in the Orient declared open the Missional College of the Holy Rosary Province, though it had not yet been formally approved by the Master of the Order.

This was in compliance with the mandate of the Constitutions, n. 831 ordering for special formation of the missionaries among pagans, and n.127 of the Provincial Chapter of 1947 establishing the convent of Saint Albert in Hong Kong as the appropriate setting. The purpose was to teach languages and culture, history of the missions, appropriate methods of evangelization and doctrinal and juridical questions pertaining to such apostolate.

The college started September 1, 1947. This was the first curriculum:

- Mandarin Language (15 hours per week)
- Missiology
- Missional Canon Law
- General and Chinese Ethnology
- Chinese Psychology
- History of the Missions
- Religious controversies

This class teaching was supplemented with educational field trips to missional stations, hospitals, schools, Chinese feasts, etc., to get acquainted with the actual life and practices of the mission. A monthly conference was scheduled for discussions about the observations of these trips, and occasional conferences by missionaries visiting Hong Kong.

The beginning, with only six students, was humble. The first director, Fr. Juan Bautista Velasco, O.P. supervised the language teachers and guided the few Dominican professors who had accepted to cooperate in this new venture (among the most enthusiastic, Fr. Jesús)

"We started the project of a library and gathered ceramic pieces for a future museum to help in the task of evangelization."

By the second year the enrolment increased: eight Dominicans, six Franciscans, two Recolects and six Redemptorists. But the Director was appointed Bishop of the diocese of Amoy and a new Director, Fr. Antonio Dominguez, O.P. took over.

At the time that Fr. Jesús wrote these notes he envisioned a bright future for the center, with a program of scientific publications,

This journal as well as other publications will bring to the public a series of very interesting documents buried in the archives of the missional congregations as well as researches that will contribute to a better understanding of the nations in which our missionaries work, as well as a just appreciation of the missional enterprise and the splendor of the missions and of the Catholic Faith.

As we noticed above the sojourn of Fr. Jesús in Hong Kong was full of expectations and personal achievements and satisfactions. One of the most gratifying experiences was the consecration of his friend, Fr. Juan Bautista Velasco, O.P. as Bishop of Amoy. Allow me to reproduce here an account that reflects the quality of our subject. It is entitled, '*Hacia el Calvario*' (*Towards Calvary*):

"The car coming from Rosary Hill towards Hong Kong Cathedral flew down the road. As the day dawned the chords of a symphony of feelings commenced to take shape in the depth of the soul, as a sort of effluvia that clothe it feastively on those unique occasions of human existence.

I was on my way to be present at the Episcopal Consecration of Most Rev. Fr. Juan Bautista Velasco, of a connovice. A 'connovice' in the conventual jargon means, besides the companion during the year of novitiate, the perpetual friend, the other half of our troubles and mirth in the most graceful period of the religious life. And the chords had sad connotations for they sounded like a march, a sacrificial march, heroic rather than triumphant, a march that distanced us, for he was directing his steps towards Calvary.

The white procession of the priests moved slowly along the nave filled with the faithful. Its tail was red, the red of ten bishops dressed with their episcopal vestments. Closing it were the two consecrants, Mgr. Teodoro Labrador, O.P. Archbishop of Fochaw and Mgr. Enrique Valtorta, Bishop of Hong Kong, and His Excellency Antonio Riveri, Archbishop of Dara and Internuncio of China. At the end was he. And the gothic vaults of the cathedral trembled with the sound of the organ and the voices singing, 'Behold the Great Priest who in His days pleased God.'

A resplendent wave of memories transported me into a region of dreams. I viewed him one sweet evening of the month of September when we met for the first time, he just arrived from the mountains of Asturias and I from the Castilian plains, under the blue and red skies of La Mejorada. For a moment I savored the joy of running among pine trees, singing in the proximity of the river, playing along the cattle path, the fightings in the free periods and the tricks in the class rooms. Then, clothed with the Dominican habit I saw him in Avila, climbing mountains, running freely along the fields perhaps to engage a shepherd in conversation or simply giving free rein to his frank character while the professor was looking in another direction. Then I saw him in Rosaryville, in America, on his way to Manila, his years in the mission, until yesterday, that is the last two years in which we again shared our lives.

I must confess that the simplicity and the variety of all these memories impelled me to doubt what my eyes were watching as the procession advanced through the cathedral. The clergy had reached the altar, bowed before it and disappeared behind. The new bishop was at the centre of the aisle. The choir was singing, 'That is why the Lord made him grow in the midst of his people.' My imagination flew: the frank joy, the ripe candour, the enterprising spirit that I had observed during our early years at school. The desire for noble conquests, the success of his studies in Avila, the flashes of brilliance, goodness and courage that budded as we prepared ourselves for the priesthood in Rosaryville. What others had referred to me of his missionary life in the district of Moyang, his sinological studies in Peking, his silent labours at the side of the late Fr. Manuel Prat, the gift of sympathy ..."

The description continues. I resume with his last paragraph that allows us to peep into his own ideas of the missionary,

"A silence descended on the cathedral filled with people. Then his voice was heard, 'The blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.' That blessing uttered with fervour gave me the clue. The congregation vanished before the eyes of the soul, the feast disappeared, glory vanished. And I saw him in the fields of the Lord, an immense field of dead souls careless to the existence of other lights. What solitude! There will resound the voice of the Missionary Bishop pouring his blessing of inspiration on his co-workers, and the blessing of comfort on those who suffer with him, and the blessing of doctrine on those who await the light from him, and the blessing of a prayer to the God who could have Abraham beget children from stones, so that he will break the ice that surrounds him and spread the faith and Love in the hearts that surround him but are not conscious of what they do not have.

Will those who live in Christian countries and who could mitigate his pains hear the voice that blesses and prays? Bigger than the distance that separate you from them can be the oblivion. But God does not forget. He will collect drop after drop falling from your forehead, the blood from the heart of the Missionary Bishop.

Bless my friend! Make the sign of the cross as you start on a path of rocks and thorns, a path of suffering, the path trodded on by Him!

You too are climbing Mount Calvary."

(Misiones Dominicanas January-February, 1949).

In Hong Kong Fr. Jesús taught the following subjects:

Sacred Scriptures: Greek, Hebrew, Introduction, Exegesis of different sections of the Old and New Testament.

Dogmatic Theology: Two subjects

Sacred Oratory

Ethnology, History of Religions, Philosophy and History, Chinese Religion and Culture

Manila, 1953-2001

Fr. Jesús was assigned to the University of Santo Tomás (*Domus Professorum Universitatis S.Tomae*) July 18, 1953 where he lived until his death on December 18, 2001.

Fr Jesús was naturally predestined to land in the University of Santo Tomas. Perhaps he spent his most happy years in Hong Kong, but it is in the University where he fulfilled his own destiny. It will be rather difficult to summarize almost half a century of the rich life of Fr. Jesús in a few pages. Perhaps an essay written when still in Hong Kong may help to focus the colorful and variegated life of our friend. It refers to his own interpretation of the activities of his great admiree Saint Thomas as Regent of the Studium Generale of Naples. But in it one can perceive the sketch of a portrait of Fr. Jesús himself, as he conceived his own activities in Hong Kong and as he will be able to realize in Manila. Some malicious minds have hinted that Fr. Jesús was too scattered, that he started many projects and did not carry any to completion. It is true that one laments the fact that Fr. Jesús did not finish any of his great projects but I do not think this is due to a volatile mind but rather to a restless spirit and the zeal of an apostle.

A literary piece for the instruction of young Dominicans of Hong Kong summarizes his view on the role of the true Dominicans following the example of St. Thomas.

The Regent of Naples

It was already late evening, and in the solitary and peaceful church only one figure could be distinguished illuminated by the light of the tabernacle lamp: a friar in black and white, kneeling on the steps before the altar.

His eyes shone for a moment. He stood up, and collecting some papers from the top of the altar he made reverence to the hidden God of the tabernacle and silently, like a shadow without a body crossed the cloisters illuminated by the moonlight.

In the dormitory he lighted his little lamp from the one burning before the statue of the Mother of God that kept watch over the cells of the friars. He entered his cell, sat down, selected a piece of parchment, took his pen and ... In

his serene face it seemed that the fire of another world palpitated while the convulsed hand scribbled some verses:

*Adoro te devote latens deitas
Quae sub his figuris vere latitas ...*

A few moments later Fr. Thomas, the Regent of Theology of the University of Naples, rested in a profound silence among his brothers.

While he was arranging the notebooks and sheets of paper on his table, the secretary Fr. Reginald asked him,

– ‘Fr. Thomas, what was the urgent message that they handed down to you during the singing of the Mass?’

– ‘A letter from the Master Fr. Juan de Vercelis. I just finished reading it. Questions on the movement of the skies that seem to worry our students of Philosophy.’

– ‘But why should some religious give so much importance to questions that are unrelated to the salvation of souls?’ – continued Fr. Reginald.

– ‘Look, Brother, also in these matters it is necessary to discern: there is a good search in the things that reflect the image of God, as the beautiful bay of our city of Naples where heavens are mirrored. Our minds are being trained and our existence gets accustomed to the light that comes from faith. Yes, you may be right in refuting an excessive interest in such matters, particularly when some writers compromise the Holy Scriptures and the Fathers of the Church reducing them to mere philosophies. I will warn our Master of the Order when we answer him tomorrow. Today is a feast day and I will have to preach and attend to some problems of our students. Can you, please, finish those parchments?’

Fr. Reginald picked up the note passed to him by Fr. Tomás and started copying it, but he had to repeat it for the first copy was stained by some tears that fell from his eyes knowing what had happened the past night in the heart of Fr. Tomás. He was well aware that these parchments had been on the altar and the Divine Master had approved them.

A few moments later the door was opened.

– ‘What happened, Fr. Tolomeo?’

– ‘Master, this is for you,’ – answered the brother.

Fr. Tomas browsed over the note, directed his sight to the crucifix on his table, wrote a few remarks on the same letter and very softly, not to disturb Fr. Reginald who was restlessly copying the notes about the Eucharist, asked Fr. Tolomeo to sit down and to take down some notes,

‘Quia quaesisti a me, carissime in Christo mihi Johannes, qualiter incidere oporteat in thesauro scientiae acquirendo, tale a me tibi super hoc consilium traditur’ (Brother John, most dear to me in Christ: Since you have asked me how one should set about to acquire the treasure of knowledge, this is my advice concerning it). And there followed a series of brief, golden and lapidary advises about how to study.

Fr. Tolomeo gently rebuked him for wasting time answering the questions of beginners:

– ‘Fr. Juan ought to have addressed his question to any other brother of the community.’

– ‘Do not disregard the eagerness of your students. To shape their souls is more urgent than to preach a sermon or to write a book. Hold on and write,

‘Majus est meritum Doctorum quam praedicatorum, quia dum iste animas lucrificiunt, illi salvatores animarum praeeparant.’

– And do not forget to include this in our *Summa* when we discuss on the merits of doctors and preachers.’

The hours passed. At the end of solemn vespers the majestic figure of Fr. Tomas climbed the pulpit. His words, full of light fell slowly on the crowd that filled the temple. A sweet and ardent love animated them while he talked about the Paschal Lamb, the true Lamb of God who died on the cross for men, to give them life with his redemption and with his grace, who stayed with us as our best friend and food and who will fill us with joy in the everlasting mansions.

His students mixed with the crowd fixed their eyes on the preacher wondering whether he was the preacher or the teacher or both. But Fr. Tomas was a man who knew how to integrate pulpit and classroom, as well as his nights at the site of the altar.

In his cell were dying the last beams of the evening sun, when he was startled by the noise of horses in the patio and loud voices in the corridors. Somebody knocked on his door. It was the Prior,

– ‘Master, His Highness wants to discuss something alone with you.’

– ‘Sir,’ – Fr. Tomas kissed the hand of the king of Naples.

Then they conversed for some time about matters pertaining to the kingdom. When Don Carlos stood up to leave, he said,

– ‘I am not paying your services because the light that I have received only God can pay, but this little token may help in your expenses. God bless.’

Fr. Tomas wished to accompany the king to the door but he would not accept it. He kissed his hand and remained peaceful among his books and in his thoughts.

There was another interruption, this time not very pleasant to Fr. Reginald. It was the student whose dissertation, about the sign of the cross in the Mass, was a total mess.

– ‘Ah, is it you, Fr. Nicola.’ Fr. Tomas received the poor student with fondness and kindness. And for some moments, that Fr. Reginald thought hours, the mistakes and defects were identified and corrected.

While the student was on his way out, Fr. Bartolome the teacher of Bible, entered confused by the difficulties of the episode about the sacrifice of the Daughter of Jephtah. Fr. Tomas told him to read the beginning of the treaty of Saint Ambrose, ‘De Virginibus’ where he could find one of the best explanations.

Fr. Reginald was complaining that people were so inconsiderate in robbing the Master of his precious time. But Fr. Tomas pacified him,

– ‘More precious than time are the souls of my brothers and our own as we accomplish our duties charitably. As Master of Studies it is my duty to share with our brothers, without jealousy or mental reservation, the wisdom that with the help of God I have acquired.’

Finally the Prior returned.

– ‘Do you have any remarks for the community, Master?’

– ‘Tomorrow, the second day of Easter, there is a disputation in the University and I would like to instruct the students to be moderate in their enthusiasm: Truth demands souls free from passion. Here I give you a list with the names of

the brothers that can preach. This other group I would like to visit me to tell them some observations regarding their sermons. Fr. Reginald has listed the provisions for the final examinations.'

– 'There is still something else, Fr. Tomas. Please, read that letter.' He obliged and after a few moments of silence he said.

– 'The Master General asks me to obey the Brief of the Holy Father in which he appoints me as Theologian in the next General Council. Those papers are the scheme of the business to be dealt with.'

– 'Glory of God and the Order, Father Master.'

– 'I will do what I can, pray for me.'

Before the Prior left the room Fr. Tomas remembered the purse handed to him which was on his table.

– 'Take that money left by the King.'

– 'Do you need anything?'

– 'Perhaps I could arrange an outing with the brother-students.'

– 'Would it not be better to buy some books for them?'

– 'It is your decision, but a day of relaxation will strengthen and encourage them, for science is nothing when it remains in the books.'

The bell rang for supper.

It was Easter Monday. A band of young friars left the convent of St. Dominic of Naples loaded with notes and books. Following them, limping and thoughtful was the figure of Fr. Tomas. An outcry broke as he entered the cloister of the university. Majestically, serenely, gently he climbed the Cathedra and started his talk. The crowd that filled the cloister listened silently or shuddered as the phrases flowed gently, luminously, ecstatic like the brilliant light of the Neapolitan sun. How clear appeared the treasures of the faith in the Supreme sacrament of our altar.

Then the discussion started. The students followed it with vivid interest. Victory was clear. But the words coming out of those lips never hurt any one, they always warmed the hearts of the listeners. They resembled the sun of springtime. In the eyes of the Dominican students occupying the first

row there was a glow of radiant light, not of victory but of enthusiastic love of truth. In the company of the Master they too felt the sun. Yes he was their Regent of Studies, Fr. Tomas Aquinas.

(Signed):

Rosaryhill, March 1946

Fr. Jesús M. Merino Antolínez, O.P.

1. Professor (The Master)

Master is the highest honor for a Dominican professor. Saint Thomas Aquinas was a Master as Fr. Jesús very clearly states it in the essay cited above. This has been a title cherished by all Dominican professors ever since. Actually the Superior General is thus called, "Master of the Order of Preachers." In this chapter I want to prove that Fr. Jesús Merino amply deserved this title though it was never granted nor explicitly sought by him.

When Fr. Jesús was assigned to the University of Santo Tomás in 1953 he had behind him not only a very solid formation in the strictest tradition of the Dominican Order, but also a long and rich experience as a teacher in Theology and Missiology.

We have already seen that right after his ordination as a priest he presented himself for the Lectorate, the qualifying examination in the Dominican Order for professor in the University of Santo Tomas. This is the transcription of his Diploma.

NOS INFRASCRIPTI FIDEM FACIMUS ATQUE TESTAMUR

R.Patrem Fratrem Jesum Merino

Provinciae Nostrae Sanctissimi Rosarii Ord. Praed. Alumnum, peracta et a nobis approbata Dissertatione in scriptis praescrita in Constitutionibus Numeri 681, 682 et 683 coram nobis consuetum Lectoratus examen super centum theses ad normam Constitutionum per duas horas cum dimidia subiisse et a nobis per vota secreta approbatum fuisse.

Testamur insuper illum, coram nobis, tactis Sacrosanctis Evangeliiis, emisisse Professionem Fidei, necnon Iuramentum contra Modernistas et de tenenda Sancti Tomae doctrina.

Datum Manilae, in Universitate Sancti Tomae Aquinatis, die 22^a
Mensis Februarii anni Domini Millesimi Nongentessimi
trigessimis sexti.

Signed: Fr. Albertus Santamaría, O.P., SS. Can. Lector

Fr. Narcissus Domínguez, O.P., S.Th. Lector

Fr. Vitalis Clemente, O.P., Ph. Lector

Fr. Aemilianus Serrano, O.P., S. Th. Lector

Fr. Augustinus García, O.P., S. Th. Lector

Fr. Serapius Tamayo, O.P., Praesses

Registratum folio 166

We have mentioned also his licentiate in Sacred Scriptures obtained in the Pontifical Biblical Commission in Rome. This is the Diploma.

**Pontificia Commissio
de Re Biblica**

Quum R.P. Jesus Mariae Merino, O.P.

Conditionibus omnibus feceris satis, quae ad canonicam
Promotionem in Studiis Biblicis requirantur, ut facultatum
Nobis concessarum, ipsum **Licentiatum** gradus coram coetu
Consultorum promeruisse declaramus et denunciamus, Cui
propterea liceat hic et ubique honoribus uti et privilegiis,
juribus et facultatibus omnibus, quibus ad hujusmodi gradum
profectos frui datum est.

Quare testimoniales has litteras sigillo Nostrae Pontificiae
Commissionis, Praesidisque subscriptione munitas ei
concedimus.

Datum Romae, ex aedibus Vaticanis

Signed:

Die 1 Junii 1939

Fr. Vosté, O.P., Consultor ab actis

Eugenius Card. Tisserant, Praeses

Right upon assignation to the University of Santo Tomas, in 1953 he obtained the Licentiate in Sacred Theology. His diploma read thus:

**Pontificia et Regalis
Universitas Sancti Thomae
Manilana
Universitas Catholica Philippinarum**

Nos infrascripti, fidem facimus atque testamur quod anno
Nativitate Domini millesimo nongentesimo quinquagesimo
quarto, die vero tertia mensis aprilis, in hac Universitate

Rev. Jesus Merino et Antolínez, O.P.

Coram nobis personaliter constitutus, ad Gradum

Licentiati in Sacra Theologia

Per nos sublimari postulavit. Nos igitur, post fidei
professionem ab ipso emissam, iusurandum antimodernisticum
factum, et iuramentum praestitum de Angelici Praeceptoris
doctrina sana et inconcussa ubique tenenda, et servatis ceteris
solemnitatibus per huius Pontificiae et Regalis universitatis
Statuta praescriptis, auctoritate Sanctae sedis nobis a Leone
XIII f. r., die 2 Septembris 1902, commissa, praefatum Gradum
eidem, summis auspiciis Ssmi. Dom. Nostri *Pii Pp. XII*, feliciter
regnantis, contulimus, ac simul, ut omnibus gratiis, privilegiis
et exemptionibus, quibus consimiles graduati potiri et gaudere
solent, potiatur et gaudeat, libenter concessimus.

Insuper testamur supradictum fuisse approbatum cum nota
Magna Cum Laude.

In quorum fidem praesentibus Litteris, Universitatis sigillo
munitis, ac infrascripti nostri Secretarii manu signatis,
subscripsimus.

Datum Manilae, ex Aedibus Pontificiae et Regalis Universitatis
S. Thomae die *tertia*, mense *Aprili*, anno millesimo
nongentesimo *quinquagesimo quarto*.

Dr. Fr. Silvestre Sancho, O.P., Vice Magnus Cancellarius

Dr. Fr. Jesús Castañón, O.P., Rector Magnificus

Dr. Fr. Felix Vacas, O.P. Decanus

Dr. Fr. Francisco Villacorta, O.P., Secretarius

Reg. Lib. LV, fol. 370

Immediately after receiving the Licentiate he wrote the Rector
of the University asking for approval of his Dissertation for the

Doctorate in Sacred Theology. The title approved was “De Evolutione Divinae Revelationis,” (Evolution of Divine Revelation) intending to demonstrate:

- a. That there exists such evolution
- b. It originates from and is guided by the divine light
- c. Its nature is mixed and heterogeneous
- d. It follows the knowable laws of the divine Providential Magisterium and it has a supreme importance for the correct interpretation of the revealed fact, specially of the Sacred Scriptures

It was approved by Fr. Castañón on July 13, 1954.

Though this was a theme he had amply studied since his early years in Theology, Fr. Jesús worked for two years more on the elaboration of a well-thought and well-exposed thesis in 560 type-written pages that he presented for defense in the Faculty of Theology of the University of Santo Tomás on February 21, 1956.

For a Dominican to rightly boast of a Doctorate he needs to publish his thesis in book form or in a reputable journal. Unfortunately he was not able to publish a work that would have opened new avenues in the understanding of Divine Revelation at a time and in a place where interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures needed some freedom.

This is his own assessment of the result of his defense:

Examined, discussed, ordered to be corrected to accommodate the opinions of the Dean. Corrected, or rather transformed into a different one, but obviously leaving the Dean with his opinions and not allowing it to be published. *(Signed): Fr. J.*

This incident deeply wounded him who had been studying this theme for more than twenty years and who had reached maturity as a Theologian, as a priest, as a religious. When I was sorting out his professorial credentials I found this note attached to his diploma, obviously written with some resentment,

I have never claimed the Diploma of Doctor in Theology in the University of Santo Tomás owing to the combined indecencies of P. J. D. and of P. F. V. who tried to lower the rating, to eliminate one of the examiners and to prevent the publication of the dissertation as it was written. All requisites

were accomplished in 1956. An abstract has been published in three occasions, though the original remains unpublished. (Signed): Fr. Jesús M. Merino Antolínez, O.P.

It is not unusual that candidates for doctorate be asked to make changes in their dissertations. Why did Fr. Jesús react so furiously to the remarks of some of the members of the panel of examiners? What happened? Perhaps the following note attached to the publication of the abstract of his thesis will shed some light on this point:

The paper on Evolution of the Divine Revelation is a belated publication in abstract form of a thesis that was defended at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Santo Tomás in 1956. During the twelve years since elapsed, many an important fact has taken place, above all the Second Vatican Council, that is relevant to the problem, yet in the process of abstracting the thesis I was gratified to realize that the doctrine defended in it remains as true and as useful as it was, I think, for the proper understanding of the main factor in human life and culture, that is the divine gift of revelation. Hence, the publication of the present abstract.

The Latin text of the thesis, the one presented in his defense in the Faculty of Theology of the University of Santo Tomas remains as the witness of the author's grasp of his subject. He planned a translation into Spanish but he never went beyond a few pages. Why? It is difficult to answer. Perhaps he became too engrossed in other matters. Perhaps he realized the uselessness of further discussing something that was becoming common doctrine after Vatican II. But he could never hide the hurt that his examiners had caused him by not allowing him to publish it. This theme had been his dream ever since he developed theological self-awareness,

The thought of examining the way the teaching of God had followed until it attained the richness and brightness we enjoy was born in us on a calm afternoon back in the Autumn of 1928 during a conversation with the great theologian Fr. Francisco Marin Sola, the author of the "Evolución Homógena del Dogma Católico" (Homogeneous Evolution of the Catholic Dogma). He was pacing along an oak shaded path of the convent of Santo Tomás of Avila surrounded by a group of

young Dominicans students. The present writer advanced a question on the subject of the conversation, 'the proper approach to the knowledge of God,' and the humble great man remarked,

– "Thank you. Here you have the reason of my enjoying conversing with you, my budding Logicians and Theologians. What I have written about and tried to explain in the ways of man for going deep and right into the sense of God's message, the ways of God, to impart this message to man is a further study, that probably I am leaving for you to make."

Since that day the problem stuck to my mind, it appeared time and again, became an obsession along the years I dedicated to specialized biblical studies, and now here it is before you, as I have tried to bring it to a clear solution.

The examination of evolution of divine Revelation is undertaken hereunder following the simple line of fixing first the meaning of revelation and evolution, establishing evolution of the divine revelation as a fact, examining its nature, researching into its sources and ending by determining the steps that have been followed by God the revealer and are traceable.

The bibliography on the subject will appear in the notes as we go on with the discussion. We refer to works that are no longer modern because they had dealt with the subject fundamentally and they keep a personality of their own for the seeker after truth. Many had helped us with their assistance and criticisms. To all our sincere thanks. (*Signed*): *The author*. May 2, 1968

This unfortunate incident did not, however, affect his teaching career. In the Philippines Fr. Jesús exerted a most fruitful teaching apostolate as can be gleaned by a simple listing of his courses in different institutions:

University of Santo Tomás, 1953-1993

Faculty of Theology:

- Sacred Scriptures (Greek, Hebrew, Introduction, Exegesis)
- History of Religions (Native Religions, Oriental Religions)

Graduate School:

- Philosophy of Religion
- Ethnology, Culture, Museology
- Advanced Studies on Religion

Institute for Oriental Religions and Culture:

- Philosophy of Religion
- Philosophy of Culture
- Chinese History, Culture and Religion
- Oriental Religions
- Philippine Native Religions

Teaching in other Institutions:**Archdiocesan Seminary of Saint Carlos, Manila:**

- Three Courses (Exegesis, Biblical Languages)

Archdiocesan Seminary of the Holy Rosary, Naga:

- Four courses (Gospels, Pauline Corpus, Saint John, Apocalypse)

Archdiocesan Seminary of San José, Jaro:

- Four courses (Pentateuch, History of the Old Testament, Prophets, Wisdom)

Sisters' Formation Institute, Baguio:

- Four Summer Courses on Dogmatic Theology

Sisters' Formation Institute, Manila:

- Five courses on Biblical Exegesis

Angeles University Foundation, Angeles City

- Four semesters and two summer courses (Introduction to Philosophy, Salvation History, Philosophy of Religion, Fundamental Ethics)

Maryknoll Convent School, Quezon City:

- Four Semesters (Moral Theology)

Assumption Convent School, Manila:

- Four consecutive School Years (Sacred Scriptures)

It is a long and fruitful teaching career. Fr. Jesús was most faithful in accomplishing his duties as a teacher and conscientious in the preparation of his classes. Two generations of priests and bishops, Dominican and diocesan are witnesses to his wisdom and enthusiasm. Innumerable other students attended his classes or were generously guided by him through the writing of their masteral or doctoral dissertations. The theology of inspiration that he sought to explain in his doctoral dissertation may not have reached the reading audience but he was able to inspire his students with the love for the Word of God in a more direct manner,

through his lessons. Only God can judge which has been more effective.

The University of Santo Tomás through its Faculty of Theology redressed the injury caused him by granting him the title of honorary professor. This is one step short of the title Master, but I am certain that at the time Fr. Jesús did not mind it any more. In his answer to the acknowledgment he paraphrased on the “mendicants” refrain, “*Benedictus Deus in donis suis*” (Blessed be God in his gifts).

The appropriate response to the gracious conferment on us of the honors of Professor Emeritus seems to be the one the Dominicans of yesterdays used for acknowledging any grant. It goes in the venerable Latin I had to use in addressing my class forty six years ago, when I came for the first time to the University as visiting professor: *Benedictus Deus in donis suis* (Blessed be God in his gifts!)

To have been, and for a life time, a professor at the Pontifical and Royal University of Santo Tomas is a gift of God indeed. It seems that your recognition of our stand as Professor Emeritus is an added gift that enhances the splendor of the first... The Holy Scriptures contain a series of most beautiful poems in praise of Wisdom, of the search for it, of the sharing of it with our fellow men. To contribute to the enlightenment, development, efficiency and beautification of the lives of men through sharing with them the truth and goodness we treasure is to become for them like an extension of God.

We accept the honor of Professor Emeritus. It is a recognition of our sharing in the great mission of the University. May it also be our inspiration.

Very Rev. Fr. Rector, heartfelt thanks. *Benedictus Deus in Donis Suis.*

(Signed): Fr. Jesús Merino, O.P.

In a letter dated February 24, 1994 we hear the testimony of one of his former superiors, Fr. Leonardo Legaspi, O.P. Rector of the University, 1972-1978,

Dear Fr. Merino:

... Among the things I found on my desk (upon my return from a visit abroad) is the elegant invitation to a special con-

vocation honoring you with the conferment of the title of Professor Emeritus of UST.

Well deserved. Long overdue. An affair I would have wanted to witness; to rejoice with you and to participate with the University in giving witness to its pride for the glory of a son ...

God bless you. And the Philippines thank you.

(Signed): Leonado Z. Legaspi, O.P., D.D.
Archbishop of Caceres

2. Priest

Fr. Jesús was a priest for sixty-six years. For him this was the greatest thing he could ever have dreamed of. He lived it as a precious gift, enjoyed it as a most beautiful grace, and boasted about it with genuine pride.

To be a priest must be something exceedingly great, when men endowed with the highest power, say the Roman Emperors, the Egyptian Pharaohs or the Emperors of China had claimed a share in the priesthood on top of their majesty. When officiating as priests they donned special vestments indicating that they were then high above their sovereignty. The sacred crown, the pectoral with divine name, the panther skin on the shoulders, the grand band around the waist, the long days of seclusion and fasting and practicing rituals, the submission to complicated ceremonies were meant to carry their consciousness above their world of might and sense a life surpassing the summit of their human highness, because for those moments they were priests.

... Priests and priesthood mean in the life of humanity a divine factor and gift; in Christianity, as in the inner purpose of the Triune God, they are the continuation of Jesus Christ, Redeemer, Master and Savior... (The Catholic Priest)

This is how he envisioned his own ministry,

The divine sources of the life with God are: The sacrifice, the sacraments, the doctrine, the direction of conscience, the pastoral care, and the fire and inspiration of intimate piety and brotherly love. These frame the ministry of the priest.

For Fr. Jesús the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was his main and supreme ministry. He was aware of the divine power of making the real presence of Jesus Christ as he held the sacramental bread and wine. He truly and really lived his Mass, the prayers therein, the ceremonies, the readings, the acclamations. Even though he did not very much like the concelebrated Mass he was aware that his words and movements responded to a commentary form, impersonating God for the Church and the Church for God. This mysterious grace filled his heart with wonder and respect for the Holy Sacrifice that he would not exchange for anything. Always, at home or away, unless he was physically incapacitated he would celebrate his Mass.

The inspiration of his priesthood was Jesus Christ:

- The Lord Jesus himself in his love for the grass and the lilies and the crops of the fields, and the sheep over the mountains and the birds of the sky;
- The Lord Jesus who embraced and sheltered and blessed the children;
- The Lord Jesus who joined his fishermen on the shattered boat and along the roads;
- The Lord Jesus who touched the blind, the deaf mutes and the lepers;
- The Lord Jesus who kissed and knocked on the heart of his traitor;
- The Lord Jesus who stood before the spies and the detractors, who confronted his enemies and crushed their tricks with a passion that sounded like love disappointed;
- The Lord Jesus who faced his condemning judges with gracious majesty, firm confession and sovereign silence;
- The Lord Jesus who searched the spark of longing for God within the heart of the Samaritan woman who had five husbands;
- The Lord Jesus who wept over the Jerusalem of his forefathers with the love of a despised and forgotten mother;
- The Lord Jesus who abandoned his feet to the kisses and the tears and the perfume and the wiping hair of the woman sinner in town;

– The Lord Jesus who begged for comfort from his intimate friends in the hour of His agony, who relished being at home in the house of Martha, Mary and Lazarus, who wept by the tomb of His friend;

– The Lord Jesus who at last entrusted to the heart and the care of the Disciple the Mother whom He loved who was His own. In the history of wholehearted human love no other love shines so true.

And he ends this summary of the role of the Catholic priest paraphrasing Paul's words to the Corinthians (I Cor 4:1),

“Let man understand us in this manner, as executives of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.”

“That sounds grand” – he writes – , “superhuman; yet the Christian priest cannot renounce his stand or ignore it; if he ever does, he will be a traitor to his God. He is a man, not an angel, but he carries in himself the name of the Lamb and His Father’” (Apoc 14:2)

Fr. Jesús loved nature and would pick a flower and inhale its perfume ecstatically;

Fr. Jesús would smile beatifically at children;

Fr. Jesús never forgot the humble origins he came from;

Fr. Jesús had a comforting word for the suffering and some few coins for the poor;

Fr. Jesús was broken by the insidiousness of conventual politics, but he did not harbor bitterness;

Fr. Jesús never had a word of condemnation for those who ruined his heritage;

Fr. Jesús was affectionate and pure in his relations with women;

Fr. Jesús cherished the memories of his classmates all his life;

Fr. Jesús dearly loved Mary the Mother of Jesus by making her present every single moment of his life.

Fr. Jesús had on his bed an old crucifix he always kissed when he went to sleep. This writer is witness to his great devotion to the crucified Lord.

The cross. My cross with all its horrors is a song of love. They will condemn me to the cross those who want to snatch for themselves alone the Kingdom of God. Crucified I will proclaim to the world and forever that the Kingdom, the

Kingdom of Love of God belongs to all men. They will nail me to it, the human powers and the human hatred. Crucified I will proclaim to the world, and forever, that the victorious in life is the love given by God that comes crowned with thorns. Nailed, naked, without even a piece of cloth demanded by modesty, I will tell the world and forever that God suffices. Destroyed, bloodied, consumed, rigid I will lie down ... eternal victim, eternal inspiration, and eternal source of endless love. (His explanation to his mother of the sacrifice of the cross that he will undergo. (*Maria, Vida y Vivir*, p. 253)

3. Dominican

From the moment he entered the minor seminary of La Mejorada at the age of eleven, until his last conscious moments; a few days before his death in the Hospital of the University of Santo Tomas, Fr. Jesús was the incarnation of a true Dominican. He imbibed the Dominican spirit from his mentors and cultivated it throughout his life with his devotion to Saint Dominic and the great Dominican saints,

(Thomas Aquinas, Albert the Great, Hugues of Saint Chere, Raymond of Peñafort, Vincent Ferrer, Catherine of Siena, Jerome Savonarola, Fra Angelico, Francisco de Vitoria, Fray Luis de Granada, Father Lacordaire, Father Jose Ma. Lagrange... a galaxy into the infinite.)

"The Dominican Father" – he writes – "is the extension of Saint Dominic, as Saint Dominic is the extension of Jesus Christ."

This is how he describes the Dominican Father,

He is the man of God, the priest endowed with the sacramental mission of his priesthood and given to the ecclesiastical mission of:

- Enkindling the faith if it be not burning,
- Strengthening it where it be weak,
- Explaining it when it be blurred,
- Defending it wherever it be challenged,
- Fathoming it if it has to be searched,
- Spreading it where it be absent,
- Making it shine always as the radiant, warming, saving truth of Jesus crucified.

He must be in constant struggle for learning, because his mission and his life are to preach and teach the wisdom of the Gospel.

He must live intensely the liturgy of the Church, in the solemn recitation of the divine office and in the celebration of the sacrifice; because the life of the faith he has to preach consists in the liturgical worship, in the administration of the mysteries of God and in the constant upsurge of Christian piety.

In the peace of the convent he rests, studies, sings and prays; but in the chair, in the pulpit, in the dust of the roads, in the corners of the streets, atop the distant mountains, at the end of unknown horizons is his work of bringing to life the flame of the fire Jesus pointed when he said, "I came to cast fire upon the earth" (Luke 12:49)

We mentioned above his love for the priesthood. We have also seen his long career and his constant studies, not only theological, but any aspect of life that could enhance his understanding of the divinity. His love for the liturgy brought him to cherish the old Dominican rite, not willing to drop it even after the new constitution on sacred liturgy was issued by the Second Vatican Council, and the admiration for solemn liturgical celebrations. He was genuinely devout with a piety emanating from his inner conviction that he was celebrating a liturgy going back to the times of the establishment of the temple liturgy in the times of King David. He loved his room, but he never refused to give a hand to whoever would ask him for a comment, a note, a consultation; to go out to give confessions to the sisters in Tarlac; to teach in the Seminary of New York...

To the question about the role of the Dominican in the present world he answers,

The Dominican Father of today has in front of him the same challenge that confronted Saint Dominic in his days. The field is immensely larger, the contestants diversified into almost infinite shades and tactics; but the goal is the same, to bring about the truth of God that would save the Man of the present day. The man in the streets, in the fields, in the skies, in the offices, in palaces or in shanties, on the seas and under the earth needs to hear that labor is not a contract, but that it is a bond of friendship; that authority is not a power, but that it is a mission for the welfare from on High; that property is not a personal domain, but that it is a treasure entrusted

to be increased and administered as a gift of God for creating happiness ...

In an age when deep thought and firm foundation in the wisdom everlasting has been abandoned, he has to stick within the great lines of the Masters of the Faith to which he belongs.

In days when the enthralling splendors of the liturgy have disappeared, he has to revive the vigils by the altar kept by his father Saint Dominic.

He has to scan the horizons of the world expanded before him and see the thirst for God that throbs around.

He must train his mind and his powers in mastering the infinite resources the open and industrialized generations of today put at his disposal. The world he has to put on fire is enormous; so is his task ...

At the entrance of the quarters destined to board the visiting friars at the Convent of Saint Mark in Florence Fra Angelico painted a delicious scene: Two Dominican Friars in full habit welcome with open arms a Pilgrim Jesus Christ who is arriving, and the legend goes, "Stay with us for the glory of the Order!" What a vision of the past! What an urge for the present! What an ideal for the future! Saint Dominic, the preacher, treading the roads of Europe; the Friars, pilgrims for Christ; the missionaries and martyrs of the newfound world; the Friar, Pilgrim-Jesus Christ in our gone-astray world and preaching, 'The Truth of God will save you.' (Fr. Jesús Ma. Merino Antolínez, O. P., 25, February 1982)

4. Missionary

Though the vision and role of the missionary has not basically changed we must admit that the perception has profoundly changed in the course of the twentieth century.

Fr. Jesús entered into the Province of the Holy Rosary boasting of a glorious missionary activity going back to the arrival of the Spaniards to the Philippines (1587).

His town, Carrión de los Condes, had given a glorious Dominican in the person of the founder of the University of Santo Tomas, Archbishop of Manila Fr. Miguel de Benavides. A few miles away

there was the little village of Capillas the home of the Protomartyr of China, whom he admired, Saint Francis Capillas. He was recruited for the Dominican Order by the remarkable missionary of Viet Nam, Fr. Francisco Romón Zorita.

Among his early formators at the minor seminary were missionaries who had spent their best years in the Orient:

- Philippines (Fr. José Verges Carriols, missionary of Nueva Vizcaya, 1895-1919; Fr. Esteban Saladich Musarra, 1894-1912),
- China (Fr. Mateo Garay Gorostiza, missionary in Fochow and Fukien from 1894-1912),
- Hong Kong (Fr. Amado Cubeñas Madrazo, 1906-1914),
- Viet Nam, (Fr. Jenaro Pérez Díaz, 1893-1917),
- China (Fr. Manuel Moreno Martínez, Fukien, 1887-1911).

The missionary enthusiasm of the young aspirant was further enkindled in the Novitiate and during his college years spent in the study-convent of Santo Tomás of Avila where young Dominicans prepared directly for the missions. Here he made his solemn profession and his vow to join the Ultramarine missions of the Province. How deeply was he touched by this spirit can be seen in his description of his journey when he left Spain,

Christ Jesus going up to heaven gathered his disciples on the Mount of Olives and looking from there to the whole world, and embracing all the nations in his thought, all the races, all the continents, opened his divine lips and declared the foundation of his nascent church, 'All authority is given me upon heaven and earth, go therefore and teach all the nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to keep all that I have told you. And see, I am with you, till the end of the world.'

These solemn words, the last uttered upon earth by those divine lips, fell into the deepest heart of the Church, and like a treasure they were kept with the utmost tenderness, as it is always kept like the last will of a beloved person, enkindled by the fire of the Holy Spirit. They produced always and everywhere fruits of the greatest and most sublime heroism.

When the Church hears the cries of the souls far from the true God, lured by vain pressure of fantastic gods, searching

for the light for their minds and the consolation for their hearts; when the Church sees men entangled in dark practices because they lack the truth in cold religions that are dead because they do not have love, then these divine words will resound in their ears; and as an echo will sprout from its fertile bosom, the heroes who will depart to bring to them the light of the revealed truth and the consolation of the love of a God who died to open the gates of glory for us...

The 15th of June was the day marked for our departure ...

(Hacia las Misiones de Oriente, 1931)

We have also seen the high missionary zeal cultivated during the four years of his theological formation spent in Rosary Ville, in the United States. During this period Fr. Jesús wrote several papers on this subject such as,

Doctor y Misionero

Los Misioneros en Isaías

El Misionero según Jesucristo

El Misionero en el Concepto de N.S. Jesucristo

Procedimientos Misioneros en los Hechos de los Apóstoles

Basically his understanding would not differ from the most contemporary ecclesiastical understanding of mission. He even foresaw the role he was destined to play as a member of a strictly missionary institution.

I have chosen a passage from the introduction of his address to the members of the 'Academia,' entitled *Doctor y Misionero*.

Illustrious Crusades: Once upon a time under the vaults of an immense temple, kneeling in front of the holy altar our lips quivering with holy emotion pronounced the vow of obedience, the formula of our immolation, the oath to the banner of Jesus Christ adding these simple and sublime words: I promise also to go to the Ultramarine missions according to the judgment of my superiors. In that solemn moment we were constituted as crusade soldiers of the divine Savior for the great work of bringing the Kingdom of His faith and his Love to the ends of the earth.

Many others who made this decision before us have been retained by obedience in the chairs of the University of Manila

and in the schools of the Province never reaching the lands of mission. Will we ever fight the battles of our Lord? In the negative case, will that mean that we ought to resign forever to become missionaries? Is there no other way of becoming missionary without going to those blessed lands fertilized with the sweat and with the blood of our predecessors?

Perhaps Fr. Jesús had already received his assignation to teach and needed to justify in front of his companions a change in his mission. In any case this essay proves to be insightful of what his life would be, not that of an active missionary but a professor,

“Allow me” – he writes – “to draw a sketch of the way in which teachers can cooperate in the work of evangelization.”

“The Doctor, as a priest of science must explore its mysteries and infuse it in the minds of his pupils. Humanity demands that he shed light on the questions that bother it. The present times demand from him to give for posterity the knowledge of our times. He more than journalists, as much as writers has the mission to write...”

“Let us now mention the missionaries in spirit, those who are formators of missionaries. They can be missionaries encouraging with their enthusiasm the existing missional agencies, or creating new ones, or communicating to their pupils the missionary spirit, working for the recruitment of missionary vocations. Finally, they can be missionaries with the most important tool of prayer and personal sacrifice that attract the Grace of God and Faith in the souls of the Gentiles...”

Another efficacious means of helping the missions is in the work of the ‘Doctor-Misionero.’ In time in which science advances so rapidly the formation initially received by the missionary is challenged by the new problems created by advancement in the sciences. He has no time to tackle all of them, he needs the support of the researcher to solve his difficulties. Thus he empowers the missionary and frees him from the immense task of searching for all the answers...

“This is our way of envisioning the most efficacious and necessary way of cooperation between the Doctor and the missionary, the way of becoming a missionary himself even

though he will never step in the missionary territories, of actively participating in the apostolic work, the greatest and the most sublime of all the activities, the one that God himself found worthy of Him Incarnated, the one for which He shed his blood: the spreading of the Kingdom until the ends of the earth..."

Does this not coincide with the statement of 'Evangelii Nuntiandi' when it says, "Men of learning – whether you the theologians, exegetes or historians – the work of evangelization needs your tireless work of research, and also care and tact in transmitting the truth to which your studies lead you but which is always greater than the heart of man, being the very truth of God."

Let me close this chapter with his poem dedicated to Francisco Capillas,

HIMNO AL BEATO FRANCISCO DE CAPILLAS PROTOMARTIR DE CHINA

Coro: ¡Salve! ¡Salve!
¡Mártir del Amor!

¡Salve, mensajero de la vida!
¡Salve, estrella de las almas bendecida!
¡Salve, pura víctima de Dios!

Tú, Francisco, del martirio abriste
Sendas en la China y de victoria:
Tuyo el triunfo, Fe es la gloria,
Tuya la corona, ¡Vencedor!

Estrofa 1ª. Corazón inmenso vuelas
Por las tierras, por los mares;
Como el pie de los altares
Es tu nido la prisión.
Y la fe a tu paso brota,
Y en los pechos, la pureza
Y en las almas, la belleza,
De la vida que es canción

Estrofa 2ª. Cuando el alba
despuntaba

De la Fe en el pueblo Chino,
Tú ofrendaste al Sol divino
De tu sangre el rosicler.
¡Haz que triunfe la luz pura
Del error y las tinieblas!
Haz que brillen sin más nieblas
Los fulgores de la Fe.

Estrofa 3ª. ¡Pura flor inmaculada!
De la tierra en que viviste
Sólo sangre recibiste
Que esmaltara tu primor.
De la gloria en que ahora vives
Pide a Dios sea fecunda.
¡Que por ella se difunda
La fragancia del amor!

Unpublished, Rosaryhill, 3-January, 1948

5. Administrator

His teaching activity was combined with the following administrative functions:

- Regent of the ROTC of the University (1953-1958)
- Editor of “Boletín Eclesiástico de Filipinas” (1956-1960)
- Prefect of Libraries of the University (1954-1963)
- Director of the Museum of Arts and Sciences of the University (1956-1985)
- Regent of the Faculty of Pharmacy (1974-1984)
- Dean of the Faculty of Theology (1969-1976)

I will dwell only on his function as Director of the UST Museum.

Director of the UST Museum of Arts and Sciences (1956-1985)

Fr. Jesús was appointed Director of the Museum in 1956 and he served the longest term, for almost thirty years, until 1985. Perhaps not everyone appreciates his work in this area, but we cannot fail writing about it.

In a letter dated November 25, 1985 we read,

Dear Fr. Merino,

Please be informed that Honorary Membership to the Philippine Association of Museums, Inc. (PAMI) has been awarded to you for your invaluable contribution to the promotion of Museology in the Philippines ...

(Signed):

Amado R. Alvarez

President

Not only the Philippines, but the University of Santo Tomas as well, is greatly indebted to Fr. Jesús for his unstinting job as Director of its Museum of Arts and Sciences during a period in which museums were not among the priorities of the education authorities. He did not only preserve the legacy of the university but worked enthusiastically to promote appreciation of its priceless heritage.

The Museum of the University of Santo Tomas started as a 'Cabinet of Physics' or a laboratory required by the Spanish authorities as a prerequisite to grant permission for the Medicine and Pharmacy faculties to be open. But through the years it accumulated all kinds of arts and artifacts, representing local as well as other areas in which the Dominicans of the Province of the Holy Rosary had their missions. Different missionaries had contributed items that could shed light on the different cultures among which they lived, either in the Philippines or other nations of Asia. When the Faculty of Fine Arts was created the best local painters were called to contribute to an already good painting collection. And at a moment when nobody cared about the small statuettes of santos scattered throughout the land, Fr. Jesús thought of adding to the already rich collections with these unique representations of Philippine devotion and art. At present one can easily discern four different fields covered by the museum collections: the natural sciences with a good representation of Filipino fauna and conchology; the arts with a substantiable collection of paintings, santos, ceramics; ethnographical artifacts representing the mountain culture of Luzon and the Islamic tribes of Mindanao; historical memorabilia with two categories, external represented by the medals and coins, and artifacts portraying the life of the university.

There was a time when nobody would like to work in the Museum of the University perceived by majority of the community as a collection of antiques and dust. I do not know the reasons why Fr. Jesús was appointed to take charge of the University Museum. Perhaps his stint at the Colegio Misional of Hong Kong made his superiors think that he had acquired a grasp of the cultures represented in the university museum; perhaps his studies of biblical archeology had developed his eye for the value of ceramics to appreciate the life of different peoples. In Hong Kong he had undertaken the task of collecting Chinese ceramics that could illustrate the Chinese way of life. He transferred it to the Museum. In the Holy Land he had taken a course in archeology.

Fr. Jesús accepted his job enthusiastically and set all his energies to continue the task initiated by his predecessors, based as always on solid principles,

"There is a good purpose searching in the things that reflect the image of God ... our minds are being trained and we acquire an experience in the light that emanates from faith..."

In a play for the students in the Studium Generale of Hong Kong, entitled *'The Tiny Spark'* the protagonist, Thomas, defends the right of the regulars, Franciscans and Dominicans, to teach in the university of Paris. What is of interest for our quest here is the double fields of knowledge comprised in the university task. This is his argument,

"Rigans montes de superioribus suis; de fructu operum tuorum satiabitur terra" (Thou waterest the hills from thy upper rooms, the earth shall be filled with the fruit of thy works, Ps 103:13).

The hills and the earth are here the human mind thirsty for knowledge, either in the summits of wisdom or in the flatness of common life endeavor. The truth comes down upon them from God like the fecundating rain. It comes in two different ways: first, "from the upper rooms," that is, from the inner depths of the Godhead by the revelation of the Incarnate Word of God, who is "in the Bosom of the Father," be it by Himself, or by His Prophets, His Apostles, His Doctors, and His Church. In this way we attain the supernatural truths, or the divine certainty of the natural ones. Secondly, "from the fruit of His works," that is, from the philosophical investigation of the created world in which God has carved an image of Himself on every creature. So we attain the truth of all science and Philosophy.

Now, as the wisdom of revelation, that is, Theology, and the wisdom of nature, that is, Philosophy, are one sole Truth, the Truth of God in two different images: first, there can never be contradiction between them, because God can never contradict Himself; second, on the contrary they must blend together into a more perfect representation of truth, because they are two teachings of God who never does anything useless; and third, they complete each other as Philosophy raises the human mind towards God, and Theology clarifies and assures human wisdom about its conclusions.

Therefore we conclude that God is the fountain of all truth and that the Word Incarnate, Our Lord Jesus Christ is the "True light, which enlightens every man that cometh into this world."

The Prince of Spain Juan Carlos and Princess Sophia visited the Philippines on two occasions: first in July 23, 1962, they were royally received by the authorities of the "Royal and Pontifical University." Second in February 1974 when he was granted the Doctor of Laws "Honoris Causa." Fr. Jesús designed the "collar of Royal Patron" that the University granted to its illustrious visitor. There was an anecdote then circulated among some critics of the Curator of the Museum of Arts and Sciences:

'Fr. Jesús Merino who acted as the official tourist guide was enthusiastically showing to the Prince the Museum treasures: the Brown Madonna of Galo Ocampo, the first portrait of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Child as a Philipino girl with her baby; the coins minted by the ancestor of the Prince, King Charles III; the blue and white vases of the Ming dynasty; the amazing ivory crucifix carved by Chinese artists; the 'very same press' used by Fr. Blancas de San José and Thomas Pimpin, first philipino printer; the intricately waved baskets of the ifugaos ... Then coming to the conchologist section he pointed to a magnificent 'Gloria Maris' and boasted, "this most beautiful shell costs a fortune, and we have several exemplars of it." Then somebody overheard the Prince commenting to one of his aids, "Could he not sell one and use the money to improve this mess?" I do not believe this story. It is highly improbable that a future King would have been so imprudent.

In another occasion I witnessed Fr. Jesús touring another prominent guest of the University, Cardinal O'Connor of New York. So impressed with his explanations was the Cardinal that he inquired about Fr. Jesús line of expertise. When Fr. Jesús told him that he was a biblical scholar the Cardinal immediately invited him to teach in his seminary. If he was so expert in a field that he had not been professionally trained, he must be excellent in his own field of expertise, – the Cardinal must have reasoned out. He was not mistaken. Fr. Jesús taught a course on 'Sources for the understanding of the New Testament' at the Yonkers Dunwoody Seminary in the school year 1986-1987.

The same enthusiasm he showed to important visitors he demonstrated to every single student, even from the elementary. An enthusiasm that not always was understood by the university authorities. There are examples of incidents that negatively affected

the development of the university museum into a modern institution. In one article for the magazine *Arts of Asia* he writes,

This is a university museum in and for the Philippines; it will be remodeled to show the mission accomplished and also to become more effective in realizing this mission in the future. The scientific order and completeness of the display, the technical character of the documentation supplied, and the serial presentation of the collection through typical items will be preserved and perfected. The museum is a supplement to classroom instruction and assistance and inspiration for active research, guiding professors, students and visitors alike toward culture and truth. (*"The Museum of the University of Santo Tomas," Arts of Asia*, Vol. 5, n. 1, January-February 1975, pp. 56-61).

During his thirty years of directorship of the University Museum of Arts and Sciences this is what he did, to try to integrate the Truth of God represented in the Sacred Scriptures that he studied, meditated on, and taught, and in the works of nature and of man, that he collected or preserved in the university museum.

Thus he followed the steps of the founders of the Museum, Cardinal Ceferino González, the collaborator of Pope Leo XIII in the restoration of Christian Philosophy who wrote a book entitled "*La Biblia y la Ciencia*" and Bishop Martínez Vigil who wrote "*Curso de Historia Natural*."

The educational mission and function of the museum ... has a dignity and value of its own as the meeting place of mind with the realities where the wisdom imparted in lectures becomes complete, light and life through direct observation and reflection. The Museum of the University of Santo Tomas has completed three centuries fulfilling that mission.

... Our contemporary, the British Museum of London, became the treasure of a whole great nation and empire, and aided by the sovereign assistance has become the grand repository of art, knowledge and culture of our age. Our Museum, supported exclusively by the resources of the University is and functions in a parallel manner, yet smaller and concentrated on the Philippines and for an educational mission. It is a "universal" Museum that is a repository covering all fields of academic knowledge.

(Fr. Jesús Merino Antolínez, O.P., "The Museum of Santo Tomas," in *Philippine Journal of Education*, n. 5, October 1985, pp. 229 and 239)

Fr Jesús had a vision of the University Museum of Arts and Sciences, a vision that he articulated in several essays that he wrote on Art, Religion and Culture, some published and others unpublished but all of them reflecting his keen sense of observation and his enthusiasm for the Philippines.

Lost and discarded in the corner of a sacristy in Nueva Vizcaya we found once a statue of Our Lady of the Rosary. Carved in the XVIII century in hard wood with ivory faces and hands of the Mother and the Child, dressed in glorious yet soft polychromy, it was a grand work of art, alive, exquisite, majestic, and so humanly true that it engaged spontaneously the heart and mind in a dialogue of piety and aesthetics. The Spanish missionary, the Filipino and Chinese carvers had truly blended together their souls into a poem of love, which today lay forgotten in a dusty corner!

Clear and shining, yet in ruins, against the background of tropical greens and luminous blue skies the church of Tumawini lifted up to heaven its cracked, bombed walls and tower, before our eyes astonished at the splendor of a rich decoration that made the bricks palpitate with love and beauty. We knew that it was designed by Fr. Domingo Fortó, O.P. and executed by the love and dedication of his anonymous parishioners. But it is a grand work deserving a place of honor, and very much its own, in the history of Architecture.

We are mentioning two samples voluntarily chosen among those unknown and unsuspected to indicate that Religion and Art have a hidden treasure within the realms of Filipino life. Better known samples brighten the rest of the Islands.

And if in case the Philippines in Religion and Art is to find a national identity, the path is marked therein: follow the inspiration that God and Religion impart to Filipino life. It seems to be the true way, because it was crowned with success, in the History of the Philippines as in the History of Human Culture. ('Religion and Art', Fr. Jesús Ma. Merino Antolínez, O.P., *Unitas* January 1974).

To give an idea of his contribution in the field of Philippine culture I am listing here his productions in this area:

A. Writings:

- "Report to the Bicentennial of James Smithson and ICOM 65 about the UST MUSEUM," 1965, unpublished.
- "The Eastern Culture of the Philippines." Address to the 9th Summer Cultural Series of UST, *Unitas*, 1963
- "Philippine Art at the Museum of the University of Santo Tomás," 1966
- "Oriental Traits and the Psychology of the Filipinos," Address to the 11th Summer Cultural Series of UST, 1965
- "Neither the oldest coin, not even a coin" Article published in the *Manila Times*, 1967
- "On the Conservation of Religious Art in the Philippines" Paper for the Philippine Hierarchy, unpublished, 1968.
- "The First Western Impression of Chinese Culture" Address to the Chinese Association of Engineering, UST, published, 1968
- "Christian Faith and Asian Culture" Points for discussion, 1978
- "State of Museology in the Philippines" Conference for ARCFA seminar, unpublished, 1973
- "Report to the 9th Conference of ICOM '71" Published is a summary in *Unitas*, 1972
- "The Chinese Mestizo" Published in "The Chinese in the Philippines" by the Historical Association of the Philippines, 1972
- "Religion and Art. The Case of the Philippines." 19th UST Cultural Series, published in Series, 1973
- "Memorandum on the Care and Preservation of Religious Art in the Philippines," unpublished, 1974
- "The Absolute. East and West," unpublished, 1974
- "A Museum with a Mission. The Museum of the University of Santo Tomas, Manila," *Arts of Asia*, 1975
- "The UST Museum of Arts and Sciences," Brochure of the Museum, 1975
- "The World Religions and Satanism." Conference for the 21st UST Cultural Series, 1975
- "Identification, Authentication and Conservation of 'Antiques'." Conference for Museum National Week, Ayala Museum, unpublished, 1978
- "Populations and Religions within the Philippines," *Life Today*, 1980
- "The Philipino Print," Book in Cooperation , 1982
- "The Museum of Santo Tomas," *Philippine Journal of Education*, 1983
- "The Psalm of the Bricks. Dominican Churches in the Philippines," published in a summary in *Life Today*

- "Cómo nacen los Pueblos. El Caso de Filipinas," unpublished, 1977
- "La Religión de los Ifugaos" sketch for a book, unfinished
- "La Religión Popular China," sketch for a book, unfinished
- "The Mountain Tribes of North Luzon. Their Culture and its Preservation"
- "Certain Filipino Religious Practices in Historical Perspective," 1978
- "The Absolute East and West," 1974
- "Religiosity and Nationalism among the Filipinos", 1965

B. Exhibits:

- *Column et Firmamentum Veritatis*, 1970
- *Filipinas Cristiana*, 1970
- *The Master*, 1955
- *Centenary Exposition: Saint Thomas*, 1974
- *Collar de Patrono*, 1974
- *Exposición Bíblica. Your Bible. Manila Cathedral*, 1989
- *Fra Angelico: Life, Vision, Mission and Glory*, 1984
- *Design of several bishops' coat of arms*

C. Conferences attended representing the museum of the University as director:

- *Bicentennial of James Smithson*. Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.; Delegate, September 1965
- *ICOM'65. 7th International Conference*. Washington, Philadelphia, New York. Representing the Philippines, 1965
- *ICOM'71. 9th Conference*. Paris, Grenoble; Philippines delegate, 1971
- *ASPAC (Asian Pacific Conference)*. Taipei, Tainan, Kaoshiung. Invited member, 1976
- *Human Settlements Symposium*. Manila, 1976
- *UNESCO-ICOM International Experts Meeting on Planning of Museums of Science and Technology in Developing Countries*. Manila, 1978
- *9th Conference of the International Association of Historians of Asia*. University of the Philippines. Invited speaker, 1982

D. Associations:

- Baguio Religious Acculturation Conference (1962-1992)
- Commission on the Preservation of the Historical and Architectural Values, Archdiocese of Manila (1978)
- Philippine Association of Museums (1984-90)

- Historical Conservation Society (1966-1985)
- Oriental Ceramic Society

E. Courses Taught:

- In the **Colegio Misional**, Hong Kong
 - Ethnology
 - Chinese Religion and Culture
 - Philosophy and History of China
- In the **University of Santo Tomas**, Manila
 - History of Religions: Native Philippine Religions, Oriental Religions
 - Philosophy of Religion
 - Ethnology. Culture. Museology
 - Higher Religious Studies
 - Philosophy of Culture
 - History, Religion and Culture of China
 - Oriental Religions
 - Philippine Native Religions
- In **Angeles University**, Angeles City
 - Fundamental Philosophy
 - Philosophy of Religion. Fundamental Ethics

6. The End: "Ligero de equipaje"

Laudare, Benedicere, Predicare: This ancient Dominican motto had guided the whole of Fr. Jesus' life. He prayed and praised God to the last moment of his life: He celebrated his daily mass with great solemnity and devotion until the last months, and though he had stopped attending the community recitation of the prayers for some years he still continued with his breviary till his very last days.

Fr. Jesús had stopped his active ministry just a few years before and his teaching in 1995. It must have not been very easy for him, but he never uttered a word of complaint about old age or the incapacity to do the multiple activities he had always engaged in. The last years of his life he dedicated to writing a poem of love to the woman of his life, B.V.M., *María, Vida y Vivir*, of which he left 691 typewritten pages.

His attitude towards old age can be glimpsed from a reflection he addressed to the Asian Regional Conference on Active Aging in

January 28, 1982. He entitled it *"The Gift of God that is Old Age."* Strewn with Bible quotations he draws a most optimistic and beautiful image of old age,

The divine law of the Old Testament prescribes in the Code of Sanctity: "You will stand up in the presence of gray hair, you will honor the person of the aged and fear your God. I am Yahweh." (Lev 19:32). And in the vision given to Daniel God wanted his majesty appear in the splendor of the Master of Destinies of the Universe and of history, "... thrones were set in place and one most venerable took place. His robe was white as snow, the hair of his head as pure as wool" (Dan 7:9). Jesus himself who resurrected in the full glory of his thirty third year and in that age ascended into heaven, came in the first vision of the Apocalypse as the Eternal High Priest, "One like a Son of Man, dressed in a long robe tied at the waist with a belt of gold. His head and his hair were white with the whiteness of wool, like snow," (Apoc 1:13-14).

Something great must be in old age when God assumes it as the impersonation of His own glory and majesty.

Nevertheless, he was well aware of the weaknesses and dangers of old age,

It is not the age and the number of years what renders a man venerable. Jesus Son of Sirah, in his book of wisdom, the Ecclesiasticus, places some old men among the nauseating types of humanity by saying, "There are three kinds of people my soul hates, and whose existence I consider an outrage: the poor swollen with pride, the rich who is a liar and an adulterous old man who has no sense" (Eccl 25:3). And in the book of Daniel we are told the shameful story of the two old men and judges in Israel whom the young prophet qualifies as, "You old relic of wicked days ... pronouncing unjust judgments, condemning the innocent, and letting the guilty go free... (Dan 13:52)

One time the prior approached Fr. Jesús to fraternally call his attention concerning his friendship with an old lady that had become the object of conversations in the campus. Fr. Jesús politely told him not to worry; he was strictly following the dictates of his religious conscience. Besides, he needed somebody with whom to converse in his long days.

His life was transparent, and only evil eyes could imagine what was only in their own wicked hearts. Fr. Jesús could not be accused of any fault on that account. The presence of this old man in a campus filled of young people was a treasure to behold, a walking blessing of God. I know of many pure souls who would be moved by the frailty of such a venerable figure. His mission had not yet ended; his pilgrimage was in the last stage, close to the Holy Sanctuary waiting for him in the Heavenly temple.

Some people also had suggested that he should have gone back to Spain. Was he not Spanish? Of course he was and felt deeply Spanish, but he was no less Filipino and as such he had dedicated the best of his life and graces. Let me quote a beautiful poem by Luis Cernuda, entitled "Peregrino":

¿Volver? Vuelva el que tenga,
Tras largos años, tras un largo viaje,
Cansancio del camino y la codicia
De su tierra, su casa, sus amigos,
Del amor que al regreso fiel le espere.

Mas, tú? ¿Volver? Regresar no piensas,
Sino seguir libre adelante,
Disponible por siempre, mozo o Viejo,
Sin hijo que te busque, como a Ulises,
Sin Itaca que aguarde y sin Penélope.

Sigue, sigue adelante y no regreses,
Fiel hasta el fin del camino y tu vida,
No echas de menos un destino más fácil
Tus pies sobre la tierra antes no hollada,
Tus ojos frente a lo antes nunca visto.

The life of Fr. Jesús has been a long journey. It started in Carrión de los Condes, the town of Archbishop Miguel de Benavides. And it ended in the city of Manila, ninety-one years afterwards, in the institution envisioned by the same man. A long journey, yes, always looking forward, faithful until the end, without complaints that God could have given him an easier destiny, with his heart and mind open to whatever ministry his superiors would give him.

"There is no greater joy" – says Dámaso Alonso – "than to experience the feeling of the anonymous pilgrim, lost among the crowd,

in search of permanent sanctuaries of beauty; to humbly kiss the worn out stones, the firm stones on which our faith is rooted.” (Dámaso Alonso, *Poesía Española*, Editorial Gredos, Madrid, 1987, p. 43)

The life of Fr. Jesús has been a pilgrimage of love: conscious of his call from a very early age, faithful to it during his long life, anchored on his love for the Blessed Virgin Mary in whose protection he abandoned himself since the loss of his own mother, guided by the spirit of the great Dominican saints.

Old age, as life itself, growing and maturing, is a gift of God. He in his mercy planted the seed of His splendid image and likeness in the tiny heart of every baby; He feeds it with the infinite riches of living experiences and of continuous gifts of His bounty; He expects to crown it with His approval and acceptance when life is over and the communion of His own glory comes beyond the material death. The key to the understanding of the value of old age is the inspiration coming from looking at life under the light coming from God.

He concludes this address with a personal reminiscence from his times in Jerusalem,

The solemn vespers of the feast of the Annunciation could not be started, because the ‘cantor’, the septuagenarian Fr. Felix Ma. Abel, O.P. failed to appear at the choir of the Basilica of Saint Stephen in Jerusalem; they looked for him and found him at his desk in his room, kneeling down, pen in hand upon the proofs he was correcting; they helped him into his bed, intoned the “Hail Holy Queen” and the great geographer of the Holy Land was gone to God.

There was no “Hail Holy Queen” sung when Fr. Jesús died, early in the morning of December 15, 2001 in a room of the UST Hospital. His life was spent, like a candle that had burned all its wax, while the community started to wake up. His nurse attended him. Fr. Lucio closed his eyes. He was buried in the Dominican San Juan cemetery at the site of his brothers and sisters in the habit.

When I intone the ‘Salve Regina’ (Hail Holy Queen) in our evening prayers I still remember this older brother in the habit, colleague in the teaching profession, singer of the Blessed Virgin

Mary whom he adopted as his mother when he became orphaned, and I rehearse one of his beautiful poems addressed to her. It is entitled "Cantares" and he places it on the lips of a small girl addressing it to the Immaculate.

Cantares

Mírame, Madre,
Te traigo flores
Y en sus colores
El corazón.
Y son silvestres
Y pequeñitas.
No son bonitas,
Mas son mi amor.

Salí a buscarlas
Por esos campos.
Como los ampos
Blancas las ví.
Las ví encarnadas,
Las ví amarillas,
Dobles, sencillas,
De formas mil.

Fui por el bosque,
Busqué en el río,
Y hasta el herío
Claveles dio.
Vengo cansada,
Mas no rendida
Porque es mi vida
Servir tu amor.

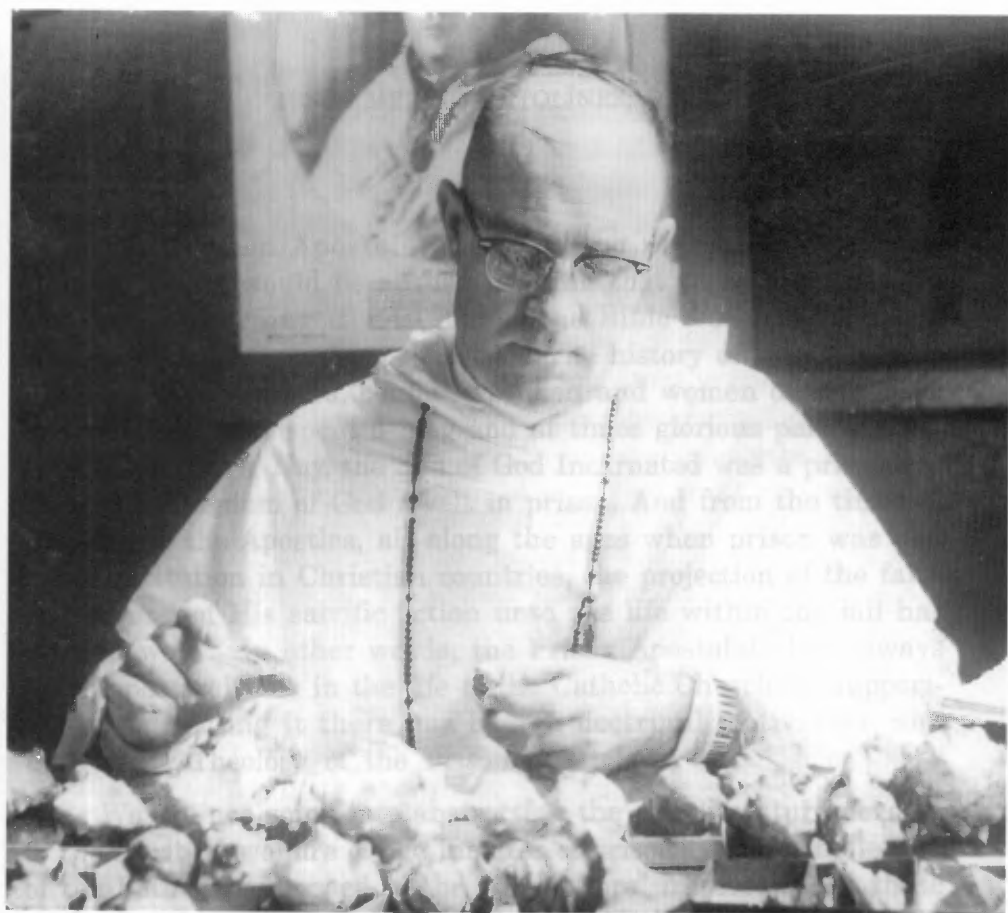
Había algunas
Que me agradaban,
Mas me manchaban
Y las tiré.
Pues eres, Madre,
Pura de veras
Flores sinceras
Besen tu pie.

Y aquella mata
De flores finas
Tenía espinas
Y me pinchó.
Teñidas, Virgen,
En sangre y llanto
Las quise tanto
Que te las doy.

Y al coger otras
Ojos lucientes
Y agudos dientes
Abrirse ví.
Me fui corriendo,
Mas los primores
De aquellas flores
Te traigo aquí.

Me dicen, Madre,
Que así es la tierra:
Dichas encierra,
Espinas, cruz.
Que hay hombres malos,
Que hay acechanzas
Que hay malandanzas
Que falta luz.

Mírame, Madre,
Te traigo flores
Y en sus colores
El corazón.
Guárdalo, Madre,
En tu regazo
Con un abrazo
De eterno amor. □



Fr. Jesús Merino Antolínez, O.P.
(Classifying shells)