

SANTO TOMAS DE MANILA
The First University of the Philippines⁸

QUENTIN McSWEENEY, O.P.

II



HEREAS the first⁹ of Santo Tomás' three eras was characterized by a steady development, the second witnessed a phenomenal increase in the student enrollment. As this is its chief feature, there is no particular need to treat the second epoch on the same detailed scale as the first. One can, without much difficulty, imagine the Institution now fully enjoying the fruits of its reputation. Students in ever greater numbers filled its halls, and, in turn, emerged to assume many of the highest positions in civil and ecclesiastical life throughout the world.¹⁰

Santo Tomás had successfully passed its formative years. However, it never remained static, despite its attainment of full stature. There was never a thought of resting on laurels. In keeping with an ever-progressive policy, more departments and schools were added to its already large quota. Thus, in 1871, the Faculties of Medicine and Pharmacy were formally incorporated into the university system.

Aside from an occasional revolution between the various Island factions, the life of the University had always continued at a steady pace. Semesters, through the centuries, succeeded one another in an almost continuous, unbroken stream till the final months of 1898. That year, marking the beginning of the third distinct era in the history of Santo Tomás, saw the domination of the Islands pass from Spanish to American hands. However, the interruption of formal university life lasted only one school-year. The blank page, 1898-1899, in an otherwise complete history, is the mute story of the

⁸ This is the second and concluding section of a brief history of the oldest university under the American flag. In the first section, the statement was made that Archbishop Salazar, the first member of the Philippine hierarchy, was the founder of the Province of the Most Holy Rosary. Strictly, Father Juan Crisóstomo and Juan de Castro founded the Province, but its first days were under the aegis of the Archbishop. In this sense he is considered one of the founding fathers.

⁹ The first epoch, embracing the legal foundation of the University in 1612, extends to 1865; the second, from the latter date to the period of American domination of the Islands; and the third, from 1900 to 1942.

¹⁰ More than 31,000 young men, from 1865 to 1898, were enrolled at the University.

struggle between two nations. American battleships, under the command of Admiral Dewey, sank a part of the old and "out-of-condition" Spanish fleet in Manila Bay. Spain was out of the fight, as far as the Philippines were concerned. Peace was established a few months later, and American politicians 'magnanimously' voted to pay Spain 20 million dollars, or "about two dollars apiece for each Filipino."¹¹

With the resumption of studies after the war, the Dominican educators continued their work with an even greater vigor. Then in 1902, Pope Leo XIII saw fit to raise the status of Santo Tomás once again. On the 17th of September of that year, he issued the Brief, "*Quae Mari Sinico*," which, along with confirming the documents of his predecessors, formally bestowed on the Institute the glorious title of "Pontifical University."

More schools and honors followed in the wake of this papal document: in 1904, the School of Dentistry; three years later, the School of Engineering, which was confirmed by Pope Pius X. In due course, the government of the United States, through its representatives in the Commonwealth, set its seal of approval on this, the only Catholic University in the Philippines.

In 1924, a minor revolution took place within the University walls. Until that year, only male students were permitted to enroll in the various courses offered. Ancient traditions had to step aside. Women could at last enter the famous halls of learning and pursue their ambitions in many of the University's colleges and departments.

The student enrollment, during the past decade, has broken all records previously set at Santo Tomás for any similar period of time. Since 1930 there have been approximately 5,000 young men and women registered each year. In the semester just interrupted by the Japanese invasion, there were more than 6,000 students in all the branches of study. A great proportion of these, more than 1,200, were medical students. This last figure is more than double the enrollment of the Medical School of the University of Manila, an institution subsidized by the Commonwealth. To adequately instruct the young men and women, a faculty of nearly 400 teachers, both clerical and lay, is maintained by the University.

The destinies of Santo Tomás have always been guided by members of the Dominican Order. Since 1612, there have been eighty-five rectors, men especially zealous for the cause of science and virtue. At present, the Rector Magnificus is the Very Reverend Father

¹¹ Adams, James Truslow, *The Epic of America*, p. 337, Brown, Little, and Company, Boston, 1931.

Silvestre Sancho. Besides Doctor Sancho, there are many other Dominicans on the Faculty. All the schools, faculties, and departments are, directly or indirectly, under their supervision. The following is a partial list of the parts of the university system governed by the Friars of the Province of the Most Holy Rosary:¹²

FACULTIES: Sacred Theology; Cannon Law; Civil Law; Scholastic Philosophy; Philosophy and Letters; Medicine; Pharmacy; Engineering.

COLLEGES: Education; Liberal Arts; Commerce; Religion.

SCHOOLS: Architecture and Fine Arts; Secondary Education; Mining.

DEPARTMENTS: Surgery; Experimental Psychology; Journalism; Industrial Chemistry; Mechanics; Electricity; Languages (English, National, and Spanish); Physical Culture and Military Service.

Until early in December, 1941, the Royal and Pontifical University was enjoying one of its best years. All was running smoothly. But scholastic activities were cut short by the unexpected and vicious Japanese attack on Manila. Nipponese planes roared over the city and bombed many of the more conspicuous buildings. Fire and steel took a heavy toll in the Philippine capital. Churches were smashed by bombs; unfortunate civilians were cut down by machine gun fire; wreckage littered the beautiful tropical city. The great library of Santo Tomás was swept by flames and 20,000 volumes went up in smoke. Some of these, still in manuscript form, had recently been brought from China, because the Dominican houses there were in the Japanese-Chinese war zone. However, the University itself did not suffer quite so much damage as did other Dominican institutions in Manila. The Convent and Church of Santo Domingo, for instance, were totally demolished.

Before the end of the following month, the Japanese had overpowered and occupied Manila. Despite this initial success, they were unable for many more months to defeat the American and Filipino forces encamped on Bataan Peninsula, outside Manila. In the meantime, Santo Tomás has ceased to function as an educational institute. Classes can no longer continue, for the Japanese have turned it into a place of internment for prisoners of war.

Thus ends the third phase of the University's history. What of

¹² Bazaco, Evergisto, O.P., *La Primera Universidad de Oriente*, Manila, P. I., pp. 59 and 60.

its future? Santo Tomás, along with the Commonwealth, will eventually be free. Just how soon, no one can say. A complete blackout enshrouds the intellectual life of Manila for the present, but only for the present. The Japanese domination, real though it is, can be only a temporary eclipse. When it passes away, "the oldest University under the American flag" will again take its deserved place in the sun. Then the fourth, and unwritten, epoch of the great University will outshine the brilliant history of the past centuries.

Recently, American papers and magazines have been filled with news about Manila and its institutions. A wave of information has poured out concerning the Commonwealth and its peoples. For the first time, many Americans have come to realize the importance of the Islands; that they are not just some specks of land stuck out in the far corners of the Pacific. All this is fine. However, due perhaps to hasty composition of news articles and the like, some details have become somewhat snarled. The result is a slightly twisted picture.

One author, for example, in giving the background of Santo Tomás, states that the Dominican Order was founded by Saint Dominic, an "Italian." Perhaps all the peoples of Europe did spring from a common stock, but for quite a few years a difference has been recognized between Spaniards and Italians.

Some articles, too, contain a number of misleading generalities. Father Thomas B. Cannon, S.J., in a recent issue of *America*,¹³ writes in such a fashion regarding the Jesuits and their work in the Philippines. The general impression is that only Jesuits have laboured in the Islands. Here are a few illustrations. "It is no exaggeration to say that the Ateneo is the best known university in the Orient." The Ateneo is an institute similar to that of the Dominican Fathers called San Juan de Letran.¹⁴ The Letran is only a college. But as this is neither the time nor the place to delve into the distinctions between 'universities' and 'colleges,' we will say that if no difference exists between such schools, then Harvard, Yale, and Chicago Universities, for example, are of the same classification as the ordinary, home-town college.¹⁵

¹³ *America*, January 15, 1942, pp. 15, 16.

¹⁴ San Juan Letran founded at Manila in the 17th century.

¹⁵ If the reader wishes to read further into this matter, he will find a complete treatment in some of the numerous works written by Father Evergisto Bazaco, O.P., Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters at Santo Tomas. Many of his books have been published at the University's Press. Incidentally, this Press is oldest in the Islands.

Father Cannon goes on to say: "It is amusing to note that every movement, every innovation—even in sports, in dramatics, . . .—begins at the Ateneo." It must be pretty hard to account for the fact that the Ateneo has yet to win its first basketball championship of the Islands, while Santo Tomás has annexed the national honor five times since 1934.¹⁶ Too, the sense of the word "amusing," in this instance, remains a bit obscure. Again, in the next sentence, we come across a puzzling statement. "The majority of the leaders of the Filipino people," says Father Cannon, "are Ateneo graduates." Heads haven't been counted on this particular question, but if they were, the names of the President and Vice-President of the Philippine Commonwealth would surely be missing from the Ateneo's list. It so happens that these two men, Manuel L. Quezon and Sergio Osmena were graduated from the Dominican College of San Juan de Letran. The list could be extended almost indefinitely. One has always to bear in mind that no one group of Religious did all the teaching in the Philippines. Credit should be given where it is due.

Catholic newspapers, too, have slipped up a bit in relating 'facts.' These, just as much as any news organ, have a duty to avoid errors. The *Providence Visitor*, in an article whose date line is "Washington, Jan. 26," comes under this category. Relating the dates of arrival of the various missionaries in the Philippines, it states: "The Franciscans arrived in 1577; the Jesuits in 1580; and in 1581 Domingo de Salazar, O.P., came to Manila . . ." Of these figures, the first and third are correct, but the second is not. The same article was used by the *Sunday Observer*, a Pittsburgh paper. Presumably, many other Catholic newspapers ran the same article.

In case there are any doubts in the matter, numerous authors give 1581 as the correct date of the Jesuit arrival in the Philippines. Among these might be mentioned the Jesuit Fathers Chirino and Colin, and the Augustinian Father Gonzalez. These three historians lived in the 17th century and were intimately acquainted with the early missionaries to the Islands.

In telling the story of the early missions, Father Juan Gonzalez says: "All of these (Augustinians, Franciscans, and Dominicans) have passed a certain time in these islands. Afterwards the Jesuit Fathers came to these regions . . ."¹⁷ And the Jesuit historian Colin sets the particular date. "The religious of the Society who have come

¹⁶ The Islanders love their sports as well as any American. Basketball has lately become one of the most popular forms of recreation.

¹⁷ E. H. Blair and J. A. Robertson, *The Philippine Islands*, Arthur H. Clark Co., Cleveland, Ohio, 1909, vol. 6, p. 90.

to these islands from Espana and Nueva Espana . . . since the year 1581, the time of the arrival of the first . . .²¹⁸

The above observations are not given in the spirit of carping criticism. They are made in an effort to serve readers, especially Catholic readers, with whole truth. Some mistakes are unavoidable, it is true, but no one deserves a steady diet of them. Since the notations mentioned in the articles quoted above refer in some manner, at least indirectly, to Santo Tomás, we have pointed them out. Perhaps these corrections will help clear up some of the prevalent misrepresentations.

²¹⁸ *Op. cit.*, vol. 28, p. 78. On the same point, there are twenty-two references among the more than fifty volumes of Blair and Robertson. The complete list is to be found in volume 55, under the title "Jesuits, first arrive in Manila (1581; erroneously stated otherwise by some writers)."