



UNIVERSITY OF SANTO TOMAS
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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A.Y. 2021-2022

TO : THE THOMASIAN COMMUNITY
FROM : OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
RE : TRIUMPHANT EXIT THROUGH THE ARCH OF THE CENTURIES
DATE : 3 JUNE 2022

The oldest architectural plan¹ of the University of Santo Tomas depicts the properties acquired throughout the 17th century, in which the main entrance of UST in old Intramuros, Manila was graced by the “**Arch of the Centuries**”. In 1941, a squadron of Japanese airplanes flew over Manila, leaving behind a rain of destructive and incendiary bombs. UST was severely damaged and the old Intramuros never looked the same again.²

Located at the España entrance of the University, the **Arch of the Centuries** serves as a memorial to the distinguished men and women, heroes, martyrs and saints, who had passed through the University's portal. The side of the Arch facing the campus is an assemblage of stones of the main doorway of the ruined UST building during the Second World War, while the side facing España Boulevard is a replica of its unscathed original structure.

Classical Greek and Roman in inspiration and notable for its Doric fluted columns, but baroque in its wealth of curving and embossed details, the **Arch of the Centuries** looks like one of those arches for victorious Athenian athletes or returning Roman generals. The medallion arch is a memorial for all distinguished Thomasians. The inscription says, "*Gateway to the history of the finest breed of Filipinos*".

On the lower facade of the pillar, a commemorative plaque honors José Rizal (1861-1896), the national hero and UST alumnus, and another plaque, Manuel L. Quezon (1878-1944), President of the Philippine Commonwealth, also a UST graduate. The sides of the rectangular top of the arch are the panels depicting some milestones in the life of St. Thomas Aquinas. Above all these,

¹ This 17th century architectural plan was made and signed by Fr. Juan Peguero, OP, the Procurator of the Dominican Province of the Holy Rosary from 1675 to 1677, and from 1680 to 1684; cf. José, Regalado, “Historic Visual Images of the University of Santo Tomas in Intramuros from the Archivo de la Universidad de Santo Tomas”, *Philippiniana Sacra*, Vol. LI, No. 153 (May-August, 2016) p. 492.

² cf. Villaroel, Fidel OP, *A History of the University of Santo Tomás: Four Centuries of Higher Education in the Philippines (1611-2011)*, Vol. II, (UST: Manila, 2012), p. 368.



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sits the serene, regal image of the angelic doctor, scholastic philosopher and theologian, patron of the University and of all Catholic school, *St. Thomas Aquinas*.³

In 2010, the **Arch of the Centuries** was declared a *National Cultural Treasure*⁴, along with the UST Main Building, the UST Central Seminary Building, and the University open field, by the National Museum of the Philippines. In 2011, the National Historical Commission of the Philippines declared UST a National Historical Landmark.

Academic Year 2002-2003 marked a significant first in Thomasian history, when the graduating students experienced a symbolic *send-off* as they passed through the **Arch of the Centuries** prior to the Eucharistic Celebration.⁵ Symbolically, the send-off rites hopes to remind the Thomasians that the University had not only been part of their academic competence but had also assisted in molding them to become compassionate and committed professionals.

As our graduating students of the Class of 2022 and graduates of the Classes of 2020 and 2021 triumphantly walk through the **Arch of the Centuries**, the portal of the University, may they continuously illuminate⁶ the Church, the nation and the global community with faith, hope and love (cf. *1 Cor 13:13*). May the Merciful Lord of our restless being, keep the Thomasians in beauty and truth and virtues, and in our teaching, researching and community development endeavors, may we be continuously imbued with *unending grace*.


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Secretary-General

³ cf. de Castro, Imelda, *The Cultural Icon of Thomasian Tradition: The Arch of the Centuries*, UST Research Cluster on Culture, Education, and Social Issues.

⁴ Section 3 of the Cultural Properties Preservation and Protection Act states that a “National Cultural Treasure is a unique object found locally, possessing outstanding historical, cultural, artistic, and/or scientific value, which is significant and important to this country and nation”; Another first is the formal declaration of *Baybayin* Documents of UST as a National Treasure in 2014, the first archival document declared as a national treasure.

⁵ cf. University of Santo Tomas, *The Academia: The Official Bulletin of the University of Santo Tomas*, March 2003.

⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II q. 188 a.6., 13th century.