Chapter One

THE YEARS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SALAMANCA

Medieval universities had their origin in the cathedral schools, or studia, of the central Middle Ages, and in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries official documents still referred to them by this term. Whereas the earlier universities had drawn mostly clergy, by the fifteenth century students were more likely to be laymen preparing for a career in government, law, or medicine. In many cases it was not even necessary for them to complete a degree. Records indicate that between fifty and eighty percent of these aspiring professionals left before achieving that goal. Merely having spent time at the university was enough to give one connections and a certain status. Across Europe, and including in Spain, students tended to be neither from the uppermost nor the lowest classes. The poor could not afford university study, and nobles were not generally inclined toward it unless they were aspiring to a career in the church. This began to change in the fifteenth century, and by the early modern period attending the university became an expected phase in the life of a young nobleman.¹

Nothing is known about the family or social origin of Juan Alfonso de Segovia. Elsewhere I have suggested that he likely came from
14 Juan de Segovia and the Fight for Peace

a family connected with the rising urban oligarchies emerging in Castile in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Although “de Segovia” was a surname and does not in itself mean that its bearer came from this central Castilian city, in Juan’s case it appears that this was, indeed, his native city. Vatican records identify him as a priest from the diocese of Segovia. Although some have included the surname González among his name, giving his full name as Juan Alfonso González de Segovia, no extant contemporary documents support the inclusion of González in his name. It is not clear what Juan de Segovia’s goals were when he went to Salamanca to study, but about ten years after arriving there, as we will see, he was energetically pursuing appointments to church benefices around Castile. He also became a faculty member at this studium and traveled, including to the royal court, on university business. If he hoped to work as a university professor and also be engaged with the central issues and power circles of his day, he would not have been the first to combine these two activities. And he would have been well positioned to do so.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore Juan Alfonso de Segovia’s formative years in the university community of Salamanca, one of Europe’s oldest universities. Juan de Segovia spent over two decades of his young adulthood there, from 1407 to 1431, as a student and then professor of theology before he left Castile for the Council of Basel (1431–49). My aim is to show that aspects significant to his thought in later periods of his life were evident in these early years. These include a strong biblical orientation in his thinking, which he would carry with him to and beyond Basel as he considered Islam. In these early years at Salamanca, he also revealed concern for renewal in the church and for presenting the Christian faith credibly to non-Christians, a curiosity about Islam, and a willingness to stand in opposition to a powerful prelate. In addition, I argue that he was both exposed to the currents of conciliar thought and sympathetic to conciliarism’s goal of collective governance. Contrary to what others have supposed, I submit that Juan was no convert to conciliarism when he arrived in Basel in the early 1430s.

As a student arriving at the studium in Salamanca in the early fifteenth century, Juan Alfonso de Segovia surely already had benefited

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from some formal education. University students began their studies having already mastered certain fundamental skills such as literacy, although their preparation probably varied greatly from one student to the next. Almost no information survives concerning the instruction of Castilian children from the middle or lower nobility or the urban elite. Some of them might have had a private tutor, but most probably acquired their early training in the seigniorial household to which their family was tied by bonds of blood or clientage. Others may have attended one of the numerous grammar studia that were founded across the kingdom in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries under the auspices of the cathedral, the municipal council (concejo), or both. Segovia had a school of grammar as early as 1331, and in the mid-fifteenth century the city’s cathedral chapter included a maestrescuela (scholasticus, schoolmaster), who was in charge of supervising the instruction of clergy and choir boys, as well as dictating and authenticating official documents for the chapter. It is possible that Juan de Segovia was a student at this school before going to Salamanca for higher study. In addition to the school in Segovia, other grammar studia existed by 1339 in Sahagún, 1368 in Jaén, 1387 in Sepúlveda, 1392 in Córdoba, 1394 in Zamora, and 1405 in Soria. In the early fifteenth century, Seville’s cathedral chapter and city council together paid the salary of a master of grammar. By one means or another, Juan Alfonso’s early studies prepared him well enough to fare admirably at the University of Salamanca, where he arrived probably in 1407.

If Juan entered the city of Salamanca from the south, he would have crossed the Tormes River via the Roman bridge, the only access to the city from the south side of the river. Salamanca was a less prominent city than Segovia, but it was still fairly important. Its markets benefited from its location on a river and between a major grazing region and a rich agricultural region. One indication of the city’s stature and condition in the early fifteenth century is that the infante Don Juan ordered that Salamanca’s main commercial streets be paved with stones because the animals pulling goods had a difficult time navigating the muddy thoroughfares. During Juan de Segovia’s time there, the cathedral itself (known today as the “old cathedral” because there is an adjoining, newer one) was still under construction. As late as
1392, its main tower was not yet complete. The cathedral was closely tied to the nearby university. Many students and university personnel no doubt lived on the surrounding streets. Curiously, if they were renters, their rent was determined annually by a group of university officials, regardless of who owned the property. Juan might well have called this area of the city home during this time there.

In any case, his association with the university was a long one. He spent twenty-four years there, from 1407 to 1431, interrupted only by two trips to Rome on university business in 1421–22 and 1427–28. Some years he was both student and professor, since he began teaching while still studying for his masters degree (magister). In Salamanca he received his training as a theologian and gained considerable leadership experience as well. He enjoyed the respect of his colleagues, who trusted him with embassies to the royal and papal courts on the university’s behalf. It is reasonable to assume that a fair number of these colleagues were also friends. He undoubtedly made the acquaintance of a number of leading thinkers who passed through the studium during those years. By the end of his time there, he had also secured benefices for himself in prominent cathedrals. In short, during the Salamanca years of his life, Juan Alfonso de Segovia was well trained, well regarded, and well launched on a promising career.

The University of Salamanca in the Early Fifteenth Century

As an elderly man, Segovia wrote with pride of his alma mater. However, the university was struggling during his years there, enough to make one wonder if his praise of the university was prompted by feelings of defensiveness after having such long contact with intellectuals associated with fine universities across Europe. In the early fifteenth century, the studium in Salamanca was in a precarious but promising position. It had endured financial, staffing, and enrollment problems for several generations. Its resources were lagging behind its French counterparts because the Avignon popes (1309–78) generally favored French universities in their patronage. Vicente Beltrán de Heredia noted that the professoriate seemed to consist largely of part-time fac-
ulty, often only holding a bachelors degree, and that those few professors of renown who appear in the records left for another position without spending much time in Salamanca.\textsuperscript{18} Benigno Hernández Montes suggested that Juan’s impassioned call for easier access to libraries, which appears at the end of his Donatio, the testament in which he described the contents of his library and where he wanted items to go after his death, betrays his own memories of difficulties obtaining books while he was a student at Salamanca.\textsuperscript{19} In any case, Juan clearly suspected that his alma mater, which he had not visited for decades, might still lack a suitable facility for storing the books he was donating. He specified that if the university had no such building or would not commission one, the books were to go to the cathedral library instead.\textsuperscript{20} These indications do not suggest a thriving, prominent intellectual center. Nevertheless, Salamanca’s fortunes were on the rise, partly because the Great Schism (1378–1417) favored the university, since patronage was a way for rival popes to seek legitimacy.\textsuperscript{21} One sign of this reversal was that a university in danger of not surviving at the beginning of the fifteenth century had recovered enough to loan 100,000 maravedis to the Crown in 1475.\textsuperscript{22}

In Juan’s time there, the university’s prestige and its support from Crown and curia were rising, and it was already a magnet that drew influential people to its halls.\textsuperscript{23} Members of the urban oligarchies increasingly found that university training was a requisite preparation for a position of influence in the administrative machinery of Castile’s Trastámara dynasty, which had come to power just a few decades earlier. In earlier generations, arms and wealth were sufficient to guarantee one’s position in society. Prominent men were now expected to know certain things, especially things pertaining to the law, and if possible to possess a university degree.\textsuperscript{24} Accordingly, Salamanca’s graduates included people like the prolific scholar Alonso de Cartagena (ca. 1385–1456) of the prominent Burgalese 	extit{converso} family. He studied canon and civil law at Salamanca for about ten years, served as a judge in the royal court, represented Juan II at Basel, and was bishop of Burgos from 1435 to 1456.\textsuperscript{25} Rodrigo Sánchez de Arévalo (1404–70) also studied law at Salamanca and went on to a career that included serving as an ambassador for both Juan II and Enrique IV.\textsuperscript{26} The
Dominican Lope de Barrientos (1382–1469), one of the most influential men of his time, was at various times a professor of theology at Salamanca, confessor to Juan II, tutor for the heir prince Enrique IV, and chief chancellor under Enrique IV. The founder of the house of Alba, Gutierre Gómez Álvarez de Toledo, was studying at Salamanca in 1393. At that time, he was the archdeacon of Guadalajara. Future promotions would make him the bishop of Palencia and the archbishop of Seville and later Toledo. Along the way, the ambitious prelate arranged the murder of rival Juan Serrano. In 1411, Pope Benedict XIII granted a request by Fernando Díaz de Toledo to be promoted to the doctorate in medicine at Salamanca without having finished his required courses for a Bachelor of Arts degree, provided he pass an exam. Probably the success of Díaz’s request was at least partly due to the fact that he was the personal physician of Fernando de Antequera, co-regent during the minority of Juan II and one of the most powerful men in the kingdom. These five are representative of many more Salamanca men with close ties to the royal court and other powerful groups. The papal registers contain numerous petitions by faculty to be released temporarily from their duties in order to serve in the royal court or papal curia, and by students to retain their financial support while away on similar business. The documents from the university’s own claustro, which handled routine business and staffing issues, are extant only from 1464 on, but the records reveal that absences and substitutions continued to be frequent decades after Juan de Segovia’s time in Salamanca. But if the faculty was less stable at Salamanca than elsewhere, it was nevertheless drawn from a cadre of Castile’s most influential men. Both the student body and the faculty counted among their ranks many of the kingdom’s most powerful and prominent.

The University of Salamanca had a respectable profile internationally as well, which may have given Juan de Segovia a certain satisfaction when he traveled outside Castile. Years later, he proudly recalled that when he was incorporated at the Council of Basel, he was directed to a place of honor in the assembly, the place next to the delegation from the University of Paris. About a century before Juan left for Basel, Pope John XXII granted universal validity to degrees from Sala-
manca. Its graduates were free to teach in any other university in Western Europe without submitting to an additional exam. Prior to this 1333 bull, they could teach everywhere except Paris or Bologna. Pope Martin V’s 1422 constitutions for the university referred to it as “one of four studia generalia under the apostolic order,” thereby recognizing a status it shared only with Paris, Bologna, and Oxford. Documents reveal a considerable contact between people at the Castilian university and other centers of learning. For example, by 1429 bachelor in theology Alvaro Martínez had studied in Oxford, Salamanca, and Lérida. He requested permission from the pope to receive his masters degree from the Roman curia. In 1403 Salamanca’s faculty included a professor of rhetoric, Bartolomé Sánchez, who came from Fermo, an Italian city on the Adriatic, despite his Spanish surname. Juan Castellanos, a Dominican who was bishop of Salamanca from 1382 to 1385, held a masters in theology from Paris. In the early fifteenth century, a Portuguese Augustinian named Juan de Santo Tomás was teaching theology at Salamanca. Several faculty members at the studium participated actively in the Council of Constance (1414–18). Even before leaving Salamanca, Juan de Segovia was exposed to international intellectual currents.

Further evidence of esteem for Salamanca’s studium appears in scattered references in unexpected places, many related to aspirations to social ascent. Sometime during the pontificate of Eugene IV (1431–47), an anonymous graduate in canon law wrote a guidebook for use in confession in which he sometimes enlisted the fact that he heard a certain view taught at Salamanca as a support for its validity. Toward the end of the fifteenth century, Pedro Sánchez de Berrío gave his son a sum of money in his will and specified that he could use it only for study at the University of Salamanca. No doubt a degree from Salamanca was worth Pedro’s money and his son’s time. In the 1480s Segovia’s cathedral chapter was engaged in a dispute over a seat on this body. The 1488 arbitration agreement stipulated that a chapter member’s rank would correspond to how long he had been in the position, with the significant exception that if the canon had a doctorate or licentiate from either Salamanca or Valladolid, this would automatically place him above those with even the highest seniority. Salamanca
provided attractive advancement opportunities for the nobility, as well. A fascinating letter written in 1477 from the bishop of Coria to the duke of Alba details the machinations the bishop had recently undertaken in Rome on behalf of the duke’s son, Don Gutierre Álvarez de Toledo, to secure for him the position of maestrescuela at Salamanca. He suggested that the duke persuade one contender to withdraw his bid for the position by offering him another benefice instead, since “those smaller benefices” added nothing to a man of his son’s stature anyway, and the maestrescuela position was so valuable that it warranted such a measure.44

If the studium’s fortunes were on the rise, this was due at least in part to support from the papacy. Beginning with the Avignon pope Benedict XIII (1394–1417), who was Spanish and had numerous ties in Castile, popes were good to the University of Salamanca.45 In an era in which the monarchy was weakened by succession disputes and restless nobles, and the papacy was weakened by the schism and its aftermath, the university benefited by both these powers’ efforts to court its loyalties. Typically the pope’s favors to the university were financial, as in 1416, when Benedict XIII conceded to the University of Salamanca two-thirds of the rentas de fábrica in the nearby towns of La Almuña, Baños, and Peña del Rey.46 Sometimes a favor bestowed was both economic and political, as when Martin V exempted the Colegio de San Bartolomé and its personnel from the jurisdiction of the local bishop and also from the tributes imposed by the nuncios and apostolic legates.47 Another university body to benefit directly from papal intervention on its behalf was its hospital, benefactors of which were assured indulgences in exchange for their generosity.48 In addition, countless individuals either studying or teaching in Salamanca, including Juan de Segovia, relied for their income on benefices in cathedral and parish churches both within Castile and beyond its borders.

As powerful parties in the kingdom competed for influence, the studium was often caught in one power struggle or another. Studying in this atmosphere might have prompted Segovia to serious thought about issues of power and persuasion at an early age. As we shall see, his earliest extant work concerned control over the university. Some scholars have noted the growing power of the popes over the studium
at Salamanca in the early fifteenth century and contrasted this with earlier times, in which the king's power was stronger. Certainly Castilian king Juan II, whose reign was marked by armed conflicts between different factions of nobles, was concerned to retain some power over affairs at the *studium* in the face of an increasingly powerful pope. In 1411, following the issuance of new constitutions for the university by the pope, the king named *conservatores* of his own, charged with keeping the peace at the university and defending its interests. At the same time, he criticized the existing *conservatores* for not having done their job. In 1421, he ordered the royal *conservatores* to respond to the accusation of negligence. As María Isabel del Val Valdivieso has argued, king and pope struggled over whose officials had the authority to oversee and protect the university.\(^50\)

Another incident occurred in 1432 in which the pope intervened in tensions among Castile's elite that were of great importance to the king. Although it did not directly involve the *studium*, the case serves to illustrate the high stakes power struggles between king and pope. This one unfolded because Juan II ordered the bishop of Palencia, Don Gutierre Álvarez de Toledo, imprisoned for threatening the peace and security of the kingdom. The bishop had participated in the military campaign against Granada a year earlier and had been entrusted with holding a defensive position. Instead, he and some allies decided to launch offensive campaigns. These failed, causing the bishop and his troops to need reinforcements and angering the powerful constable Álvaro de Luna. These tensions between Gutierre Álvarez de Toledo (and supporters) and Álvaro de Luna escalated until it was discovered that the bishop and his circle had conspired to murder Álvaro de Luna. The king was so concerned that this chaos in the upper ranks of his leadership would spell military disaster that he was forced to return to Castile to address the problem. Not unreasonably, he imprisoned Gutierre Álvarez de Toledo, who appealed to the pope to intervene.\(^51\) Pope Eugene IV obligingly delegated to the archbishop of Santiago and the bishops of Plasencia and Astorga the responsibility of conducting an investigation. If the charges turned out to be true, they were to free him from jail, place him under ecclesiastical custody, and refer the case to the curia. If he was innocent, they were to see to it that he
was freed. If the plot against Álvaro de Luna had succeeded, it would not have been the first assassination orchestrated by the bishop of Palencia, who had a long history of being a menace to the peace of the kingdom. What strikes the modern reader is that the pope chose to investigate and intervene in such a case. With a pope so willing to involve himself in high-level affairs within Castile, Juan II was prudent to show concern to protect his traditional authority, including over an important center like the *studium* at Salamanca.

Nevertheless, the increasing power of the pope over affairs at Salamanca did not always represent a challenge to the power of the king. Often enough, the popes acted to bolster royal authority. Along with the rest of the kingdom, the university sometimes benefited from the popes’ support of the king against troublemaking prelates and general malefactors throughout the kingdom. In September of 1423, for example, Pope Martin V agreed to a request by Castilian king Juan II to appoint the bishops of León and Salamanca as judges in proceedings against prelates and other clergy who had occupied royal lands or seized royal rents or jurisdictions from the Crown. Three years later the same pope gave the archbishop of Toledo the right to intervene in cases in which archbishops, bishops, and other ecclesiastical leaders had given controversial judgments in cases within the dominion of the Crown. Apparently still struggling with the problem of unruly prelates, Juan II returned with another request to the pope in 1430, namely, that he be allowed to imprison any master, prior, commander, or other person from any of the military orders who acted against the king or the peace of the kingdom, or committed any crime that qualified as *lèse majesté*. The pope also granted the king the right to imprison anyone who had threatened the monarch or the peace and then hidden within the territorial jurisdiction of the military orders. Chaos and lawlessness make normal affairs as difficult in a university as in the rest of society. Popes often bolstered royal authority and thus helped to quell the disturbances in this tumultuous era of Castilian history.

Apart from the political issues facing the wider kingdom, Salamanca’s *studium* may have had its share of intrigues and power plays. In his *Sacramental*, a pastoral work on the sacraments that was written between 1421 and 1423 for priests, Clemente Sánchez de Vercial...
alerted his readers to the sins most commonly committed by various groups. A graduate of Salamanca, he asserted that the primary way in which professors sinned was by obtaining their degrees by means of bribes and entreaties (ruegos) to other doctors. Also, in their pride, they regarded their students and the simple with disdain. They cared less about saying helpful things than about saying subtle things that would earn them accolades, and thus they wasted their students’ time. Furthermore, they taught things that were against their consciences in order to please others. They silenced the truth to avoid being held accountable for their wrongdoing. And for the right price, they gave false counsel.58

Juan de Segovia never commented on the political conflicts or dishonorable behavior by professors in Salamanca during his years there. Nonetheless, he later showed himself to be prepared to stand on principle, especially when it had to do with someone (such as the pope) overstepping the proper boundaries of his power. This early period of his life may have prompted him to think hard about how power is exercised and what good governance entailed. Quite possibly it left him wary regarding unchecked power invested in an individual, whether king, pope, or archbishop.

Juan de Segovia at Salamanca

In surveying Juan de Segovia’s trajectory as a thinker, into the Basel years and beyond, it is clear that his endeavors reflected certain intellectual proclivities and social concerns that appear repeatedly throughout his work. For example, one of the major characteristics scholars have noted in his thought was a marked biblical orientation, especially in his works at Basel.59 Another central aspect scholars have noticed was an affinity for Franciscan thinkers. Richard Southern, for example, simply assumed that Juan was, in fact, a Franciscan, and at least two scholars, Uta Fromherz and Ottokar Bonmann, considered the possibility strong enough to warrant careful attention.60 Both concluded that he was not. Perhaps the strongest argument that Juan Alfonso de Segovia did not belong to the mendicant order is that papal