



DARK HOURS OF THE NIGHT (1941-1945)

Rolando Delagoza and Jesus Ma. Cavanna

THE TRAGEDY OF WAR OVERTAKES THE VINCENTIANS

On the feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 1941, ominous news reached our shores: Japan had treacherously attacked Pearl Harbor. War between Japan and America was on. At midnight of that same day, Japanese bombers destroyed American airfields around Manila. Terror and commotion reigned that night. Blackouts, air-raid sirens, antiaircraft fireworks, and bomb explosions rocked the city. The students of San Carlos Seminary in Mandaluyong had to be sent back to their homes the very next day. The Seminary building was occupied by American personnel of the demolished air base, and the Fathers transferred to the Vincentian Central House in Manila. From there they witnessed with dismay the bombing of the historic Walled City of Manila, which General MacArthur had declared an “Open City”, precisely to spare it from wanton destruction.

Besides these and similar other frightening incidents in the following years of the Japanese occupation (1941-1943), life was relatively normal for the Vincentians in Manila and in the provinces except in Cebu. Although classes were interrupted for some weeks during the days of turmoil, these resumed as soon as circumstances allowed. The Vincentians, faithful to their mission, quietly did their work amidst the people, whom they did not abandon in the dark hours of their trial. The Fathers continued their work inside and outside the Seminary. In Mandaluyong, for example, besides their classes in the Seminary, some Fathers took on the heavy work of spiritual ministrations to the poor and neglected inmates of the



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Psychopathic Hospital, and the orphan children, delinquent youth, and old folks of the Welfareville Government institutions, as well as in the Prison for women. There they established “praesidium” units of the Legion of Mary to bring lay helpers into their apostolic works. They were also involved in the White Cross mission of attending to children of tubercular patients. On July 21, 1942, the Provincial, Fr. Tejada, reviewed the prospects of the Philippine Province in the face of prevailing circumstances. He noted the uncertainties, the sufferings, and insecurities that prevailed in various parts of the Philippines. He spoke about the situation in the Vincentian House in Manila, because he had been there with his Council and several other confreres. He described how the House had become a raid shelter. Many families sought refuge there, as if – he noted – it were a Noah’s ark, admitting under its roof whomever and whatever was running away from danger.

During the occupation years, in the provinces, our confreres in Jaro and Lipa, were a little better off. However, this was not the case in Cebu. Here the Archbishop’s palace, the Sisters’ *Colegio de la Inmaculada* and a great portion of the city were burnt to the ground. Fortunately, the Seminary building was still standing, and so also was the *Asilo de la Milagrosa* of the Sisters. The Fathers were sent to various places; some were transferred with the seminarians to Dalaguete, a town south of Cebu; others remained in the Seminary, and the rest went to Mandawe or to Bogo.

The Vincentians had some premonitions and fears about what might happen, so the Superiors decided to make some special acts of prayer and penance such as the daily Stations of the Cross, in order to ask for special help from heaven. Father Tejada, the Provincial, foresaw many things, based on reports he received and observations he himself made. Little did he suspect that he himself would be one of the innocent victims of those terrible days.

The Philippine Vincentians almost foundered during World War II. They lost 22 members: 13 Priests and 5 brothers perished in violent death; 4 confreres died from natural causes during the same period.

It is beyond us to assign the reasons for the unbelievable, cruel assassination of so many Spanish Vincentians by the Japanese soldiers or by the guerillas. Mercifully, some died quickly, others suffered



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slow torture and agony. Known details of their deaths serve as fearful historical markers of the Japanese occupation, samples of the excesses of a desperate pagan soldiery that was defeated.

VINCENTIAN VICTIMS OF THE WAR

Most of our Vincentian victims met their deaths in Manila during the war of liberation in 1945. Two died violently in the provinces during the Japanese occupation: Fr. Alfonso Saldaña at the beginning of the Japanese occupation in 1942, in Cebu; and Fr. Aniano Gonzales, at the end of the Japanese occupation, in 1944, in Baguio.

The First Victim, Fr. Alfonso Saldana, CM¹

On account of the war, the Archbishop of Cebu had ordered the Major Seminary to be transferred to Dalaguete. Fr. Alfonso Saldaña, the Seminary Rector since April 1937, with three other Fathers and their seminarians, were accommodated there temporarily.

Not long afterwards, a sad and unfortunate incident between a Spaniard and a Filipino took place. The Filipino died near the Seminary house. In retaliation, on the night of September 17, 1942, Filipino *guerrilleros* (underground forces waging war against the Japanese) invaded the Seminary. They took the Spanish Priests – the Rector and others – to the mountains. Convinced later of the Vincentians' innocence in the sad affair, the *guerrilleros* allowed the Fathers to return either to Dalaguete, or to their vacation house in Mantalongon on September 19. The following day, September 20, two men, with revolvers, demanded that Fr. Saldaña go with them. The good Father had surmised from the beginning that they wanted to kill him. Before leaving the house, he made his sacramental reconciliation; he had been preparing for death since the first assault, and during the long marches they had been forced to do. Resigned to God's

¹Information about Fr. Alfonso Saldaña's death is taken from Manuel A. Gracia MSS, "Ad Cleri Disciplinam" and "Nuestras Victimas," in ACMF.



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Will he followed his executioners. They killed him some four kilometers from Mantalongon, by the end of the road going to Badian. He was shot several times – one shot was aimed at the right temple. According to some references, he died forgiving his murderers. They left his corpse unburied, and stripped of the habit. Some good friends found it later, in a state of decomposition. They buried him on September 25. When the news reached the Fathers they could not even go to bless his grave, since they were confined in the house, and forbidden to leave the place under penalty of death.

Fr. Saldaña's grave was on a slope, by the action of the rains, the skull was released and washed away some meters from the grave. In mid-April 1943, the Fathers and some friends brought it to the chapel of Mantalongon; they placed his remains in a box, and buried it in the sacristy behind the main altar of the chapel.

The Second Victim, Fr. Aniano Gonzalez, CM ²

Fr. Aniano Gonzalez, a veteran Vincentian in the Philippines, had assiduously labored for 25 years in the Seminaries of Calbayog and of San Pablo, Laguna. Finally, his health gave way and he was sent to Baguio in 1940 to recover. At the same time, he was to attend to the Daughters of Charity as their Chaplain in *Villa Milagrosa*, a rest house for sick sisters. He was joined there by his brother, Fr. Prisciano Gonzalez, C.M. who also went for reasons of health to the Pines City. By 1944, however, Fr. Prisciano was back in the Seminary of Manila.

²Information about this and the following Vincentian victims are taken from *Anales*, LIV (Marzo 1946), Num. 3: "Numero Extraordinario – Dedicado a las victimas vincencianas de la catastrofe de Filipinas," where direct narrations from eyewitnesses are reproduced in the testimonies given by Fathers Manuel Gracia, C.M., Maximo Junquera, C.M., Antonino Mayoral, C.M., Angel Lucia, C.M., Sor Delfina Abaurre, D.C., Sor Petra Cabodevila, D.C., Sor Consuelo Severino, D.C., Sor Maria Uandasan, D.C., Fr. Pedro Martinez, C.M., and Fr. Martin Legarra, O.R.S.A. About Fr. Aniano Gonzalez, C.M., cf. *Anales*, LIV (Marzo 1946), 3-6.



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On September 9, 1944, at 5 o'clock in the morning, the Japanese Military Police came noisily to *Villa Milagrosa* to seize and arrest Fr. Aniano who had been accused of keeping a hidden short-wave radio in his room. The accuser was an Igorot house boy of the family of a certain Spaniard, Mr. Valles. In revenge for having been beaten, the house boy had informed the Japanese that his master, as well as Fr. Aniano and two others, had a clandestine radio. During the search no evidence could be found to support the false accusation. Still, the Japanese tied Fr. Aniano up, and brought him to prison. The *Cold Store* in Baguio City was used as a prison, and there for 15 days, Fr. Aniano was harassed, and tortured during the long and repeated interrogations. Everyday, in that prison, the good Sister Superior of *Villa Milagrosa*, Sor Delfina Abaurre, brought Fr. Aniano something to eat; but practically nothing of that food reached his hands. He was given common miserable food like the rest of the prisoners. The poor Father who had been suffering for 20 years of some stomach ailment, was exhausted, and begged to be brought to the Hospital.

With some sense of humanity, the Japanese allowed it. Fr. Aniano stayed in *Notre Dame Hospital* for 14 days, during which time he prepared for the death which he saw was coming. In the Hospital he made his sacramental confession to the zealous Msgr. Jose Billiet, C.I.C.M., Apostolic Prefect of the Mountain Province, who visited him. After 14 days, he was brought back to prison. The harsh treatments, his own sickness, and lack of nourishment weakened him so much that after some days, he was unable to eat. When they brought him his miserable diet, the few crumbs fell from his hands to the ground. At times, he begged for God's sake, to be lifted up the little window to breathe some air. His bed was the hard cement floor. At times he asked for water, and there was no one to give it to him. One day he tried to raise himself up, gasping for breath. He felt dizzy and fell, striking his head on the corner of the hard wall. For half an hour, he was in agony, bathed in his trickling blood. Finally he expired. This was on October 21, 1944.

The Sisters were notified at 11 o'clock at night that Fr. Aniano had died, but, insisted the Japanese, "not out of ill treatment."

With Christian charity, the Belgian Canoness Sisters at St. Augustine arranged to celebrate the funeral of Fr. Aniano in their



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own chapel. The Vice Consul, with a great crowd of people, specially from the small Spanish colony in Baguio, came to attend the funeral. Many were overheard to have said: “he was a martyr”. There was even a representation from the *Japanese Imperial Army* who came to express their condolences! Three Daughters of Charity and a Dominican Father accompanied the coffin to the cemetery. Fr. Aniano Gonzalez was buried in the same place where his confrere, Fr. Lope Legido had been previously buried.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE VINCENTIANS OF THE MANILA SEMINARY³

The school year 1944-45 began as usual in June, 1944 with 43 Major seminarians and around 70 Minors. Fr. Zacarias Subiñas was Rector. The Faculty Fathers were Luis Angulo, Gabriel Rodriguez, Prisciano Gonzalez, Crispin Gomez, Prudencio Mayoral, Antonio Gomez, Antonio Mayoral, Teotimo Pacis, and Jesus Cavanna. There were also cleric scholastics, Bro. Wenceslao Yonson, and Br. Francis Bogacz, and the well-loved Mandaluyong Brother-Coadjutor, Rafael Martinez, who had been in the Seminary of San Carlos (Mandaluyong) since 1915.

On August 19, 1944, the Provincial, Fr. Tejada came to bring the official news that the Japanese army was to occupy the Seminary building. On September 12, classes were stopped and the seminarians returned to their homes. Still Fr. Prisciano Gonzalez was able to preach the Annual Retreat to the Major seminarians before they left.

On September 21, 1944 the first American air attack over Manila harbor took place at 9:20 a.m. It was repeated in the same day at 11:30 a.m., at 3:00 p.m. and at 5:00 p.m. The war of liberation was on.

On September 23, Fr. Luis Angulo left the Seminary to reside in Meycawayan, Bulacan. The Japanese army began to occupy the Seminary. The Fathers were confined to the East wing of the building.

³Cf. *Anales, op. cit.*, 13-28.



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Two days later, the Provincial, Fr. Tejada, expressed his desire that somebody would remain in the Seminary, but allowed each one to look for shelter wherever he might find it. Fr. Pacis and Bro. Yonson left for Malolos, intending to gather some seminarians as Chaplain of some Sisters of Charity who had gone there from various Houses in Manila. Fr. Antonio Gomez left for *White Cross (Quezon Preventorium)* in San Juan del Monte, Fr. Gabriel Rodriguez went to attend to the poor patients of the *Psychopathic Hospital* and the inmates of the *Prison for Women*, in Mandaluyong. Fr. Cavanna went to the *Welfareville Institution (Children's Village)* to attend to the juvenile delinquents, and children of the *Orphanages*. He also helped out at the *Nurseries* for lepers' children from Culion and the *Home of the Aged and Infirm*. The Pastoral work of Fr. Gomez, Rodriguez and Cavanna in these Institutions was enormous. Everyday, an average of 7 to 13 patients died of hunger, sickness, and misery in these institutions. The last to leave the Seminary on October 11, 1944 was the Rector, Fr. Subiñas, who went to Hagonoy, Bulacan, with the plan of gathering some seminarians and giving classes there.

In the Mandaluyong Seminary remained only Frs. Prisciano Gonzalez, Crispin Gomez, Antonino Mayoral, and Brother Rafael Martinez. A 4th year Latin seminarian, a good and promising youth, Gumersindo Novero, had decided to stay with the Fathers.

The air attacks were becoming more frequent and violent by the end of October and during the whole month of November. On December 4 the Japanese Captain Tada ordered the Fathers to give the entire Seminary building to the army. He offered them a small house, apparently good enough for the time being. On Christmas day, the Japanese helped the Fathers transfer their belongings to the small house in San Juan del Monte, not far from the Seminary. On December 31 the Fathers went to inform the Archbishop of Manila, Mons. O'Doherty about their transfer.

On January 2, 1945, the Provincial, Fr. Tejada, came to visit the community of Mandaluyong in their new residence in San Juan.

On February 3 the American army was able to enter the city of Manila. This day marked the beginning of the liberation of the city. It also marked the beginning of the final catastrophe where hundreds and hundreds of civilians were to perish, trapped between the merciless and reckless bombings and cannonade of the liberators



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and the gunfire and bayonets of the cruel and desperate retreating enemy. The very next day, February 4, the Japanese army abandoned the Seminary, which was immediately looted and plundered by neighboring folks. More than a thousand people of all ages stripped the Seminary building of everything it had.

On February 7, the bombardment was formidable and put the city of Manila in flames. The following day, February 8, from 7 o'clock in the morning until noon, a duel of gunfire started from a machine-gun of the *guerrilleros* who were close to the house of the Fathers, and seven Japanese soldiers parapeted some 80 meters in front of the same house. The fight ceased at 12 o'clock. While the Fathers were taking their lunch, eight *guerrilleros* arrived, bringing along in a little cart their machine-gun, intending to fix it in the house. However, after taking some drinks, and inspecting the house, they changed their minds and left the house without fixing the machine-gun there. Their visit to the house had probably been noticed by the Japanese, or by the so-called *Makapilis* (Filipino armed bands, collaborating with the Japanese). The revenge was to come soon against the supposed friends of the *guerrilleros*. The Fathers however never suspected that anyone was to disturb them that night.

At 11:00 p.m., the town of Mandaluyong was aglow with big fires all around. Fr. Crispin woke Fr. Mayoral up to show him the frightening flames. Then, Fr. Mayoral heard firm steps in the street. He saw two men stopping before the exterior gate of the house. With the help of a flashlight they saw the gate and opened it violently. They came under the window from which Fr. Mayoral and Fr. Crispin were looking. One of them said aloud "*Hali ka!*" (in Tagalog, meaning "come down here"). The poor Fathers, deeply frightened, were unable to utter a word. As the Fathers did not answer, the two men (perhaps they were Japanese or "makapilis" or just brigands) angrily smashed into the ground something that sounded like glassware.

Over and over they called "*hali ka, hali ka*". Because of the noise, Fr. Prisciano woke up, and said at once. "There we go!". The three Fathers deliberated for a few moments in the little hall about what to do, and then decided to go down. Brother Martinez and the seminarian Novero were sleeping in the ground floor. While they were going down through the stairs at the back of the house,



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once more the criminals shouted “*hali ka!*” Impelled by a terror that seized him, Fr. Mayoral, without a word, instinctively ran in the opposite direction, and out through the garden’s back gate. He ran behind the neighboring houses; and crawling amidst the tall grass of the field, sought the nearby brook, until he reached a clearing. While escaping, he distinctly heard, in the midst of the night, four gunshots. He could not tell whether these were aimed at him, or at his confreres. . . Most probably, the four innocent victims, Fr. Prisciano Gonzalez, Fr. Crispin Gomez, Brother Rafael Martinez, and the Seminarian Gumersindo Novero were killed there and then by the murderers.

Still crawling behind trees and bushes, Fr. Mayoral arrived at the house of a friend, Dr. Genato, where he was attended to and comforted. These friends advised him not to return to the house until the next morning. But Fr. Mayoral could not sleep. At 1:30 a.m. he decided to go back to find out what had happened. He could see enormous fires all around. Stealthily he reached the house of Dr. Josefa Estrada which was near the Fathers’ house; forty meters away, he saw the flicker of a cigarette. Were they waiting for him? He advanced 3 meters more, and then he heard and counted 15 gunshots, probably pointed at him. At once, he turned back, and retired to the house of Dr. Josefa Estrada where the 30 persons had been gathered, and were now asleep. Fr. Mayoral could not rest. He said one rosary after another, and stayed nervously awake until 6:30 a.m. The next day, February 9, cautiously, he returned to the Fathers’ house, and found no one there. Everything was in disarray: clothes were scattered in the little hall, and utensils of the Brother were strewn along the stairs. The little house was wrapped in ominous silence.

With immense sorrow, Fr. Antonino Mayoral went to the Holy Cross Sanctuary of the Dominican Fathers, not far away from the place. They received him with great charity, as a real brother. The prior of the convent sent some good and pious persons back to the house occupied by the Vincentians to take whatever could be salvaged from there, and bring these to the Dominican convent. (That house belonged to a certain Dr. Cabrezas, who during the war, had gone to Pagsanjan, Laguna with his family. They were glad to know that it had been occupied by our Fathers).



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Fr. Mayoral had developed a malignant fever which lasted for several days. The Dominican Fathers solicitously cared for him in their convent, until he recovered and retired to the *White Cross*.

The American forces entered the town of Mandaluyong on February 9, bringing to the people salvation and food. But . . . nothing more was heard about the victims after that grim night. Some said they were tied, killed and their corpses thrown into one of the houses on fire. Others insist that they were thrown alive into the flames. Still others guess that they were massacred together with 35 other unfortunate victims in the Psychopathic Hospital of Mandaluyong. Although all these are just rumors, the first conjecture seems the most probable.

THE CATASTROPHE OF THE VINCENTIAN CENTRAL HOUSE OF SAN MARCELINO⁴

The Community of San Marcelino at the coming of the Japanese was composed of the Provincial, Fr. Jose Tejada, (who had been residing there since 1932), Fr. Estanislao Araña (since 1920), Fr. Adolfo Soto (since 1939), the Parish priest, Fr. Jose Fernandez (since 1922), his coadjutor, Fr. Jose Aguirreche (since 1922), the Master of novices, Fr. Maximo Juguera (since 1935), Fr. Jeronimo Pampliega (since 1938), and Fr. Elias Gonzales (since 1937). Fr. Julio Ruiz, of the Seminary of Lipa, joined them at the beginning of the Japanese occupation, in 1942. By 1943, Fr. Luis Ejeda who was rather sickly had come from the Seminary of Jaro. Also in San Marcelino were the Brothers Coadjutor, Antolin Marcos Pardo, (since 1898), Valentin Santidrian (since 1920). In 1943, Bro. Gregorio Indurain came from the Seminary of Naga. To this Community also belonged Fr. Anselmo Andres although he had been confined in the San Juan de Dios Hospital since 1936. The only ones who were saved from the catastrophe were Fr. Estanislao Araña (who had remained in La Concordia, as Chaplain of the Sisters, since February 3), and Fr.

⁴Ibid., 29-55.



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Maximo Juguera (who had left also San Marcelino for St. Anthony's Orphanage in Legarda St., with the Franciscan Sisters). The rest of the Community became innocent victims of the cruel war.

From March 3 to December 15, 1942 His Excellency Bishop Taguchi, of Osaka, and chief liaison officer for the mutual intelligence of Philippine Church authorities with the Japanese Imperial Army, resided with the Vincentians in the Central House of San Marcelino as guest of honor. In September of the first year of the Japanese Occupation, the *San Vicente de Paul* church was used for the preparatory feast of the petition to the Vatican for the beatification of the noble and heroic Japanese Catholic, Justo Takayama Ukon. Ukon had been expelled from Nagasaki for his religion, and had died in Manila at the beginning of the 17th century. During this celebration, photos and movie films were taken, some of which showed the beautiful church of San Marcelino. These were used in the Japanese Propaganda in the provinces, and in Japan itself. But during the hours of the final disaster, nothing of these good relations which the Vincentians had with the Japanese were of any help.

Two thirds of the Vincentian Central House of San Marcelino was occupied by the Japanese in June, 1944. This forced the young Jesuit scholastics and Professors who had been accommodated there for one year, to leave the place. The Japanese troops were entirely separated from the Fathers through partition walls. The Japanese kept besides big reserves of food, large deposits of ammunition. Obviously, the Vincentians foresaw the great risks the presence of these ammunitions presented to the people in the house, especially when the liberation of Manila would come. But where could they take better shelter than in the strong edifice of their own residence? So, although the Provincial gave the Fathers permission to seek safer refuge elsewhere, the majority remained, preferring to entrust their fate to Divine Providence, specially Fr. Fernandez and Fr. Aguirreche who considered it their duty to stay with their parishioners in San Marcelino.

The American troops entered Manila on February 3, and liberated their countrymen who were concentrated in the University of Santo Tomas. In fury and despair, military orders were issued to the Japanese army, to kill all civilians in Manila, to gather them in houses that were to be put on fire with incendiary bombs. Those



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who would try to flee would be shot with machine-guns already set up in the streets. In many places in Manila these inhuman orders were fulfilled to the letter. To be fair, however, we should note that among the savage Japanese soldiers were found also some soldiers with noble hearts who, at their own risk, prevented and opposed such barbarous orders in order to save the lives of innocent people.

In San Marcelino, however, the Japanese did not spare children, or religious men, or even poor Chinese fellow orientals. They had sworn: “The Americans might come in, but you will not see them . . .”

On the evening of February 3, when the bombardment of Manila was beginning, the Vincentians were arrested in their own House, and confined to limited quarters in the ground floor: the Community dining hall, the kitchen, three rooms of the Brothers and the adjacent corridor. They were always under the watchful eyes of a sentinel who had a rifle and a bayonet. With the Fathers and Brothers there were also an old cook, a young, exceptionally bright, 1st year Minor seminarian, named Romeo Santos of the San Carlos Seminary of Mandaluyong, two small boys, acolytes of San Marcelino church, named Eusebio Quintana and N. Magno, and three houseboys. No one was allowed to go out, except one of the small acolytes, just to get some vegetables and food for the community meals from a small farmyard tended by some Chinese folks within the Vincentian grounds. These Chinese had been there already for some time, renting a small lot from the Vincentians, for their garden and poultry.

Thus the Vincentians and their companions were held incommunicado for six days. In the meantime, the shelling was growing in intensity from February 3 to 9th. The Americans, having come from the North, had already reached the South of Manila, crossing the Pasig river through a pontoon bridge at Nagtahan. They were almost at the gates of San Marcelino, having occupied Pandacan and part of *La Concordia*, in Paco.

The Japanese were maddened with despair. On February 9 the Americans occupied the Paco market. The shelling was formidable. At ten o'clock in the morning, the poor Chinese gardeners, frightened by the rain of falling bombs, sought refuge in our house. Some of them joined the group of the Vincentians, without realizing that the



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Japanese inside were more cruel than the shells outside. Only 2 Chinese, Tan Chiu and Co Ching, with 6 Filipinos decided to remain in their shelter in the garden.

The night of February 9, the Japanese ordered the Vincentians and the Chinese to take supper early. At around 10 or 11 o'clock the soldiers came. They tied up the Vincentians and the Chinese and took them through the corridor and out through the main door. First the Vincentians were lined up at the bank of a nearby brook *Estero de Balete* (tributary of the Pasig river). Then they were machine-gunned or bayoneted mercilessly by the soldiers. Their bodies were thrown into the *estero*. Afterwards, the Chinese group was similarly massacred. One of them, Ching Co, was wounded in the neck, but not mortally. He was thrown in together with the other bodies into the muddy *estero*. Overcoming great difficulties, he succeeded in crawling away stealthily, little by little, until he reached the Chinese shelter in the garden. There he found his two companions Tan Chiu and Co Ching still in hiding. After telling them about the whole tragedy, he left the shelter to seek refuge elsewhere. He was never seen again. But the two witnesses who heard the whole story from his lips, lived to narrate it in an interview with our historian, Fr. Manuel Gracia, who met them on March 26 of that same year (1945), in their dwelling place at Legarda St., no. 502, Sampaloc, Manila.

Those massacred were the six Vincentian Fathers, Jose Tejada, Luis Ejeda, Adolfo Soto, Julio Ruiz, Jose Fernandez and Jose Aguirreche; four Brothers Coadjutor, Antolin Marcos, Gregorio Indurain, Valentin Santidrian, and Alejandro Garcia; plus the minor seminarian Ramon Santos, and one of the acolytes Eusebio Quintana? or N. Magno?). Their bodies were found some 20 days later – at the end of February – in a state of advanced decomposition, but still recognizable. The removal of the bodies was a work of combined charity involving Fr. Manuel Gracia, C.M., the American Army Chaplain, Fr. Ferdinand Evans, the good friend, Don Marino Olondriz and his sons, “Tito”, Jose, and the good Jesuits, Fr. Francisco Araneta, (a Scholastic), and five Juniors, Frs. Catalino Arevalo, Roque Ferriols, Expedito Jimenez, Lucio Codilla and Rodolfo Malasmas. The mortal remains of the ten Vincentians and the young seminarian and the acolytes were taken from the *estero*,



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and piously buried in a common grave, blessed by Fr. Manuel Gracia, C.M., in the ground between San Marcelino building and the Parish church. According to the Chinese eyewitness, before the time of the execution, the three houseboys and one of the acolytes were no longer in San Marcelino. It cannot be ascertained whether these four companions were also killed. The mortal remains were later transferred to the Crypt of San Vicente de Paul Parish Church.

The Manila Archbishop Most Rev. Michael J. O'Doherty who knew Fr. Jose Tejada well as a close collaborator in many affairs of the Archdiocese, wrote this letter to the Superior of the Vincentians, on March 2, 1945.

“Having ascertained the tragic death of Very Rev. Fr. Jose Tejada, C.M., the worthy Visitor of the Congregation of the Mission in the Philippines, who, together with his confreres, succumbed in the savage hecatomb in one of the days of last February, we wish to take this opportunity to express our sincere condolence for such an irreparable as well as sorrowful loss, not only for the Congregation of the Mission but also for the Archdiocese of Manila. We are stressing in these short lines the inappreciable services which Very Rev. Fr. Jose Tejada has given to the Archdiocese of Manila on several occasions but in a very special way in his capacity as President of the Matrimonial Tribunal, Archdiocesan Consultor, and as Secretary of the Administration of the *Hospicio de San Jose*.

His devotion in complying with his duties, and the good judgment with which he has proceeded in his actuations in the said positions, is an honor to the Congregation and for those of us who still are working in the vineyard of the Lord. May God grant him an eternal reward.”

EPILOGUE OF THE CATASTROPHE OF SAN MARCELINO

After the cruel massacre of these innocent victims, the Japanese soldiers in San Marcelino remained in that big building, to fight their last desperate stand against the oncoming American forces. The Central House and the adjacent Church were strongly built; and



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although these were badly damaged by the constant shelling, they were not reduced to ruins like many neighboring houses. When the Americans were almost at the gates, the Japanese, in a last fit of madness, set fire to the interior of the church and convent. In the church all the altars, images, benches, and flooring went up in flames. The Crypt, with its niches that kept the mortal remains of many Vincentians, was desecrated, and converted into a kitchen. The rich library of the convent was reduced to ashes, as was the Community oratory.

Although a fierce battle was still going on, the American troops seized the House of San Marcelino on February 24 and drove away the Japanese. Crossing dangerous zones and lines of battle, Fr. Araña and Fr. Juguera went to San Marcelino that day. They could find no trace of their confreres. Fr. Gracia went there again on the 26th, and came back with the same negative results. At the end of February, our Scholastic Bro. Wenceslao Yonson, who had remained with the American soldiers in the House together with a friend, Eduardo Altonaga, learned from an American soldier that the corpses of our victims had been seen in the *estero*, near the House. Fr. Gracia then began to take steps to remove from the *estero* those remains and bury them in holy ground, on March 6, 1945. May, they rest in peace! And may eternal light shine upon them!

OTHER VICTIMS OF THE CENTRAL HOUSE

Fr. Elias Gonzales, C.M.⁵

On February 1 or 2, Fr. Elias Gonzalez, C.M., Chaplain of the Canoness Sisters of St. Augustine (Belgian Sisters) of St. Theresa's College, advised the good Sisters to transfer with him to Assumption College, which he considered a safer place. The Chaplain of St. Paul College, Fr. Pedro Martinez, C.M., from the Seminary of Naga, also joined them and so did the Religious Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres.

⁵Ibid., 74-78.



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On February 9, at 5 p.m. a riotous crowd of Japanese soldiers, with fixed bayonets, came to frighten the poor Sisters, but did not do them any harm. One hour and a half later, several groups of soldiers came again and, with pointed bayonets, drove away all the Sisters, and all the men, women and children sheltered in the college, totaling some 250 people. They were forced to occupy the ground floor of a house so small that they could hardly sit down, or even move a little.

At this point, it seems that Fr. Elias foresaw his coming end. On February 11 he made a good general Confession to Fr. Pedro Martinez as if he were preparing for death. On that day, one of the Japanese sentinels of their prison came and violently pushed Fr. Elias Gonzalez out of the overcrowded prison. He was taken away, nobody knew where. He was never seen alive again. Some days after liberation, some Sisters of St. Paul de Chartres came from the Spanish *Hospital de Santiago*, in San Pedro, Makati, to visit the ruins of their college of St. Paul, in Herran St., Manila. There in the College grounds they found the corpse of Fr. Gonzalez already in a state of decomposition, but quite identifiable. His hands were tied at the back, and evidence pointed to a barbaric assassination. The good Sisters then narrated to Fr. Gonzalez's confrere, Fr. Pedro Martinez, what they believed to have been the cause of the killing of Fr. Elias Gonzalez. On February 11, a group of Japanese soldiers had wished to violate some of the Sisters of St. Paul. They did not succeed. When the Sisters told Fr. Elias about this, he advised them not to come out if the soldiers came again, but to inform him, and he would send them away. Fr. Elias knew how to speak Japanese. He had learned the language during the occupation years, and he had been able to preach in Japanese to a group of some 70 Catholic employees in the Japanese Imperial Army. When the soldiers returned to molest the Sisters, Fr. Elias came out and scolded them for their villainy. This was tantamount to signing his death sentence. Revenge came soon after. Fr. Elias Gonzalez, C.M., gave his life defending Christian chastity against pagan debauchery, (as it happened also to Bishop William Finnemann, SVD, Prefect Apostolic of Mindoro, who was killed by the Japanese for the same cause, some time before). "How beautiful is the chaste generation. . . Their memory is immortal because it is known by God and by men!" (cf. Wis. 4.1)



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Fr. Jeronimo Pampliega⁶

Since July, 1941, he belonged to the Community of San Marcelino. He had come from the Seminary of San Pablo, Laguna, with a throat ailment that rendered him unable to teach in the classroom. During the Japanese Occupation, 1941-1942, he remained in San Marcelino. By August, 1944, he had recovered so well from his ailment, that he was sent to the Seminary of Mandaluyong to replace Fr. Manuel A. Gracia who was called by the Manila Archbishop to take care of the Archives of the Archdiocese. But he stayed in Mandaluyong for a little over a month only. In October of that year he was sent to the College of *Santa Isabel* in the Walled City (*Intramuros*) as Chaplain of that Institution under the Daughters of Charity. From his observations of the war preparations being done by the Japanese in that last stronghold where they were to fight the Americans to the end with a desperate resistance, it seems that Fr. Pampliega knew for certain that his days were numbered. These forebodings he manifested to the Superioress of *Santa Isabel* College, Sor Juana Zabalza, D.C. Nevertheless, he did not recoil or abandon his post at the face of that imminent danger; he obeyed his Superiors and remained where they sent him.

On February 4, the Japanese went from house to house driving out people at the point of their bayonets. Women were sent to take refuge in the churches of *San Agustin*, *San Francisco* and the Manila Cathedral. Some men were brought to Fort Santiago. The next day, February 5, under pretext that the church of St. Augustine was the safer place, they forced everybody into the church. All the religious Friars of *Intramuros*, even those who were sick or weak in their old age, were expelled from their convents and gathered in the convent of *San Agustin*. Thousands of people were confined in the church, in the convent and in the gardens.

On February 7 began the destructive fire of all *Intramuros*. The fire that night was already reaching the College of *Santa Isabel*. Fr. Pampliega and the Sisters were forced to leave their house and take refuge with the immense crowd that was filling the grounds of *San*

⁶Ibid., 79-93; 124-134.



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Agustin. In the morning of February 8, the Japanese came to *San Agustin*. They gathered all the men, lay and religious, and brought them to Fort Santiago. All in all, Filipinos and Spaniards, lay people and religious numbered over one thousand. They remained in Fort Santiago until the afternoon of February 9. Fr. Pampliega was among the prisoners who were badly treated by the Japanese, and at the same time, exposed to the American shelling of Fort Santiago. The religious imprisoned were 16 Augustinians, 14 Franciscans, 6 Recollects, 6 Capuchin Fathers, and the Vincentian Fr. Pampliega. Among themselves and some pious laymen, they organized a continuous Rosary recitation. In the afternoon of February 9, the prisoners who survived were brought back to *San Agustin*. From the one thousand that entered Fort Santiago, Filipinos and Spaniards, only around 150 Spaniards returned to *San Agustin*. According to semi-official reports some 700 Filipinos were sprayed with gasoline and burned alive, while others were bayoneted by the Japanese, and others left to die of hunger.

The survivors remained imprisoned at *San Agustin*. At 5 o'clock in the morning of February 18, all men over 14 years of age were gathered in the church and then brought away, in spite of the tears and cries of the women and children who were left behind. The American bombardment was frightful. It was a miracle that on their way along the streets, no one was hit. The prisoners, including Fr. Pampliega, were taken away from *San Agustin* at 6 o'clock in the afternoon of Sunday, February 18. They were placed in a warehouse in front of the monastery of *Santa Clara*, not far from Fort Santiago.

The next day, at 8 a.m., February 19, 1945, a group of 150 prisoners were forced to leave the warehouse, and were brought near the Manila Cathedral. In the corner of Aduana and General Luna Streets, some ground walls of a projected palace for the Governor General in Spanish times had been converted by the Japanese into underground air raid shelters. There, 80 prisoners were forced to enter one shelter, all piled up on each other. Once they were inside, unable even to move, the cruel soldiers threw hand grenades into the shelter. Sealing the entrance, they buried alive the unfortunate wounded, who died little by little inside the shelter.



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One Augustinian Fr. Belarmino de Celis, survived the holocaust to tell the story. According to him, Fr. Jeronimo Pampliega, C.M. might have been among those innocent victims sacrificed at the site near the Manila Cathedral, on February 19, 1945. However, an Officer of the American Military Secret Police reported that in Fort Santiago in one of the halls he found among the heap of fetid corpses piled on top of each other, three corpses dressed in white habit. Two of these wore a black leather cincture (Augustinians or Recollects?). The third wore a white cassock that had outside buttons from the collar to the bottom. He also had a black velvet cap on his head. Fr. Jeronimo Pampliega was the only one in Intramuros who dressed that way. The three religious were found with their hands tied at the back, and their backs deeply slashed. This report seems to indicate that Fr. Pampliega was among those killed in Fort Santiago on February 19. On February 25, the American Army buried the unfortunate victims. May they rest in peace. These details about Fr. Pampliega's last days in Intramuros were furnished by Juanita Bull, the young widow of Ernesto Tarraga who was also killed in Intramuros. These good friends shared with Fr. Pampliega those fateful days in the church of *San Agustin* from February 7 to February 18, until Ernesto Tarraga and Fr. Pampliega were taken away from the Fort Santiago, to be immolated the following day.

Fr. Anselmo Andres, C.M.⁷

Fr. Andres belonged also to the community of San Marcelino when he died as a victim of the war of liberation, on February 26, 1945. Born in 1875, he entered the Congregation of the Mission in 1891. He possessed rare talents, and dreamed of attaining academic degrees, and glory and honor for his scholarly accomplishments in the fields of ecclesiastical sciences. He excelled in Academes and Universities. In 1926, he wrote an article in the Vincentian Magazine ANALES. In all frankness, simplicity, and humility Fr. Andres made public a youthful mistake. He admitted that the Superiors had intended to send him to the Philippine missions, in the remote islands

⁷Ibid., 135-139.



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of the Far East; but he had refused to hide his talents in some obscure corner of the world; he ignored the orders. As a good lesson in humility he was assigned to the *Iglesuela del Cid* (poor church of the Cid).

Nobody can question the intellectual gifts and solid learning of Fr. Andres. But he committed the youthful mistake, through lack of reflection, of refusing to serve the Philippines with his gifts from God. Somewhat like Jonah, the prophet, who refused to go to Nineveh, he was taught by God a painful lesson, that it was useless to oppose His plans. The winds of revolution and the tempest of war were threatening Spain during the first months of 1936. Only then did Anselmo Andres came to the Philippines, arriving here by the middle of April, 1936. Strong and brave, he was now ready to work in these regions.

Scarcely 15 days after his arrival in Manila, Fr. Andres suffered a stroke which left his left side paralyzed. He had to be given the Last Sacraments and hospitalized for treatment in *San Juan de Dios* Hospital. He improved a little, but remained an invalid for some 9 years, tied to his wheel-chair and to his sick bed. He was to offer to God, as his apostolate in the Philippines, the sacrifice of his patient suffering, resignation and prayer, instead of the satisfying ministry of teaching and lecturing in classrooms and College halls.

In 1941 when the war broke, the Sisters in the *San Juan de Dios* Hospital decided to bring Fr. Andres to the *Hospicio de San Jose*. There he was well attended to during the three years of the Japanese occupation. There, in the so-called *Island of Convalescence*, Fr. Anselmo Andres, in the midst of his helplessness, experienced bright happy days reading and talking about books and authors, and sharing his original though sometimes impractical ideas about Seminary training, etc. Yet many times despondency and tedium overtook him and he refused even to shave or to speak a word. Poor Fr. Andres certainly suffered his Purgatory in those long nine years spent in the Philippines, especially at the end of his days!

In late January, 1945, when the American army was approaching the city of Manila, the poor people of the *Hospicio*, were able to leave the extremely dangerous and doomed zone of the mined Ayala bridge. This was through the intervention of a good-hearted Japanese Officer in charge of Religious Affairs in the Japanese Imperial Army. On



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January 24, three Sisters brought the babies of the Nursery to *La Concordia* College, in Herran Street, Paco. On January 29-31, the rest of the poor people and refugees sheltered in the *Hospicio* followed them to *La Concordia*. Poor Fr. Andres, on his wheel-chair was accommodated by the Sisters in a little house reserved for old Sisters located at the end of the College. There Fr. Andres spent those terrible days of the merciless Japanese. The College was directly in the firing line of battle. The Americans firing at the East of the house, and the Japanese at the West. Thousands of people (from *Hospicio de San Jose* alone there were 1,700 persons) were trapped between these two firing lines. Fr. Andres, helpless and invalid, lived in his little house together with an old Canon from the Manila Cathedral, Msgr. Hipolito Arceo, and a young man who took care of them both, from February 1 to February 11, Sunday, when the whole college was put to flames. There was no other remedy but to flee under a rain of bombs, grenades, and stray bullets from the machine-guns of the Japanese who systematically massacred the people who tried to escape from the burning houses. In the shelters of *La Concordia* there were more than 2,000 people.

The fire in the building began at 2 a.m. It had consumed half of the College, when the young man attending Fr. Andres and Msgr. Arceo awoke. He succeeded in bringing Fr. Andres in his wheel-chair down the 6 to 8 steps of the stairs to the ground. He left Fr. Andres beside the wall. Then the houseboy took the old and weak Msgr. Arceo outside to a safe place. In the meantime, the wall was beginning to catch fire. Fr. Andres, unable to move his wheel-chair, suffered several serious burns. At dawn, the houseboy returned and found Fr. Andres in exactly the same place where he had left him. He had been unseated from his wheel-chair. Perhaps from shock, Fr. Andres remained absolutely speechless that day. The houseboy found a little cart, put the good Father in it, and took him – burned, cold, hungry, dirty – to the shelter where most of the people took refuge. In the afternoon, an ambulance of the American Army brought Fr. Andres to the *San Lazaro Hospital* in Manila.

Several days afterwards, Fr. Manuel Gracia, C.M., happened to learn about his whereabouts and went at once to visit him. He found Fr. Andres in the department of Tubercular patients, lying in a poor bed, along a corridor. Dressed in a shirt of green percale, he was



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unshaved, with big stains of permanganate for burns all over his face and arms. He spoke in monosyllables, and told Fr. Gracia that he was attended to quite well, as far as circumstances could allow.

Some days later, the parish priest of the Holy Ghost Church nearby, a zealous Argentinian, Fr. Antonio Albrecht, SVD, reported to a group of good Catholics the case of that lonely priest in the Hospital. He suggested that someone take him at home. Immediately a charitable gentleman, Mr. Ignacio Capili, religiously educated by the Spanish Jesuits of old, went and took Fr. Andres into his home, and personally took care of him, as if he were his own father, trying to satisfy even the petty whims of his patient. In the home of this good Christian Filipino gentleman, Mr. Ignacio Capili, the last Vincentian victim of the Japanese war, Fr. Anselmo Andres, C.M. died in the peace of the Lord on February 26, 1945. Fr. Antonio Albrecht, SVD and Mr. Ignacio Capili buried him in the convent garden of the Holy Ghost Parish Church, at the foot of an image of Our Lady of Lourdes, at the entrance of the Parish rectory. Fr. Maximo Juguera, C.M. and Fr. Manuel Gracia, C.M. went the following day to express to the SVD Fathers and the good and generous Mr. Ignacio Capili their own deep gratitude and that of the Congregation of the Mission in the devastated Philippine Province.

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